

“CHARITY ITSELF”: VIRTUE, HAPPINESS, AND CHRISTIAN LOVE IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Augusta Vae Hardy, Ph.D.

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Dr. Theresa Kenney

**Dissertation Abstract**

Despite the historical evidence that Jane Austen was a devout Anglican, many readers have nonetheless contended that her Christian faith does not truly inform her fiction. Even those who do identify Christian themes in her works tend to argue that her early three novels, of which *Pride and Prejudice* is one, have a lightness of theme and tone that Austen abandoned in favor of more serious and explicitly religious subjects for her final three novels. While critics have described Christian elements in *Pride and Prejudice*—such as the importance of repentance, humility, and forgiveness—none have yet made a prolonged study of the way these Christian ideas pervade, not simply punctuate, the narrative.

In my dissertation, I argue that *Pride and Prejudice* is a fully Christian work because Austen’s moral concerns in the novel are fundamentally, if not explicitly, Christian. The novel is governed from beginning to end by several essential Christian virtues, the chief of which is charity, the queen of the theological virtues. In their different ways, both Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy must improve in Christian charity as a preparation for romantic love: she must learn to judge with charity, and he must learn to consider others’ needs ahead of his own. Charity is also key to Austen’s understanding of the happy ending which rewards her characters; she suggests that her characters can hope to achieve real happiness in proportion to their ability to love others unselfishly. Indeed, her idea that happiness consists in generous love reflects her belief that the Christian’s ultimate happiness and reward is loving communion with God and the saints

in heaven. Following charity, humility is also central to the novel's Christian vision.

Austen shows that this quintessentially Christian virtue must inform justice: only through the humble recognition of their own faults are the hero and heroine able to treat each other justly. Their humility also prepares them for gratitude and forgiveness, attitudes which are themselves the precursors to love.

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OF THE  
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IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

by

AUGUSTA VAE HARDY

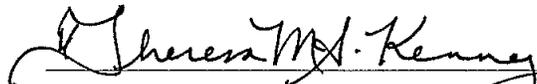
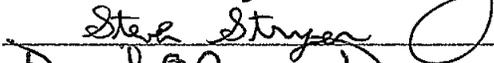
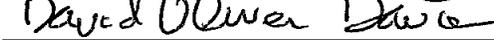
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction: Making a Case for <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> as a Christian Novel	viii
Chapter I: Politeness and Charity: The Education of Mr. Darcy	1
Chapter II: Candor and Charity: The Education of Elizabeth Bennet	41
Chapter III: The Justice of Humility and Gratitude	96
Chapter IV: Marriage, the Good, and Human Happiness	148
Conclusion: “Circumstances of the Story”: Charity and Grace	211
Bibliography	216

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## Introduction:

### Making a Case for *Pride and Prejudice* as a Christian Novel

According to the biographical notice published along with the first printing of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, Jane Austen was a faithful and orthodox Anglican Christian. The notice, generally accepted to be the work of Jane's brother Henry Austen,<sup>1</sup> declares, "She was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature. On serious subjects she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation, and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church" (8). In more recent years, there has been some questioning of the family motives for this "hagiographical" biography (Kirkham). The family's affection for the departed Jane, plus Henry's own Evangelical religious principles likely account for his glowingly hyperbolic account of his sister as perfectly mild-mannered and gentle in all her words and deeds (Tucker 3-5). The trouble, of course, is that Austen's novels and letters reveal a critical mind and a sharp—sometimes biting—wit that belie Henry's picture of a purely demure and sweetly inoffensive woman.

Yet while we should reasonably doubt that Austen presented any such "picture of perfection" (to borrow her terms of complaint about unrealistic novel heroines), her real human imperfections are not in themselves sufficient cause to discount the claim that she was a sincere Christian who valued and strove to practice gentleness, humility, and charity (*Letters* 23-25 March 1817). Nonetheless, many readers have concluded that

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<sup>1</sup> Juliette Wells has demonstrated that while evidence certainly suggests that Henry wrote the "Biographical Notice," no absolute proof for the authorship is extant; thus it is possible that Jane Austen's sister Cassandra had a part in the composition.

Austen was not the devout believer of Henry's biography. Such judgments generally rest on the claim that, if Austen was sincere, surely her Christian beliefs would be clearly displayed in her novels. Laurence Lerner articulates this position:

I say that Jane Austen the novelist did not believe in God because God is totally absent from her work. A person may remain silent about a deeply held and genuine belief, but not a writer: all that exists in a writer's work is what he creates. I cannot of course prove that God is absent from Jane Austen's work, because no one can prove an absence: but there is quite a lot of circumstantial evidence. (23-4)

Lerner's premise is reasonable and one with which I agree: what an author truly values will find its way into her work. It is difficult to imagine that a self-respecting author could remain utterly silent on those subjects which she believes matter the most. At any rate, biographical evidence about Austen's religious views is not sufficient in itself to qualify Austen's novels as Christian works. In other words, if God—or anything else intrinsic to religious faith—really is “totally absent” from the novels, historical facts such as Austen's upbringing as a clergyman's daughter or her reading of sermons do not make her works Christian in content or theme.

Other critics have been ready to note the apparent “circumstantial evidence” against sincere Christian piety in the novels. Cited particularly often is the fact that Austen does not reserve the clergy from her satire. Indeed, *Pride and Prejudice* is especially singled out as an example of Austen's lack of respect for men of the church. Kelly declares, “There's rarely much Burkean ‘reverence’ in Jane's attitude to the clergy;

in *Pride and Prejudice* there's none at all" (132). Mr. Collins is "a clergyman to be laughed at," notes Warren Roberts (133).<sup>2</sup> Surely, reason many readers, an author who truly respected the clergy would hardly have made one of her most notable fools a clergyman.

Readers also attribute to Austen social views that are not particularly compatible with conservative, orthodox Christian faith. *Pride and Prejudice* is especially susceptible to radical readings, given both content (Elizabeth Bennet is a non-conventional heroine who overcomes class distinctions) and style (of the novels, *Pride and Prejudice* is probably the most witty and ironic or "light, bright, and sparkling," as Austen herself claimed).<sup>3</sup> D.W. Harding's famous essay on "Regulated Hatred" (and the myriad of critics who have followed his lead) attributes to Austen a thinly-veiled disgust with her associates which hardly comports with the Christian ideals of love and kindness. Feminists such as Nina Auerbach or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that Austen critiques female oppression under a patriarchal society, a reading that all but excludes the possibility of intelligent approval for traditional moral values. Claudia Johnson suggests that Austen's apparently conservative novels contain disguised liberal themes: Austen,

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Elton, Austen's other laughable clergyman, is strangely absent from Roberts' discussion of *Emma*, a novel which he considers evidence of an Evangelical conversion.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter to her sister, Cassandra, Austen wrote, "Upon the whole however I am quite vain enough & well satisfied enough.—The work is rather too light & bright & sparkling;—it wants shade;—it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter—of sense if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense—about something unconnected with the story; an Essay on Writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparté—or anything that would form a contrast & bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness & Epigrammatism of the general stile" (*Letters* 4 February 1813). Despite the obviously ridiculous nature of her suggested improvements for the novel, many critics have nonetheless taken Austen to be earnest in faulting the novel's lightness. Personally, I find it difficult to take the whole passage as anything but a lighthearted excuse for writing as she sees fit, rather than to suit the tastes of hard-to-please readers. The improvement, after all, is simply to introduce boring passages of "solemn specious nonsense" in order that the intended lightness and humor will be better appreciated.

she claims, “vindicates personal happiness as a liberal moral category” and “implies a toleration of some ethical relativity” (77, 81). Others mention Christianity only in order to dismiss it, as Susan Morgan does when she argues that “Austen, far from being ‘the conservative Christian moralist,’ is innovative in her thought and that the contemporary practice in whose light she should be considered is romantic poetry” (*In the Meantime* 2).

Interestingly, even some critics who concede that Austen was a believer in her personal life do not see much religion in her novels. Though declaring himself “sure that she was . . . genuinely pious,” Gilbert Ryle considers Austen’s ethic to be “secular as opposed to religious” (297). Others have also suggested that Austen became more serious about religious matters in the latter part of her life. Peter Knox-Shaw asserts, “As far as religion goes, it is clear that Jane Austen died a believer, but she ranks among the least proselytizing of Christian novelists, and may, without ever having ceased to believe in the utility of belief, have been something of a private sceptic in the first part of her career” (9).<sup>4</sup> Roberts argues that Austen had a “conversion,” prompted by the Evangelical movement, between the first three and last three novels. He finds the latter books concerned with serious religious themes in a way the others are not: “What Austen demonstrates in *Persuasion*, just as she had in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, is a new frame of mind, a different orientation, way of viewing life and system of morality. Religiously, Austen’s last three novels are of a piece” (153). These assessments suggest that Austen’s

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<sup>4</sup> Knox-Shaw also argues that Austen was neither an Evangelical nor “an ‘orthodox’ Christian” but rather an “Anglican Erasmian” (5). Thus, readers persuaded of Austen’s orthodox faith may wish to take his other pronouncements with a grain of salt.

moral and religious themes in her later works are at odds with (or at least absent from) the themes of an earlier novel such as *Pride and Prejudice*.

Doubtless, Austen's art and her views matured: it would be odd for a woman so skilled at depicting the moral growth of her heroines to have experienced no similar growth of her own. However, I do not believe that *Pride and Prejudice*—arguably the best of her early works—is devoid of the serious Christian themes that characterize Austen's later novels. The challenge of defending such a claim is, of course, the one identified by Lerner: where do we find religion in *Pride and Prejudice* when God seems conspicuously absent? Ryle elaborates the problem of seeking God in Austen's stories:

[H]ardly a whisper of piety enters into even the most serious and most anguished meditations of her heroines. They never pray and they never give thanks on their knees. . . . I am not suggesting that Jane Austen's girls are atheists, agnostics or Deists. I am only saying that when Jane Austen writes about them, she draws the curtain between her Sunday thoughts, whatever they were, and her creative imagination. Her heroines face their moral difficulties and solve their moral problems without recourse to religious faith or theological doctrines. (297)

While a number of critics have demonstrated that the “serious” reflection practiced by Emma Woodhouse, Anne Elliot, and Marianne Dashwood is almost surely prayer,<sup>5</sup> Ryle's point remains that Austen very rarely places explicit, unequivocally Christian religious thoughts in the minds of her heroines. As a result, it is easy (especially for a

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<sup>5</sup> See Stuart Tave (112) and Laura Mooneyham White (*Jane Austen's Anglicanism* 59-60).

contemporary post-enlightenment reader) to conclude that the characters' judgments and moral standards may be explained in wholly secular terms.

Indeed, Austen's lack of obviously Christian doctrines has proven a challenge even for those readers who maintain that Christian principles pervade the novels. The temptation is to lean on biographical details from Austen's life to supply religious beliefs held by her heroines. But while it is reasonable to assume that Austen would attribute to her most admirable characters the same fundamental beliefs that she personally held as true, an argument that relies on inferences based on Austen's personal life is not very convincing. If we are to make a convincing case, the majority of our evidence must necessarily come from the text of the novel itself.

The lack of overt Christian themes has not prevented all readers from seeing Christian principles in Austen's novels. Richard Whately has famously argued that "Miss Austin [sic] has the merit (in our judgment most essential) of being evidently [that is, clearly] a Christian writer" (359). He considers Austen's novels so successful precisely because she does not preach or otherwise force her values upon the reader:

[W]hen the purpose of inculcating a religious principle is made too palpably prominent, many readers, if they do not throw aside the book with disgust, are apt to fortify themselves with that respectful kind of apathy with which they undergo a regular sermon, and prepare themselves as they do to swallow a dose of medicine, endeavoring to *get it down* in large gulps, without tasting it more than necessary. (359-60)

Austen handles her religious themes with subtlety, ruining neither the reader's delight in the narrative nor his receptiveness to Austen's moral lessons. It is worth noting that immediately before offering this praise of Austen, Whately faults the novels of Austen's contemporary, Maria Edgeworth, for failing to show religion as the source of virtue and moral transformation. Thus, in his judgment, Austen's own religious principles, though they be unobtrusive, are by no means obscured. He notes, "The moral lessons of this lady's novels, though clearly and impressively conveyed, are not offensively put forward, but spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story" (360).

When we consider the "circumstances of the story," I believe it is important to look at more than just a few key moments of conversion or self-knowledge. Sarah Emsley has rightly pointed out that such scenes follow a Christian model of confession and repentance (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 9-10).<sup>6</sup> Yet if Austen's novel really is Christian, we can expect religious themes to permeate it from beginning to end, though of course such themes do shine most brightly at certain points of the narrative. We should see Christian principles reflected in the characters' virtues and their flaws, what they must learn and the process by which they grow, what does or does not make them truly happy, what distinguishes good characters from bad, and how characters are rewarded or punished for their actions. Put another way, if Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy are truly Christian characters, then all of their actions—not just those at crucial moments of conflict—may be profitably evaluated according to Christian moral principles.

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<sup>6</sup> Deresiewicz also points out that "the moment of humiliation—that excruciating scene of exposure [as when Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter]—was Austen's vision of grace (72-3).

I am hardly the first reader to consider Austen from a Christian virtue ethics standpoint. However, even Christian studies of Austen's virtue ethics tend to emphasize the ways in which her ethics are Aristotelian without sufficiently accounting for the way that her Christian faith informs the Aristotelian elements.<sup>7</sup> For instance, while Alison Searle, Amanda Marie Kubic, and Alasdair McIntyre agree that Austen was a Christian Aristotelian, they offer more general arguments about Austen's oeuvre, without studying any given novel at length. Rather predictably, when Christianity is discussed, Austen's later novels tend to be mentioned first. McIntyre sees Austen's highest virtue as "constancy," as exemplified in *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* (242). Gene Koppel, while maintaining that Austen's Aristotelianism comes by way of the Christian natural law tradition, claims that Austen's final three novels are those most informed by the "religious dimension" (5). Kubic, too, finds that Austen's "theory of the virtues is in reality very much influenced by Christianity. This influence is particularly evident in *Mansfield Park*." Even Emsley, who acknowledges the theological virtues faith and love are important to all of the novels, finds that these virtues are most prominently exemplified in *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion*, and *Emma*. Clearly, it is time for a reading

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<sup>7</sup> While many critics have identified Aristotelian elements in Austen's ethics, there is somewhat less consensus on how she received her Aristotelian ideas. There is no biographical proof that she read Aristotle's works either in translation or in the original Greek—her father did tutor boys in Latin and Greek, so it is certainly possible that he taught her Classical languages as well; indeed Mary DeForest contends as much. Yet it is not necessary to posit that she read Aristotle himself in order to accept that she was familiar with his ideas. Ruderman notes that Austen "certainly knew Shakespeare, [Samuel] Johnson, and [Henry] Fielding, and she could well have learned Aristotelian principles from their work" (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 20). Alternatively, Ryle proposes that Austen came by her Aristotelianism "directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly," by way of Lord Shaftesbury (298). At any rate, Aristotle's ethical ideas were sufficiently present in the literary atmosphere of the eighteenth century that Austen easily could have absorbed them at second hand.

that examines how *Pride and Prejudice* is as much seriously Christian as its author's later productions.

A few critics have begun to do *Pride and Prejudice* more justice as a Christian novel, yet even their readings leave room for expansion. Ruderman's book *The Pleasures of Virtue* offers a more comprehensive discussion of Austen's Christian Aristotelianism, though (like others) Ruderman tends to rely on Austen's biography, rather than the narrative itself, for evidence of Christian themes in *Pride and Prejudice*. As her chapter title "Proper Pride and Religious Virtue" suggests, by making pride compatible with religious virtue, she overstates the novel's Aristotelian themes in a way that downplays Christian humility.

Emsley does a better job of representing the fusion of classical and Christian virtues in Austen's works. Yet like Ruderman, she gives more thorough evidence for her Aristotelian claims for *Pride and Prejudice*, while resting the Christian argument on the humiliation, self-knowledge, and subsequent confession experienced by the characters—a crucial movement in the novel, truly, but not yet a complete account of the story's Christian ethics. Emsley identifies charity as a key virtue for Austen's moral tradition: "The Christian tradition of the virtues, therefore, is the integration of these four cardinal virtues into a system in which the three theological virtues are paramount, and the greatest virtue is love" (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 30). Nonetheless, I find that she does not clearly distinguish charity—the virtue of unconditional love—from *eros*, the romantic, married love that is a "crowning reward" for Austen's heroines (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 33). Hence, it can be somewhat difficult to understand the full significance of

Emsley's statement that "the educative power of love in the novels is related in some degree to Augustine's theory that all the virtues are expressions of love" (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 30-1). Neither Austen nor, I think, Emsley is arguing that the sentiments of romantic love are in themselves the spring of all human goodness, though shallow romances (or at any rate, shallow readings) may suggest so. Rather, I believe Austen shows that a worthy romantic love is grounded in Christian charity, which itself comprehends and informs the other virtues. These virtues, both cardinal and theological, are responsible for the education and transformation which the characters demonstrate.

The central claim of my dissertation is that *Pride and Prejudice* is a Christian work because Austen's moral concerns in the novel are fundamentally, if not explicitly, Christian. Charity is of course the highest Christian virtue, and I will demonstrate that it provides an ideal key to the novel's moral vision. Exemplified by the love Christ shows the Church, charity is unselfish, unconditional love characterized by generosity in thoughts, words, and deeds alike. Not only does charity serve as the standard by which to judge the actions of the hero and heroine; it is also the guide to what constitutes their real and lasting happiness at the end of the story. The other fundamentally Christian principle essential to this novel is humility, a virtue that has no analogue in classical ethics.<sup>8</sup>

Austen's insistence that humility must accompany justice is evidence of the strong Christian influence on her nonetheless Aristotelian understanding of this cardinal virtue.

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<sup>8</sup> Here I should note that I will not limit the term *virtue* strictly to the four cardinal (justice, temperance, fortitude, prudence) and three theological (faith, hope, charity) virtues. Not only does this choice reflect conventional usage—one only need look at the *Oxford English Dictionary's* entry on *virtue* for examples—but this usage also reflects the Augustinian idea (noted by Emsley above) that all virtues are expressions of the chief theological virtue, charity. Since the qualities of humility, politeness, and candor are clearly entailed by good Christian moral character, it is fitting to refer to them as virtues.

In chapter one, I will consider Darcy's character in light of a sermon by Bishop Hurd which teaches that true politeness is guided by charity and seeks the good of others. At the beginning of the novel, Darcy's consistent carelessness about others' feelings reveals that his actions are not guided by charity, as they should be. Even his admirable distaste for falsehood is problematic, since he fails to distinguish between flattering insincerities meant to benefit the self and charitable disguises that express true concern for the needs of others. While Darcy's lack of charity is first evident in small ways, his most egregious failure of politeness—his first proposal—is consistent with his behavior since the opening of the novel, proving that he needs to learn charity and true politeness before he can be a worthy match for Elizabeth.

In chapter two, I show that Austen understands candor as practicing charity in one's judgments and thoughts about others; furthermore, she shares this idea with contemporaries such as minister Hugh Blair. Seen in this religious context, Elizabeth's repeated and willful misunderstanding of Darcy is not simply a failure of judgment, but a failure of charity. Key to her moment of self-knowledge is the recognition that candor—which she had once dismissed as blindness to the faults of others—could have protected her from foolish errors in judgment and helped her to treat Darcy justly. Elizabeth's moral education is complete when she revises her opinion of Darcy and learns to view his past behavior with the kind of "generous candor" that her sister Jane has always exemplified.

In chapter three, I argue that Austen's understanding of justice is fundamentally Christian, since justice is intrinsically connected to the virtue of humility. Both Elizabeth and Darcy possess a strong sense of justice which prompts them to reevaluate their

judgments; in turn, this discovery of their own errors teaches them first humility and then gratitude. Like justice, gratitude is also deeply linked to humility: Elizabeth and Darcy's gratitude towards one another is heightened by the knowledge that they do not strictly deserve the other's love or goodwill. Furthermore, their gratitude is an expression of justice whereby each renders what is owed to the other's goodness while preserving the gratuitous nature of the gift of love and forgiveness. Of course, by receiving this gift without attempting to repay it, they yet again practice humility. With Darcy and Elizabeth's final reconciliation in the novel, Austen also suggests that grace, which offers better than what is deserved, is even more powerful than justice.

In chapter four, I will argue that because of her Christian faith, Austen intends the novel's happy ending to be both serious—that is, un-ironic—and realistic. First, I examine how Austen's idea of happiness implies a hierarchy of goods, the highest of which involves relationships founded on unselfish love. We see that Lydia Bennet and Charlotte Lucas marry for lesser goods—erotic attraction and financial security, respectively—and in doing so, forfeit the chance to attain the highest good of rational companionship, a good which both Jane and Elizabeth achieve in their own marriages. While the novel's morally weak characters selfishly consider only their own pleasure, Elizabeth and Jane exemplify the true attitude of Christian charity because they want to share their happiness with others. These ideas reflect Austen's Christian belief that earthly happiness is a preparation for heavenly, eternal happiness. While her sympathetic treatment of Charlotte indicates that marriage may not be the ideal choice for every person, married love nonetheless offers an ideal image of a relationship founded in

charity, the kind of love intrinsic to human happiness. In the context of the Biblical teaching that human marriage is an image of Christ's union with the church, the comedic marriage ending takes on a further significance: it suggests the heavenly wedding feast, foretold in the book of Revelation, when all the faithful shall rejoice in full union with God. Thus, the novel's happy ending reflects Austen's faith in the promise of heaven: she can confidently portray a happy conclusion for her characters because she believes that every Christian will ultimately arrive at eternal happiness. Thus, Darcy and Elizabeth's earthly happiness is not an unrealistic fantasy, as some readers have claimed; rather, it is Austen's representation, through the novelist's art, of the heavenly reward that concludes every Christian narrative.

## Chapter I

### Politeness and Charity: The Education of Mr. Darcy

Critics of *Pride and Prejudice* often seem to take one of two approaches when it comes to the subject of Darcy's character growth in the novel. There are those who agree that Darcy requires significant reformation before becoming a worthy match for Elizabeth.<sup>1</sup> Then there are those who vindicate Darcy's early behavior, arguing that Elizabeth must learn to reevaluate Darcy's actions to identify his good qualities that have been on display from the beginning.<sup>2</sup> Critics from both camps have offered valuable insights, and the truth of the matter, as it often does, seems to lie somewhere between the two poles. Settling the question of Darcy's character almost inevitably brings up the related topic of manners and what they say about one's moral character. After all, Darcy's unpopularity in Hertfordshire society is largely founded on his haughty manners. Darcy's prideful and aloof behavior at the Meryton assembly ball also makes it easy for Elizabeth and everyone else to think him capable of mistreating Wickham. The following questions arise: Is Darcy's rudeness negligible, a refusal to subscribe to social forms which are empty of any significant moral content? Is his behavior not, in fact, rudeness, but simply misunderstood as such by a prejudiced Elizabeth? Or do his manners reflect something truly and morally wrong in his character?

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<sup>1</sup> See Walter E. Anderson, "Plot, Character, Speech, and Place in *Pride and Prejudice*"; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Sarah Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*; Michael Giffin, *Jane Austen and Religion: Salvation and Society in Georgian England*; Stewart Tave, "Affection and the Mortification of Elizabeth Bennet"; Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists."

<sup>2</sup> See Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue*; Jane Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums: Anne Crippen Ruderman, The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen*.

Many critics have observed that manners and morality are interrelated topics for Austen. Jane Nardin rightly states, “A character’s social behavior—in other words, the standard of propriety by which he lives—is, for Jane Austen, the external manifestation of his internal moral and psychological condition” (23). Indeed, Austen shared this understanding with many of her contemporaries. Tony Tanner locates Austen’s keen interest in manners in her particular historical context: in an England desperate to avoid the social and political upheaval exemplified by the French Revolution, good manners were “a form of politics—an involvement with a widespread attempt to save the nation by correcting, monitoring and elevating its morals” (27). Austen shares her moral concerns with another popular literary genre of her time, the courtesy book. Penelope Joan Fritzer explains, “To be sure, courtesy literature is concerned with manners and society, but unlike simple etiquette, it is based on morality and inner development rather than on fashion and expedience. Courtesy books are deeply concerned with morality and with the reader’s relationship to his conscience as well as to his God” (4). Thus, while the concept that manners reveal morality may strike the modern reader as somewhat foreign, Austen was hardly alone for thinking so at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Yet as all of Austen’s novels show in one way or another, properly judging another’s manners can be a great challenge at times, since the outward forms of propriety and politeness may be adopted by the morally reprobate as well as morally worthy characters. As Tanner puts it, “[Manners’] key problem—and drama—arises from the fact that a skillful or well-educated person can, if he or she wishes, deploy and manipulate the signs in such a way that it can become very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish

‘true’ good manners from adroitly ‘simulated’ ones” (28-9). Manners are signs, Tanner notes, and thus we must consider what these signs are intended to express.

Samuel Johnson, one of Austen’s favorite moral writers, describes polite manners as “those little civilities and ceremonious delicacies, which, inconsiderable as they may appear to the man of science, and difficult as they may prove to be detailed with dignity, yet contribute to the regulation of the world, by facilitating the intercourse between one man and another” (161). Manners derive from the fact that man lives in society, and they have the practical purpose of “regulating” that society by ensuring social interactions are both pleasant and civilized.<sup>3</sup> However it does not necessarily follow that because manners serve a practical purpose that they are merely matters of social utility or that the practice of good manners is moral only under the ethics of a Lockean social contract, as Mitrić’s argument suggests. For Austen, manners are an expression of the most notable Christian moral principle, charity. While this position is not one that Austen explicitly spells out in her fiction, a consideration of what Austen considers truly appropriate behavior points us subtly but unavoidably to this conclusion. Indeed, as Scholes has pointed out, both Austen and Johnson are united in the conviction that “manners rest on the fundamental moral principle of unselfishness” (384). Unselfishness is closely united to charity, for charity requires that one love his neighbor as himself, a fundamentally unselfish proposition. Turning to what Johnson says regarding the foundation of good manners in *Rambler* 98, we read: “The universal axiom in which all complaisance is included, and from which flow all the formalities which custom has established in civilized nations, is,

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<sup>3</sup> See Ana Mitrić’s “Jane Austen and Civility: A Distant Reading” for a discussion of the connection between the terms *civility* and *civilization*.

‘That no man shall give any preference to himself.’ A rule so comprehensive and certain, that, perhaps, it is not easy for the mind to image an incivility, without supposing it to be broken” (162). Johnson’s context (much like Austen’s) is not explicitly religious, yet his words contain an echo of Romans 12:10: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; *in honour preferring one another*” (italics mine).<sup>4</sup> The scripture helps make explicit what is yet implicit in Johnson and Austen: the idea that the forms of polite behavior are a set of conventions by which one expresses charity for others.

Another of Austen’s contemporaries, Bishop Hurd, most certainly had the above scripture passage in mind when he discussed the connection between Christian charity and politeness, for the verse is the foundation of one of his published sermons. While it cannot be confirmed that Austen ever read a volume of his sermons, she almost certainly would have been familiar with this particular one, as it was anthologized in *Elegant Extracts*<sup>5</sup> under the heading “The Difference between true and false Politeness.” In the passage excerpted by Knox for *Elegant Extracts*, Hurd identifies the importance of Christian charity to this distinction:

It is evident enough, that the moral and Christian duty, of preferring one another in honour, respects only social peace and charity, and terminates in the good and edification of our Christian brother. Its use is, to soften the minds of men, and to drawn them from that savage rusticity, which engenders many vices, and

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<sup>4</sup> All Bible verses are cited from the King James Version, the same translation which Austen would have read.

<sup>5</sup> We know that she owned and read *Elegant Extracts*. Her personal copy, which she gave to her niece Anna Austen Lefroy in 1801, is part of the museum collection at Austen’s house in Chawton. Jane Austen’s handwriting appears in several places in the volume: a personal dedication to her niece, as well as marginalia on several of historical passages (Le Faye 222).

discredits the virtues themselves. But when men had experienced the benefit of this complying temper, and further saw the ends, not of charity only, but of self-interest, that might be answered by it; they considered no longer its just purpose and application, but stretched it to that officious sedulity, and extreme servility of adulation, which we too often observe and lament in polished life. (65)

This passage begins by alluding to the scripture passage around which the sermon is based, recalling the injunction to prefer one another. While *Elegant Extracts* does not reproduce the scripture reference at the beginning of the sermon, Austen, as a devout woman and the daughter of a clergyman, would have had little trouble identifying the Biblical source text. As Hurd elucidates here, the aim of true politeness is identical with that of charity: the “good and edification” of others, which itself is a Christian moral duty. One cannot be truly charitable without also necessarily being polite. In contrast, false politeness perverts the ends of charity so that self, not others, is served by “sedulity” and “adulation.” Where true politeness is expressed in “preferring one another”—that is, putting another person’s needs over one’s own—false politeness is marked by putting one’s own needs first. Thus for a Christian, manners and politeness do not simply put a polish on social interactions and ensure that human relations run smoothly, though of course, they do serve these ends as well. Manners are the means by which the Christian lives out the principle of charity on a daily basis, in both momentous and ordinary situations alike.

Darcy’s failure to be polite—truly polite, as Hurd defines it—reflects more than simply the flouting of empty social conventions. As many critics have already noted,

Austen seems less concerned with strict adherence to a precise code of conduct and more with the underlying principles of a person's behavior. For instance, Nardin proves that there are some social forms that may be dispensed with if the situation is better served by doing otherwise—such as when Elizabeth walks to Netherfield alone for the sake of comforting her ill sister (49-51). Fritzer utilizes Nardin's terminology, likewise noting, "In almost every instance, Austen is more concerned with 'deep' manners, or the spirit of behavior, than with 'surface' manners, or those of the rulebook" (20). Mary Ann O'Farrell argues that habit is especially important to the consideration of manners:

Austen's interest . . . is less in manners as ideals that we might approximate in hit or miss form than as daily practices that have become ways of doing and being, and as ways so habitual and recognizable as to have become characteristic. Austen . . . is interested in manners understandable as manner: a way of behaving that is both customary and (in being distinct) distinguishing, a style. One may work to cultivate a manner, in Austen as in the world, but one cannot escape the having of one, she seems to suggest. As ways of being and doing repeat, accumulate, even proliferate, manners become manner. (105)

If we wish to understand Darcy's character, we must look at the behavior that he has established as his habit, for the actions that he has repeated till they become characteristic likewise reveal his habitual ways of seeing himself and others. Whether Darcy's behavior matches specific rules set down by contemporary conduct books is only a lesser concern, for as Hurd remarks, the forms of true and false politeness may look the same. Indeed,

from the beginning Darcy does, if somewhat stiffly, observe all the formalities of politeness (Nardin 57). Rather, I want to look at what his words and actions reveal about the spirit of his behavior in the first half of the novel: does he act from motives of selfishness or selflessness?

Darcy himself answers this question near the end of the story. Following his successful proposal, he reflects on his prior behavior, saying, “I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. 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” (409).<sup>6</sup> His self-evaluation is honest and accurate, as a close attention to his behavior from his entrance in the novel will reveal.<sup>7</sup> His tendency is to think slightingly of the needs and feelings of those others whom he deems beneath his notice or otherwise unworthy of consideration. Nonetheless, he truly has possessed right principles, the most notable of which in the first half of the novel is his distaste for anything resembling disguise and deceit. A criticism of Darcy’s practice should not be understood as a criticism of his principles. Rather, what I mean to demonstrate is that the difference between good principles followed in pride and conceit and good principles practiced rightly is Christian charity. Pride and conceit aim at the elevation of the self, but charity directs one’s attention to others.

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<sup>6</sup> Myra Stokes offers a thoughtful discussion of how Darcy’s temper is reflected in his manners, paying special attention to the terminology Austen uses to describe moral character (37-40).

<sup>7</sup> I find it very difficult to maintain, as some readers have, that there is insufficient textual proof for Darcy’s judgment of himself. Ruderman argues, “Mr. Darcy’s self-criticism in the end should not be taken at face value any more than we can rely on what most of the characters profess about themselves; certainly it runs counter to the evidence in the novel” (124). Likewise, Nardin claims that “Darcy censures himself for the stiff and haughty manners that reveal his wish ‘to think meanly of all the rest of the world’ on very insufficient evidence” (60-1). The evidence, as Darcy is well aware, is all there.

In the first half of the book, Darcy's consistent habit is a lack of charity, exemplified by a carelessness of the needs and feelings of others. We see this habit enacted first in small ways even before it is most fully on display in Darcy's first, failed proposal. Thus I will show that Darcy's behavior in the proposal scene is not a departure from, but very much in character with the way he has acted from the beginning. Furthermore, the virtues Darcy does possess are yet imperfect because they are not guided by a sense of charity. Hence, Darcy manages to confuse true and false politeness, resulting in injury to others.



Before examining specific instances of Darcy's conduct, it will be useful to return to Hurd's discussion of true versus false politeness. Understanding this distinction will allow us to see more clearly how Darcy needs to grow. While he has not perfected true politeness in himself, Darcy has no trouble seeing through the false politeness of others. Hurd's description of false politeness reads like a list of those qualities that Darcy despises and tries very hard to avoid:

Hence, [from false politeness] that infinite attention and consideration, which is so rigidly exacted, and so duly paid, in the commerce of the world: hence, that prostitution of mind, which leaves a man no will, no sentiment, no principle, no character; all which disappear under the uniform exhibition of good manners: hence, those insidious arts, those studied disguises, those obsequious flatteries, nay, those multiplied and nicely-varied forms of insinuation and address, the direct aim of which

may be to acquire the fame of politeness and good-breeding, but the certain effect, to corrupt every virtue, to soothe every vanity, and to inflame every vice of the human heart. (65)

Darcy dislikes the “infinite attention and consideration” of Miss Bingley because it is an “insidious art,” as Hurd would put it. Darcy himself tells her, “Undoubtedly . . . there is meanness in *all* the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable” (44).<sup>8</sup> Not only is Darcy disgusted by flattery directed at himself, but he also refuses to flatter others, even when making his first proposal of marriage to Elizabeth, because “disguise of every sort is [his] abhorrence” (215). As we learn from the discussion of Bingley’s easily persuaded nature (53-5), Darcy also prides himself on his strength of will and character, qualities that are the opposite of the “prostitution of mind” that Hurd describes above. Darcy will not compromise his principles in the name of good manners because he rightly values virtue and strives to avoid vanity and vice. “[I]t has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule,” he tells Elizabeth, adding, “[V]anity is a weakness indeed” (63). Overall, Darcy has learned Hurd’s lesson very well, insofar as he hates pretense and artifice.

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<sup>8</sup> Despite Darcy’s indirect censure, Miss Bingley carries on with her “obsequious flatteries,” complimenting his letter writing, feigning interest in the novel he reads, and strolling about the room in hopes of drawing his eye (51–52, 60–61). Darcy knows precisely what she is doing, for as Miss Bingley walks the room, we are told that “Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious” with his book (61). Miss Bingley is a poor judge of his character: blinded as she is by her own ambition to secure him as a suitor, she seems unaware that her efforts only repulse him. Ironically, Darcy comes to believe Elizabeth is likewise inviting his attention, for he later admits that he first proposed because, he says, “I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses” (410). The difference between Miss Bingley’s real and Elizabeth’s apparent flirtation is that, while Miss Bingley offers insipid flattery of everything he does and says, Elizabeth challenges Darcy’s ideas of himself and others.

Darcy's distaste for disguise truly is an admirable quality, and I do not mean to suggest otherwise. As critics such as Ruderman have noted, one of Austen's recurring interests, in *Pride and Prejudice* and in her other novels, is to show that the falsely polite person's talent for readily pleasing behavior and conversation often hides selfish, rather than virtuous, motives (104-6). Darcy's integrity in word and speech (that is, his refusal to disguise his feelings and motives) sets him apart from Wickham and Mr. Collins, Elizabeth's two other suitors. Wickham's pleasant manners and charming conversation readily convince everyone, including Elizabeth (who is hardly naive in general), that he is a respectable and trustworthy gentleman, when in truth he is a mercenary rogue. Mr. Collins's pompous good manners are an overblown act with which the self-important clergyman wishes to curry favor for himself.<sup>9</sup> Compared to these characters' self-promotion, Darcy's taciturn manners and blunt statements appear a refreshing example of integrity. For unlike other characters, who value no more than the appearance of truthfulness, Darcy cares that his behavior reflect the truth—no matter how unflattering—about himself and his own feelings, as well as about others. After all truthfulness is, by principle, better than deceit.

However, Darcy's insistence on truthful, transparent behavior becomes problematic because he pridefully believes that his character, when fully understood, is

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<sup>9</sup> Mr. Collins perfectly exemplifies Hurd's description of false politeness as "ambitious, servile, timorous. It affects popularity: is solicitous to please, and to be taken notice of. The man of this character does not offer, but obtrude his civilities" (65). These words bring to mind the moment when Mr. Collins insists upon introducing himself to Mr. Darcy at the Netherfield Ball, despite Elizabeth's protests that Darcy would consider the action an "impertinent freedom" (109). Austen humorously describes the moment as an intrusion indeed: "And with a low bow [Mr. Collins] left [Elizabeth] to attack Mr. Darcy, whose reception of his advances she eagerly watched, and whose astonishment at being so addressed was very evident" (109). Mr. Collins is, of course, oblivious to the awkwardness and social impropriety of approaching Darcy without a formal introduction because he, Mr. Collins, is so eager "to be taken notice of" by his illustrious patroness's nephew.

sufficiently good to recommend him to those people who truly matter. When Elizabeth alludes to his dealings with Wickham, Darcy responds, “Mr. Wickham is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure his *making* friends—whether he may be equally capable of *retaining* them, is less certain” (103). Manners and character, he claims, are not the same thing. And to a certain extent, he is right: as Hurd’s sermon shows, pleasing manners are not necessarily an indication of good character. Wickham is popular for possessing pleasant manners, but Darcy subtly claims to have the greater value in possessing true good character. Because Darcy is fully confident in his character, it is perhaps not so surprising that he is apparently unconcerned with improving his manners. After all, Bingley’s friendship with Darcy seems to be proof that those people who truly matter will recognize his value without Darcy’s having to pretend to be someone he is not, or worse, flatter people into enjoying his company.

What Darcy does not completely understand is that in discarding the vices and flatteries of false politeness, he should not likewise discard all consideration of how his actions affect the happiness and pleasure of others. He does not yet fully value the charity that is behind true politeness. As Hurd shows, the truly polite man should be motivated by the good of others:

True politeness is modest, unpretending, and generous. It appears as little as may be; and when it does a courtesy, would willingly conceal it. It chooses silently to forgo its own claims, not officiously to withdraw them. It engages a man to prefer his neighbor to himself, because he really esteems him; because he is tender of his reputation; because he thinks it

more manly, more Christian, to descend a little himself than to degrade another. It respects, in a word, the credit and estimation of his neighbor.

(65)

While this description suits Darcy as he is at the end of the novel, it does not yet fit him when he enters the story. The truly polite man “really esteems” and “respects” his neighbor, but Darcy (by his own admission later in the book) has a tendency to thinking slightly of others. He says he was “allowed, encouraged, almost taught . . . to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond [his] own 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 [his] own” (409-10). Such pride is clearly the complete opposite of preferring others to oneself. And while Darcy’s selfishness is not of the seditious sort that would use others to advance himself (as we see in the falsely polite Miss Bingley and Mr. Collins), Darcy is still right when he later recognizes his selfishness.

Furthermore, charity and politeness may, in fact, occasionally require that one practice a certain amount of concealment. No matter how just one’s thoughts or feelings are, it is not always edifying or appropriate to share them with others. Because pride, rather than charity, is what initially characterizes Darcy’s actions, he struggles to recognize that occasionally concealing his judgments for the sake of others’ feelings is not a compromise of his principles. Several critics have identified this connection between charity and concealment. Susan Morgan describes the way that truly good (that is, moral) manners often require veiling one’s own judgment. While her remarks are in

response to *Sense and Sensibility*, the same principles are important to *Pride and Prejudice*:

The veil of decorum masks a generosity of heart, an act of love. It is a form of temporizing which makes room for our uncertainties and for those sudden moments of understanding which we could wish were more habitual than they are. Politeness is not an adequate expression of our feelings and thoughts. It really is a disguise. And that is its value. (“Polite Lies” 204-5)

The idea that charity helps mitigate the failures of understanding is truly apt to *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel about mistaken judgments. Melora Giardetti likewise notes the connection between disguise and love in *Pride and Prejudice*. She, too, uses the language of masking to speak of the kind of concealments that good manners dictate: “Those who wear masks or conceal information out of self-sacrifice, or to protect others, possess the highest virtue, according to Austen: true charity” (25). Concealment, like any other aspect of polite behavior, must be judged by the standard of charity. A disguise used for selfish motives—to injure others or to advance oneself—is reprehensible; such disguise Darcy justly hates. But a disguise that edifies others because it conceals ungenerous or hurtful thoughts and feelings is an act of charity and self-control. Darcy’s initial failure to distinguish between these two sorts of concealment stems in part from his ignorance of his own faults. Not yet fully aware that his own character is flawed by selfish conceit, he does not recognize the need to practice charitable concealment to protect others from his own unkind impulses.

As Giardetti recognizes above, practicing charity requires a certain amount of self-sacrifice, yet Darcy is not in the habit of taking such trouble, in large part because he tends to look down on others and believe they are not worth the effort of pleasing. While it is neither appropriate nor practical that one should seek to please all his acquaintances in all things at all times, Darcy's narrow understanding of who is (or is not) worth his consideration to please indicates that his pride is not under such good regulation as he thinks. His pride in his worth, plus his pride in his own integrity, together allow him an excuse for not considering the feelings of his companions. Austen tells us that, at least in some circles, Darcy is "continually giving offence," something that (in the first half of the novel) he does not attempt to correct (17). Almost certainly, those people who are offended do not matter enough to him that he will change his behavior on their account. Of course, it will take Elizabeth to teach him the humility to recognize that he must, in fact, learn to practice charity if he wishes to please even those people whom he values the most. Darcy is not so entirely lovable that he can disregard the thoughts and feelings of others; rather, it is in learning to respect and esteem others that he proves himself lovable.



While we ought to take warning from Elizabeth's example and not place too much weight on hasty first impressions, Darcy's first scene in the novel nevertheless serves as a good foundation for understanding his character. At the Meryton assembly ball, we see Darcy's chief flaws on display: his pride and his disregard for the feelings of others. These are, in fact, the very faults that Elizabeth accuses him of when she refuses his first proposal, and so it is important to recognize that, despite her prejudices, Elizabeth is

essentially right: Darcy's offensive behavior in the proposal scene is consistent with his previous actions. He needs significant reform before he can become a worthy suitor.

Some critics have gallantly attempted to excuse his manners in his first scene as essentially blameless. While Ruderman acknowledges that Darcy's lack of social polish is justifiably offensive to the standards of polite society, she claims that his "lack of social ease . . . is a sign of integrity, of his inability to pretend to be someone he is not" (105). Giffin reads Darcy's behavior at the ball as a "defense mechanism": he is a desirable match in a society where others are grasping for the advantages he can offer, and therefore "there is nothing wrong with Darcy wanting to guard his feelings" by remaining aloof (100). Likewise, while Ek acknowledges Darcy has performed "a concrete act of rudeness directed against the heroine," she finds Darcy's refusal to dance "perfectly justified when seen in relation to the expectations of female Meryton," who view him as a "matrimonial 'prize'" (181-2). Babb suggests that Darcy's sharp reply to Bingley's invitation to dance "[reveals] the instinctive irritation of a shy person at an aggressive invasion of his privacy," and that the reader (and Elizabeth) only interpret the remark as rudeness because we have been swayed by "society's judgment" (115). Furthermore, Nardin claims that "Elizabeth thinks that Darcey's [sic] manners are rude and that his rudeness indicates both a lack of respect for others and a lack of moral principle. . . . [But] Elizabeth is wrong about Darcy, not because his manners lie about his character, but because she has misperceived those manners" (56). According to Giardetti, when Darcy declares Elizabeth not pretty enough to dance with, he is "simply stating the truth from his perspective. He is not presented as malicious, but rather as vociferously honest" (27).

While such justifications are ones Darcy would likely use himself on this occasion, I believe Austen takes care to show us that there is, in fact, little excuse to be made for Darcy's unpleasant behavior in this scene. His aloof manner clearly falls short of true politeness, a standard which has Christian charity—rather than forms of conduct—as its rule.

Darcy's behavior at a ball, a social gathering intended strictly for entertainment, may seem a minor concern when compared with occasions of more weighty social and moral import. Yet when considered from a Christian perspective, Darcy's failure to be guided by charity in even small matters is a serious problem, for charity truly is at the heart of morality. If Darcy is not in the habit of considering others ahead of himself in small matters, we can hardly expect him to do so in great ones. As Hurd makes clear, charity—exemplified by putting others first—ought to govern all of a person's actions, no matter how minor: “Again; the man who governs himself by the spirit of the Apostle's precept, expresses his preference of another in such a way as is worthy of himself; in all innocent compliances, in all honest civilities, in all decent and manly condescensions” (66). Innocent compliances and honest civilities are precisely what are fitting for this social scene; all that Darcy is being asked to sacrifice at this moment is a bit of personal comfort as he interacts with strangers. After all, people attend a ball in order to enjoy one another's company. Even though Darcy's personal tastes would be better gratified by a smaller, more intimate gathering, the true politeness of charity dictates that he ought to consider others' feelings and not behave in such a way that

disregards or injures the innocent pleasures of the other people present. Yet from his actions, it appears that Darcy is careless of how his cold attitude affects his company.

The general impression that Darcy's behavior creates is that he is not enjoying anything about the ball. We are told that, while he is greatly admired at first, midway through the evening, "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" (10). This description is apt, for it suggests that Darcy believes his company cannot offer him any pleasure; in other words, he has decided from the start that nothing here will be enjoyable to him, and so he does not make an effort to appreciate anything or to please anyone. Thanks to his prideful superiority, not only does he deprive himself of any possible enjoyment, but he renders himself a disagreeable companion. Yet Darcy does not seem to be much concerned with the feelings of others, as his public snub of Elizabeth proves.

Bingley, unwilling to see his friend standing awkwardly aside from the dancing and clearly not enjoying himself, entreats Darcy to dance. While Bingley's suggestion reflects rather more on the diversions that he, rather than Darcy, enjoys, his intervention is kindly meant: Bingley believes that dancing is enjoyable and that if Darcy were to exert himself, he might find that his spirits improve. Yet Darcy's response takes into account no-one's pleasure but his own:

I certainly shall not. You know how much I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this, it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another

woman in the room, whom it would not be a punishment *to me* to stand up with. (11, italics mine)

Coupled to the fact that we know that more men are needed to partner the ladies in the dance, Darcy's insistence on his own feelings highlights how little he is thinking of anyone outside himself. If he were more in the habit of thinking of others' needs, Darcy would be more willing to set aside his personal discomfort and inclinations in favor of contributing to the pleasure of Elizabeth, who has been forced to sit out the dance.

But in fact he seems so little troubled by her feelings that he does not even care that she may hear his unkind dismissal of her, despite the fact that she is sitting near enough to catch his eye. Indeed, we cannot help but wonder how closely situated Darcy and Elizabeth really are in this moment, given that she hears him clearly in what must be a crowded ballroom loud with music and conversation. "She is tolerable," he concedes unwillingly, "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" (12). Once again, his emphasis is on his own wishes. And despite the fact that he acknowledges Elizabeth to be an injured party, he is not motivated by any chivalrous impulse (as Mr. Knightley is, in a similar situation) to rescue her. If anything, Darcy is perhaps concerned by how it will look if he is seen paying attention to the lady who was not good enough for the other men to choose.

Being taciturn and refusing to dance at a ball is not by itself a great misdeed. As we will learn later, because of his serious personality, Darcy finds it difficult to take a lively interest in strangers the way his friend Bingley can, and to a certain extent, he

cannot help his nature. What is truly problematic in this first scene is the manner in which Darcy expresses his refusal to dance; his words are harsh and he does not scruple to speak them in a public place where, even if Elizabeth does not hear them firsthand, there is a good chance others may hear and report them to her.<sup>10</sup> Darcy's behavior here is not guided by a sense of charity, to Elizabeth or to any others who may feel hurt on her behalf. Remembering the incident later, Elizabeth quips, "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*" (21). Her tone is humorously self-deprecating, but she accurately diagnoses Darcy's problem: his fault is less that he thinks highly of himself, and more that he does not think enough of others.

Nor can we vindicate Darcy as having been entirely misjudged by his critics at the ball;<sup>11</sup> Austen gives us sufficient insight into Darcy's feelings that we can believe the proud impression he has made pretty accurately reflects his actual sentiments. We learn that he later speaks of the ball as "a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Miss Bennet he acknowledged to be pretty, but she smiled too much" (18). His tone in this free indirect discourse is negative, critical, and, as Austen assures us, "sufficiently characteristic" (17). It is little surprise that he has received no pleasing attention from the ball-goers for it is clear he has made just as little effort to please any of them. Indeed, Darcy is described by Austen in the voice of the

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<sup>10</sup> Nardin argues that "Darcy, after all, has been rudely insulting to Elizabeth only if he intended her to overhear his remark, and on this point we have no evidence" (55). However, I find it irrelevant whether Darcy intended her to overhear or not; the fact that he says what he does while she and others are present indicates that he certainly does not care who else may hear him.

<sup>11</sup> Both Nardin (54-55) and Ek (180) argue that the criticism of Darcy, voiced as it is by Mrs. Bennet and other equally shallow persons, ought to be viewed with skepticism.

objective narrator thus: “He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence” (17). Austen leaves us little question that Darcy’s behavior at the ball is fairly consistent with his usual manners on such occasions. Thus even if we give Darcy the benefit of the doubt (as Jane surely would) that his insult to Elizabeth is the result of a singular bad mood, we are given enough information to conclude that Darcy is generally aloof and, as was said earlier, “above being pleased.” Indeed, we also learn that “Mr Darcy had at first scarcely allowed [Elizabeth] to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise” (25). Of course, his immediately succeeding admiration of Elizabeth’s “fine eyes” goes a long way towards softening the reader towards him. Yet we must not let his new interest as the romantic hero of the novel distract us from what is emerging as a real flaw in his character: his tendency to consider others as beneath his notice. While it is understandable that a quiet, serious man could struggle to make new acquaintances in a public ballroom crowded with strangers, Darcy’s behavior cannot be solely imputed to introversion or discomfort, as Babb and others would have it. Instead, Austen has provided us with enough clues to judge that his aloofness truly does stem from a sense of prideful superiority to others. Despite Charlotte’s claim that a young man with all of Darcy’s advantages deserves to think well of himself, the fact that we have seen him consistently disregard the needs and feelings of others should make us aware that there is,

in fact, something disordered about his high estimation of himself and his low estimation of others.



As Elizabeth and Darcy deepen their acquaintance at Rosings, they revisit the subject of Darcy's behavior at the ball where he made his first social appearance in Hertfordshire. Their conversation centers around the idea of performance, a concept which once again shows that Austen is concerned with the way Darcy's actions affect others. Darcy's defense of himself further confirms what we learned about him in his first scenes in the novel: first, he does not think many people are worth the effort of performing to, and second, he believes that, without mending his manners, his own character is sufficiently good to recommend him to the people who do matter.

As their conversation begins, Elizabeth highlights the importance of performing. As she plays the part of the "fair performer" on the piano, Darcy approaches to watch and listen (195). When Elizabeth accuses him of trying to intimidate her—an attempt which she declares will not succeed—Darcy counters that she surely cannot mean what she says. He notes, "I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know, that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own" (195). Of course, his observation is fairly accurate, and it is worth noting that Elizabeth does not try to deny it. After having a good laugh, she remarks to her other companion, Colonel Fitzwilliam:

Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so

well able to expose my real character, in a part of the world, where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mr. Darcy, it is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Hertfordshire—and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too—for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out, as will shock your relations to hear. (195-6)

While she is teasing about her situation as a visitor in this country, her words also have relevance for Darcy's own situation at the beginning of the novel, when he was the visitor. Elizabeth claims that, in a place where no-one knows her by reputation, people will form an opinion of her based solely on her behavior. According to the joke, if Darcy were not here to expose her habit of pretending to false opinions, everyone would accept her as a perfectly sincere person. While her claim of being discredited by Darcy is humorously exaggerated, her overall point is valid: in the absence of other information, we judge others based on their performance. Such is a lesson that Darcy himself could take more fully to heart. After all, upon his arrival in Hertfordshire, his performance at the ball decided people's opinions of him as a prideful, selfish person.

At Colonel Fitzwilliam's request, Elizabeth explains further:

You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very dreadful.

The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you think he did? He danced only four dances! I am sorry to pain you—but so it was. He danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge,

more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner. Mr Darcy, you cannot deny the fact. (196)

While Elizabeth yet again exaggerates the enormity of his behavior for comic effect, we should not be tricked by her jesting tone into believing that her accusation is therefore entirely trivial. Her complaint is not merely that Darcy acted in a manner unsuited to the gaiety of a ball—something he certainly did—but more important, his behavior was reprehensible because it was a cause of injury to others. Of course, Elizabeth does not share the worst example of Darcy’s misbehavior, his insult to her; yet what she does tell is enough to show Colonel Fitzwilliam that his cousin chose to pursue his own comfort, rather than that of others. When Darcy protests that the only women he knew at the ball were those in his own party, Elizabeth retorts, “True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ball-room. Well, Colonel Fitzwilliam, what do I play next? My fingers wait your orders” (196). Her closing appeal to Colonel Fitzwilliam further emphasizes the difference between her own obliging attitude as she performs at the piano to please another, and Darcy’s earlier lack of consideration for the wishes of others. Darcy concedes, “Perhaps . . . I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction, but I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers” (196). When Elizabeth is astonished that such should be the case for someone with Darcy’s many advantages in life, Colonel Fitzwilliam—who is enjoying the wit and attention of this pretty young woman—does not hesitate to sacrifice his cousin’s pride for her amusement and explains, “It is because he will not give himself the trouble” (196).

Darcy defends himself by claiming that his actions were an accurate reflection of his character, once more revealing that he values truthfulness over disguise. “I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,” he says, “of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done” (197). “This is how I am,” he claims; “I do not have Bingley’s gift for easy conversation, and you are wrong to expect me to be like my friend.” Darcy’s personal distaste for making light and easy conversation with strangers should not necessarily be taken as general condemnation of the talent for doing so. Surely Darcy enjoys Bingley’s company because Bingley does possess the skill of making others feel at ease and appreciated; we know “Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, and ductility of his temper” (17). Darcy’s objection is rather to pretending to possess a skill, a skill which, furthermore, would require feigning an interest which he does not feel for other people. “I cannot *appear* interested in their concerns,” he says (italics mine), likely implying that any interest would be merely an appearance.

While it is true that one should make allowances for differences in temperament and personality, the fact that Darcy makes this excuse indicates that he has not yet grasped the distinction between selfishness and charity that separates false and true politeness. In order to accept his excuse as valid, we must also accept that every instance of acting in a way contrary to one’s nature or feelings is a performance in the worst sense: a disguise intended to deceive others and gain favor for oneself. It is by this kind of performance that the falsely polite man masks his own selfish ambition. If we only consider this bad kind of performance, then yes, Darcy’s refusal to act as if he is

interested in strangers' conversations is nothing to be criticized, but rather is an example of integrity. Darcy wishes to make his behavior the pure, unvarnished expression of his character; and if he lacks a talent for social graces, then he wishes this fact to be accepted, without criticism, as the truth of who he is.

However, Elizabeth argues that there are some worthwhile skills that are not possessed naturally, but are nonetheless worth acquiring through practice. Returning to the idea of behavior as performance, Elizabeth makes an analogy regarding her own less than perfect musical performance:

My fingers . . . do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women's do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I would not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe *my* fingers as capable as any other woman's of superior execution. (197)

The comparison counters Darcy's excuse in a number of ways. First, it reveals that not every performance is the sort of disguise that Darcy detests and avoids. A musical performance is not a false display by which one pretends to skills she does not possess. Indeed, the pianist can only exhibit skills that she has mastered through hours of practice; her performance shows who she truly is as a musician. Furthermore, the skills possessed by the accomplished pianist would not have felt easy or comfortable at first. Only practice can make challenging skills familiar. The same facts hold for the conversational skills that Darcy currently lacks. If he wishes to get better at speaking comfortably with

strangers, he must expect to practice and to feel uncomfortable in the beginning. Once acquired, those skills will not be a disguise, but a true reflection of his character. The argument Elizabeth makes here is a very Aristotelian one: the practice of the virtue turns into possession of the virtue. Darcy's problem, of course, is that he has made a habit of the wrong kind of behavior. His pride leads him to act cool and disdainful towards others, and in turn, the continual practice of such aloof behavior only serves to reinforce his pride.

The last element of Elizabeth's analogy reveals what must change for Darcy if he is to practice the right sort of performance: he must learn to consider his audience. The idea of an audience is implicit in the concept of a performance. While surely the pianist plays in no small part to gratify herself, when she performs, her goal is to share her musical skill with others and to delight them. Thus, the good performer will keep in mind what will be pleasing to her audience. Likewise, Darcy's social performance will only be a success if he chooses words and actions that will be gratifying to others. This does not mean he must become an obsequious flatterer like Mr. Collins, who has only his own good in mind. Rather, Darcy ought to practice true politeness, which seeks the good of others. As long as Darcy's goal is to edify his companions, rather than promote himself, his performance is not a deception but a real expression of charity.

Though not truly devoid of inclination or ability to please others—Darcy does offer to dance with Elizabeth on more than one occasion when he imagines she wishes to—he has shown a tendency to be overly selective about whom he deems worth the effort. He tells Elizabeth, “You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better.

No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think any thing wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers” (197). He implies that those who know Elizabeth well (i.e., not strangers) understand that her lack of musical skill is made up for by her other personal charms, such as her intelligence and wit. That is, intimate friends know better than to value what he believes a superficial skill—be it playing the piano or entertaining strangers—more highly than one’s true (and therefore more valuable) character. Darcy clearly considers himself among Elizabeth’s more intimate friends by this point, a not unreasonable inference since he does know her well enough to observe accurately that she enjoys saying things she does not believe. By classing them both together at the end of his statement, he seeks to emphasize that he likewise considers her his own friend, someone who recognizes that he too possesses virtues and talents that make up for his failure to perform for just anyone. Despite his compliment to her, he nonetheless misses the point she has been making: performance reveals character, rather than disguises it. The irony of their present conversation is that Elizabeth does not desire Darcy’s friendship because his performance at the Meryton assembly ball declared him to be a prideful, inconsiderate man. While he believes she now knows him well enough to excuse his failure then, in truth, he would probably be enjoying more success with Elizabeth had he thought as kindly of her when she was a stranger as he does since admitting her to his circle of friends.

Regarding this passage, Babb is right to note that there are two possible meanings of *performance* and that Darcy and Elizabeth are arguing over them: “[T]he sense of *performance* extends from a mere display of skill to a deed expressive of one’s whole

being” (125, 132-42). Contrary to Babb, I believe Darcy is the one who understands the word in the former sense, and Elizabeth suggests that a performance becomes something more meaningful if it expresses a real consideration of others, rather than just a superficial appearance of deference. Likewise, Tanner discusses the idea of performance in terms of the roles that individuals are called to play in society. Regarding Darcy’s character growth, he writes,

Darcy of course *has* thought about all the implications of his role in society, at least by the end of the book. His hauteur makes him go in for a certain amount of “role distance,” as at the first ball, when he slights Elizabeth to show his contemptuous detachment from the social ritual of the moment; but, unlike Wickham, he is not cynical about role-playing, and by the end his performing self is shown to be in harmony with his reflecting self. (124)

Darcy will eventually learn that his performance can (and must) express the good principles that he values, though for now, I maintain that he considers performance or “role-playing” to be the dishonest betrayal of those same principles.

Insofar as Darcy is trying to excuse his own lack of effort to make up for talents that do not come easily for him, Elizabeth and Colonel Fitzwilliam are right to criticize him. Yet Darcy’s claim that he has trouble speaking to strangers is not solely an attempt to excuse himself; it is also a request for understanding. He is saying, “Do not judge me so harshly. It is difficult for me to meet new people; while others seem to find it easy and entertaining to talk to strangers, I find it very unpleasant. You must imagine how I feel.”

Understood in this way, Darcy's petition is not at all unreasonable. It is a request that Elizabeth try to understand Darcy's perspective and treat him as she would wish to be treated in the same situation—a request, that is, for charity. He reminds us that it has been all too easy to judge him by the standard of his more gregarious and outgoing friend Bingley, without making much allowance for natural differences in temperament and personality. Understood in this way, Darcy's defense has some validity. However, it is still clearly a problem that Darcy is not yet very good at offering others the same charity and understanding that he requests for himself. For as we will see, he struggles even to place the woman whom he admires ahead of what he believes is due to himself.



These self-centered tendencies that we have been tracking in Darcy's character thus far come to the fore in the first proposal scene. Indeed, his behavior in this scene is a key reason that I cannot agree with Mary Lascelles that “the Darcy of Meryton assembly is quite inconsistent with the Darcy who is described and developed in the rest of the book” (22). As he insults Elizabeth even while he asks for her hand in marriage, it becomes painfully obvious that this is yet another instance in which Darcy has failed to take others' feelings into account when deciding how to act. If we look at the language of his proposal, we find that he makes continual references to himself and his wishes, but hardly any to Elizabeth's own feelings. Thus it should hardly come as a surprise that not only does he disregard the fact that his insistence on her family's inferiority must be highly offensive to her, but also that he believes (as we learn after the second, successful proposal) that Elizabeth has actually been encouraging his advances. Shockingly bad as

his behavior is in this scene, it is not at all out of place given the attitudes he has displayed in the novel thus far: his prioritizing truth over manners and his difficulty in prioritizing the needs of others when their needs conflict with his own. In other words, this proposal is not out of character for him; rather, it is the final proof that Darcy has a few lessons to learn before he is a worthy suitor.

The opening lines of Darcy's proposal adequately set the tone for the entire scene. He declares, "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (211). Darcy's emphasis is on himself and the power of his feelings, which have overcome all other considerations. As Sarah S. G. Frantz notes, "Darcy demonstrates his pride as soon as he opens his mouth. His struggles and his feelings are the first subjects of his words, not Elizabeth's worth as a lover and a wife" (169). He makes no address to Elizabeth's own feelings or otherwise expresses a desire that she will listen favorably to this outpouring of his heart. Moreover, his words "you must allow me" imply that she owes him a hearing regardless of what her own sentiments might be.

While Austen does not include any direct dialogue for the remainder of the proposal itself, she does clearly indicate, via narration, the gist of Darcy's words. We are told that he "spoke well" of "all that he felt and had long felt for her" (211). In itself, this is not a bad subject for a proposal. Yet where Darcy misjudges is in spending apparently equal time on detailing the circumstances that nevertheless make such a match distasteful to him. We learn, "His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a

warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit” (211). While he considers his own consequence—his rank, position, and dignity—there is no indication that he considers anyone but himself a wounded party in this transaction.<sup>12</sup> By his calculations, Elizabeth only stands to gain by an alliance to him. Austen’s dry humor points out how utterly ridiculous his oversight is; the narrator’s claim that his approach is “very unlikely to recommend” him suggests that it should have been obvious that focusing on how much she is beneath him is not the right way to secure a yes. Yet Darcy has clearly miscalculated how Elizabeth will respond, either because he overvalues his own worth or because he undervalues Elizabeth’s sense of her own dignity and worth. His mistake is highlighted by the impersonal construction of the narrator’s criticism. The narrator does not mention Elizabeth by name as the person Darcy has failed to recommend himself to; just as Elizabeth’s personal feelings have been overlooked in the proposal, she has been excluded from the grammar of the sentence. At the same time, the fact that Elizabeth is not mentioned by name also implies the universal nature of Darcy’s failure. His words are not calculated to recommend his suit to any woman.

While Darcy blunders ahead with his ill-considered proposal, Elizabeth illustrates by example how Darcy should have proceeded. We read of her reaction to Darcy’s declaration:

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man’s affection, and though her intentions did not vary for

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<sup>12</sup> For *consequence* and all subsequent word definitions cited in my dissertation, I have referred to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, unless otherwise noted.

an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger. She tried, however, to compose herself to answer him with patience, when he should have done. (211)

Elizabeth, as the narrator reminds us, has never cared for Darcy. However, she still attempts to respond to him with compassion. She recognizes what one in the position of the rejected lover will surely feel. Her charity—represented by her ability to consider others' feelings in connection with her own actions—makes Darcy's own lack of charity to her even more jarring. Given the fact that he is the one seeking her favor, we would have expected that the greater sympathy and consideration should be on his side, but ironically, Elizabeth expresses more of both in this moment than he has thus far. Of course, her compassion is understandably short-lived when she realizes that Darcy has extended no such courtesy to herself.

In fact, it turns out that Darcy is so far from understanding how Elizabeth will take his words that he believes he is succeeding with his suit. He ends his speech by “expressing his hope that [his attachment] would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand” (212). But there is a flaw in his petition, for we are told, “As he said this, she could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer. He *spoke* of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther” (212). Complete assurance would be out of place in any proposal; humility is surely a much better trait than pride for a lover. But in this case, Darcy's certainty of a favorable answer only makes matters worse, as it emphasizes how little

understanding he has for Elizabeth at this moment: he has entirely failed to see this exchange from her point of view. He probably believes he has taken into account her wishes, but the truth is that he has far overrated his own attractions to Elizabeth. Another young woman—Miss Bingley, for instance—might well be eager to accept him, regardless of the manner of his proposal. Of course, Darcy knows Elizabeth is very different from most other women, but he does not yet understand her as well as he thinks he does. His self-assurance is also another example of his tendency to believe that his own feelings and motives are worthy enough to be presented to others without disguise, when in fact charity and good manners alike require that the feelings of others be taken into account before one speaks precisely what is on his mind. In this case, Darcy would have done better to approach the proposal somewhat more like the performer in Elizabeth's musical analogy: if he wishes to elicit a certain response in his audience (in this case, a favorable answer from Elizabeth) he needs to present his suit in a way that is sensitive to her own needs and wishes.

Even after Elizabeth rejects his offer, Darcy struggles to accept her response, since it is not at all what he had expected. We should note that Elizabeth, even angry as she now is, can still recognize Darcy's disappointment. "I am sorry to have occasioned pain to any one," she says (212). While her sympathy is more for his general position as the rejected lover than for Darcy personally, it is still significant that she can imagine his pain and acknowledge that she (although unintentionally) has caused this disappointment. In contrast, Darcy's response still only makes reference to his own desires. He says, "And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to

be informed why, with so little *endeavor* at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance” (212). He speaks of her reply as something due to him and his honor. His use of the passive construction “I am thus rejected” is significant, for it allows him to frame the sentence without mentioning Elizabeth as the agent. The rejection becomes something that has happened to him, rather than something performed by another person acting from her own desires. Darcy began by failing to predict how Elizabeth would react to his words, and now, confronted by the proof of his failure, he is not yet able to acknowledge that his actions have justified her response.

Though Darcy may be unable to see where he has gone wrong, Elizabeth points out what has been Darcy’s chief flaw in the novel thus far: his inability to consider the feelings of others. She retorts, “I might as well inquire . . . why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was this not some excuse for incivility, if I *was* uncivil?” (213). While her accusation that Darcy set out to insult her may not be intended literally—little as she likes him, it seems unlikely that she would truly expect him to intentionally offend her when asking for her hand—her point is clear: he should have known that his words were obviously inappropriate for a marriage proposal. He has failed to consider her feelings and so has no reason to expect any better in her reply. She brings in Darcy’s separation of Bingley and Jane only after she has made it clear that her feelings, first of all, make it impossible for her to accept Darcy’s offer: “Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the

man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?" (213). Yet Darcy's interference with Jane is not really a separate offense from the disregard for others' feelings of which Elizabeth has already accused him. It is still a further example of his inability to value others' needs as he values his own. Ultimately, Elizabeth's accusation is that Darcy does not care enough about other people; he is selfish, and therefore she cannot love him.

As he responds to her charges, Darcy makes no apologies for his actions, but falls back on the justification he has used for himself before: that his motives have been just and his actions truthful and transparent. "I have no wish of denying that I did every thing in my power to separate my friend from your sister, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards *him* I have been kinder than towards myself," he says, as if the objections to the Bennet family which he has already enumerated are still sufficient to explain the separation of the lovers (213). When Elizabeth adds to her charges Darcy's apparent disappointment of Wickham's prospects, Darcy refrains from addressing what is understandably a sensitive topic (and one about which Elizabeth is entirely misinformed), giving instead a defense of his manners moments earlier. He says:

But perhaps . . . these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed, had I with greater policy concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination; by reason, by reflection, by every thing. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I

ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. 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?

(214-5)

The fault, as he describes it here, is not in fact his own but Elizabeth's. He focuses on the truthfulness, and therefore blamelessness, of his address to her. He also contrasts his "honest confession," a positive notion with religious connotations, to "flattery" and "policy," two words with negative connotations of cunning and falsehood. As he did during the conversation at Rosings, Darcy fails to distinguish between altering one's behavior out of consideration for others and disguising one's true motives out of selfishness; he conflates concession to others with flattery. Therefore, he values his own truthfulness over Elizabeth's hurt feelings. Yet he is so far from recognizing how selfish he truly is that he claims it is unreasonable for Elizabeth to be offended by his honesty, especially when the alternative is lies and manipulation. Darcy believes his refusal to stoop to stratagems is a mark of his own good character. He believes his lack of shame is further proof that there is nothing reprehensible in feelings that were "natural and just." Of course, the irony is that Darcy does not sympathize with Elizabeth's position, for surely her disgust with his arrogance is equally natural and just. Instead, Darcy imputes Elizabeth's hurt feelings to her wounded pride, completely ignorant that his own monumental pride has been on full display throughout this whole interview.

Elizabeth responds by once more directing his attention to the evidence against him: his poor behavior. After assuring him that his manner of proposing did not affect the substance of her answer, she explains:

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 of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable 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. (215)

Elizabeth dates her dislike of Darcy from their first encounter at the Meryton assembly ball, and what is more, she points to his manners as the first evidence for her adverse opinion of him. It is important to note that despite having her judgment clouded by personal injury and a lack of candor, her appraisal of him is precisely in keeping with what our careful reading of Darcy's first scene earlier revealed: a "selfish disdain for the feelings of others." It is true that Elizabeth has been hasty in forming such a strong prejudice against him following a single encounter—remember that she cannot be privy, as the readers are, to the narrator's assurances that Darcy's haughty and judgmental behavior at the ball is consistent with his usual character—and she will learn to see her mistake. However, she has been essentially right about the flaws in Darcy's character; his behavior in this very scene is proof enough for her words. So, despite the qualities Elizabeth will soon learn to value in him, until he mends his pride and learns to rule his

actions by charity, she is quite right to refuse him. As he is at this moment in the story, Darcy is not suited to be a good husband: he feels justified in exposing Elizabeth's inferiorities regardless of her own feelings, while still believing himself entitled to her acceptance and approval. Had Elizabeth accepted him now, one imagines their marriage truly would have been the unhappy one against which Mr. Bennet needlessly cautions his daughter later (418).

Disastrous as his behavior has been so far, Darcy's farewell does offer a glimpse of hope for his future redemption. As Elizabeth has been offering her final, unconditional refusal, Austen tells us that Darcy's face expresses "mingled incredulity and mortification" (215). He is not yet mortified for the right reason; he is humiliated by her refusal rather than (as he should be) his own inappropriate behavior. Yet the fact that he feels mortified is a good sign; the religious connotation of *mortification* suggests a process of spiritual growth as sinful desires and habits are overcome and replaced by better ones. Darcy is only in the very preliminary stage of this process, but his parting words, even grudging as they are, foreshadow his future improvement: "You have said quite enough, madam. I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness" (215-6). He acknowledges that her feelings (which he understands better than he did before) ought to inform his own feelings, and he recognizes that his view of the situation is not the only one. Once again, his sense of shame is not yet directed at the correct cause (himself), but the fact that he does feel shame in connection with this exchange is a movement in the right direction. Of course,

he would do better to apologize for his hurtful words, not simply for wasting her time. Still, his recognition that some form of apology is appropriate suggests that he does possess good moral principles. Though he has not yet realized what he has done wrong, he understands that admission and apology is the correct response when one is at fault. Therefore, we can believe that a sincere recognition of his mistake will lead to an equally sincere redress.

Lastly, Darcy offers Elizabeth a blessing.<sup>13</sup> It is significant that he does so precisely at the moment when it appears that her future health and happiness will have nothing to do with him, that both will in fact be improved by his absence from her life. His benediction is a positive sign because it is an acknowledgement that her happiness is not determined solely by his own wishes; it is proof that “he can pay attention to what is apart from himself” (Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, 93). I qualify that statement since, by the end of the novel, Darcy and Elizabeth’s reconciliation permits them both to wish for and contribute to one another’s happiness. But before Darcy’s desire for Elizabeth can be fulfilled, he must come to respect her own feelings. He must learn that what she wants may be very distinct from what he does and that loving her means respecting her thoughts and wishes even (and perhaps most especially) when doing so requires a sacrifice of his own pride. His tone is still bitter; we imagine he says the words more because he knows rather than feels them to be right. Still, he knows to say them.



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<sup>13</sup> His good wishes here foreshadow the closing line of his letter: “I will only add, God bless you” (225).

Darcy's disappointment is important because it forces him to address the one major flaw in his character. His pride and disregard of others' feelings has been a problem in more aspects of his life than simply his courtship of Elizabeth. It affects his relations to all those with whom he associates. At stake is not simply whether or not Elizabeth will agree to marry him; at stake is his character, and whether or not he can, as a Christian, promote the good and happiness of others, not the least of whom is the woman he marries. Although his romantic love for Elizabeth motivates Darcy to mend their relationship, correcting his pride has to do with more than learning to approach her alone with charity and humility. Darcy must learn to treat all others—including the strangers at a public ballroom and Elizabeth's ill-behaved family members—with deference.

While this chapter has focused on how Elizabeth's incisive criticism teaches Darcy how he must grow, I hardly mean to suggest that she is without flaws herself. Indeed, her powers of discernment, which shine so well at some moments, fail quite markedly at others. Like Darcy, she, too, requires an education in Christian charity; but whereas Darcy learned to mend his manners, Elizabeth will learn to temper her judgment.

## Chapter II

### Candor and Charity: The Education of Elizabeth Bennet

“I must confess that *I* think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, & how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I do not know,” wrote Jane Austen of Elizabeth Bennet (*Letters* 29 January 1813). Luckily for Austen, however, the majority of readers have liked Elizabeth very much, admiring her vivacity, her cleverness, her self-assurance, and her ability to speak her mind. Of course, these traits win admirers inside the fiction, too: they are the reasons Darcy not only falls in love with her, but also learns from her.

Such qualities also make Elizabeth stand out from other literary heroines. “We may have encountered sweet, angelic, beautiful, modest Jane Bennets before in literature,” observes Emily Auerbach, “but no one like Elizabeth” (146). Readers have rightly noted, for instance, that Elizabeth’s feisty nature sets her apart from the demure ladies of contemporary literature, both novels and conduct books. Henrietta Ten Harmsel finds Elizabeth to be a much more interestingly mixed and active heroine than her predecessors in either the works of Frances Burney or Samuel Richardson. Similarly, Mary Waldron argues that Elizabeth subverts the typical Burney heroine who is submissive and ultimately conforms to the accepted behavior manual standards for women:

Elizabeth departs quite startlingly from the Gregory—and the Burney—ideal. She is far from silent, frequently pert (at least by contemporary fictional standards) openly challenging to accepted authority, and

contemptuous of current decorums. . . . As a central female character Elizabeth is quite new. She may not, for instance, wish to usurp any male prerogatives . . . or countenance the initiation by the woman of divorce [as the heroines of radical novelists Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft do] . . . but she does wish to subject current shibboleths to intelligent examination instead of accepting them blindly. (41)

Though Elizabeth's behavior is not extreme compared to other more overtly radical heroines, nonetheless her daily words and actions challenge certain social and political standards.

Indeed, readers who see Elizabeth as a modern heroine ahead of her time have focused on her wit as her great virtue. Marian E. Fowler argues that Elizabeth's wit and impertinence, while being "the antithesis of courtesy book ideals," are wholly positive and that Darcy falls in love with her for these very qualities (59). *Pride and Prejudice*, Fowler maintains, is "Jane Austen's own feminist manifesto" written at the time and in the spirit of the feminist controversy in the 1790s (54). Laura Vorachek likewise finds Austen contradicts the conduct advice of Fordyce's sermons, since she creates a "witty heroine who marries despite [Fordyce's] indication of improbability. Those readers who laugh at Lady Catherine and Mary Bennet and rejoice in Elizabeth's resolution are, therefore, complicit in Austen's subversion of the hegemonic narratives of her time" (136). These readings all contend that Austen found fault with the contemporary understanding of feminine virtues and that she shows her distaste for such prescriptions of behavior by creating a lively, attractive heroine who succeeds while flouting those very

conventions. Interestingly, even Marilyn Butler, who argues that Austen's novels reflect her conservatism, finds that Elizabeth undermines the moral conventions Austen herself approves: "The trouble with *Pride and Prejudice* is that many readers do not perceive just how critical the author is of Elizabeth's way of thinking" (216). Elizabeth is such an appealing character that the reader accepts, rather than questions, "her lively and satirical vision" (Butler 216). While not going so far as Helena Kelly, who calls Elizabeth "a conservative's nightmare" (148), Butler acknowledges that Elizabeth's disregard for certain rules of decorum is potentially problematic for a conservative reading of the novel.

Certainly Elizabeth is a non-traditional heroine for the reasons enumerated above; to understand her in any other way is to ignore the cultural and historical context of the novel. However, Elizabeth's disregard for certain social "shibboleths" is not necessarily proof that she questions or rejects the moral principles upon which such conservative decorums are founded. Indeed, Katie Halsey has argued that "Jane Austen was far from opposed to the central tenets of conduct literature, with its strong emphasis on New Testament Christianity, propriety and good manners, prudence, economy, modesty and good sense" (37). Even so Austen "is not a writer for whom agreement (or even admiration) precludes mockery" of "a genre that combines the wise and good with the foolish and inconsistent" (Halsey 38). Austen's questioning and parodic interaction with the conduct texts shows an intelligent engagement with her moral tradition, but not a deliberate attempt to discredit what is truly wise and good.

Elizabeth's wit has also been understood as a defense against the selfish, foolish, or cruel. D. W. Harding's account of Jane Austen's "regulated hatred" is perhaps the earliest example of looking at wit and irony in her novels as a way of coping with people who either threaten or annoy the civilized female. P. J. M. Scott has seconded Harding's reading, and in much the same vein, Gloria Sybil Gross praises Elizabeth's aggressive wit, seeing it largely as a necessity: "Elizabeth must use all her arts to outflank the enmity of fools, bald-faced insolence, even defection by reputed allies. And sometimes she argues just to argue. . . . In a world rife with bluff and bluster and withering presumption, wit is almost a condition of survival" (82-3). This is hatred, though perhaps not much regulated at all: "The sallies back and forth [between Elizabeth and Mr. Bennet] expose the epidemic idiocy of the world, as well as a conspiratorial aversion toward almost everyone in it. . . . A sly, satirical bearing masks a whole lot of rage" (Gross 93). Bernard J. Paris's psychological reading finds less malice in Elizabeth, while still arguing that Elizabeth's sharp tongue with Darcy is a defense against being hurt by him a second time. Not surprisingly, neither Harding, Scott, nor Gross address Elizabeth's moment of self-knowledge and her repentance. Indeed, to read Harding, one might suppose that Elizabeth's principles and behavior are without fault throughout the story: "[T]he heroine of these early novels [*Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*] is herself the criterion of sound judgment and good feeling. She may claim that her values are sanctioned by good breeding and a religious civilisation, but in fact none of the people she meets represents those values so effectively as she does herself" (356). And none of the four authors just mentioned acknowledge that Elizabeth ultimately recognizes she

needs to be generous towards others. After all, if Elizabeth's sharp tongue and critical eye are largely a survival mechanism, then her wit appears morally neutral or even praiseworthy insofar as it allows her a means of preservation and happiness in a hostile environment.

In much the same way, readings that take Elizabeth as proof of Austen's anti-conservatism often miss what is morally problematic about her wit. While Patricia Meyer Spacks acknowledges that Elizabeth's sense of irony and humor does indeed defend against the pain that the follies of others may cause, she argues that it is a dangerous defense. The tendency to look for the flaws and foibles of others can keep one from seeing them correctly: "Laughter cuts Elizabeth off from the possibility of romance . . . . While Elizabeth preserves her mocking stance, she perceives in Darcy only corresponding mockery. Laughter, protecting frail mortals, can also distort their vision" (Spacks 75). Because the uses of intelligence and wit are sharply called into question, *Pride and Prejudice* does not appear to be, as Scott claims, "the novel in which Austen celebrates wholeheartedly the possession of her own intelligence, the resource for coping with life, especially other people" (61). Laura Mooneyham White observes, "Certainly the moral problem of wit dominates Austen's fiction. Heartless and self-serving wit functions as a major sin that two of her heroines, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, must overcome, and it is a ruinous characteristic for Fanny Price's romantic rival, Mary Crawford" (*Jane Austen's Anglicanism* 132).

As I have begun to suggest, I believe Austen's response to this problem of wit is neither radical nor progressive; rather, the correction lies within the Christian moral

tradition. Critics such as Emsley, Searle, and C. S. Lewis have observed that Elizabeth's education over the course of the book follows the Christian pattern of humility and contrition. And if we focus specifically on the correction of her wit, we find that she, like Darcy, learns a lesson in the virtue of Christian charity. Many readers have already identified the importance of charity to Austen's moral vision. Emsley, both in her writings on Austen's works in general and on *Pride and Prejudice* in particular, has shown that Austen has an abiding concern for the tension "between criticism and kindness, justice and charity" ("Laughing"). Butler argues that Jane and Bingley provide examples that teach Elizabeth and Darcy "to harness their talents to more Christian ends, by showing charity towards others and humility towards themselves" (212). And John Pikoulis notes that Elizabeth ultimately learns from Jane "the spirit of love, magnanimity of spirit, charity, 'universal good will'" (50). Yet despite the fact that Austen closely identifies Jane with the virtue of candor, few writers have spent much time developing the connection between this particular virtue and charity. Laura Mooneyham White perhaps comes closest to making this connection when she identifies candor—the generous attitude of offering others the benefit of the doubt when judging their actions—as the opposite of "malicious" wit that laughs at the flaws of others. She even notes in passing that Elizabeth's moral superiority is due to her charity, observing that Elizabeth shows both "the greater wit, and ultimately, the greater charity" when compared to her rival Miss Bingley (*Jane Austen's Anglicanism* 151). However, while White notes that the *Oxford English Dictionary's* entries for early usages of the word *charity* actually align with

Austen's usage of *candor*, White leaves the connection between candor and charity largely unexplored (*Jane Austen's Anglicanism* 148).

Other critics have likewise come near to what I am arguing, though without bringing Christian virtue into discussion. Joan Klingel Ray has pointed out what readers tend to overlook: Elizabeth is repeatedly critical of Darcy despite his efforts to be gallant. Ray observes that Darcy's affection for Elizabeth makes him change his attitude towards her, for he tries to become acquainted and to explain himself. In contrast, her attitude towards him remains static, as she continues to "willfully misunderstand" him: "So while Darcy experiences psychological movement, Elizabeth dwells for three weeks on her 'mortification' from Darcy's far from 'ridiculous' remark: she is both emotionally and psychologically mortified, stuck in one place" (Ray 39). Susan Morgan has also offered an unreligious, yet insightful account of Austen's art of judgment. Morgan writes:

The famous opening of *Pride and Prejudice* . . . locates the subject of the book in our tendency to generalize. To invoke universals is to live in a world of forms, to think with all the spaciousness and all the hollowness of preconceptions and thus withdraw from life in its demanding and inconclusive particularity. Such objectifying keeps us from the risks and thereby the hopes of an involved intelligence. (*In the Meantime* 10)

Although Morgan contends that Austen is "far from being 'the conservative Christian moralist'" that Butler would have her be (*In the Meantime* 2), the problem that Morgan identifies as the heart of this novel is, in fact, deeply connected to the Christian virtue of candor. Indeed, the passage above offers a secular account of what candor involves.

Candor prevents one from judging by preconceptions and generalities; only by understanding the particulars of a given situation can a person accurately judge another's deeds. The problem, as Austen sees it, is that fallen, sinful humans find it easiest to see others' actions in a negative light. As a corrective, candor requires us to withhold our judgment until that truth has been fully revealed (a principle on which Morgan and sermon writer Hugh Blair, Austen's contemporary, in fact agree).

I contend that if we consider Elizabeth's prejudice according to the principle of candor, we can understand more clearly why Elizabeth's stubborn dislike of Darcy is so problematic: the issue is not simply that Elizabeth arrives at a judgment without engaging fully with the facts and then refuses to change that judgment, though certainly such behavior is wrong. Rather, the problem underlying the observations of Ray and Morgan is Elizabeth's repeated failure to be guided by charity when judging others. In other words, Elizabeth's weakness is not merely epistemological—a failure of “intelligence”, as Morgan puts it (“Intelligence” 56). Her failure is moral, as well. Candor, of course, is a virtue that combines both epistemological and moral imperatives: it requires seeking the truth, while recognizing that knowledge is imperfect and supplying its defects with generosity and love. Austen invites us to consider Elizabeth's moral education through the lens of candor, for Elizabeth grows from dismissing Jane's characteristic generosity to rueing that she did not let the same “generous candour” rule her own judgment (230). Framing the issue according to Austen's own terms is better than straining for a subversive reading, especially one which ultimately requires positing that Austen's outward conservatism belies a hidden progressivism apparent only to “a small band of

superior readers who can now understand Austen, even if her contemporary readers could not” (Emsley, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy* 88). Taking the *lectio difficilior* seems inadvisable when the plainer reading, the one offered by the author herself, comprehends the complexities of the issue at hand. Candor not only provides a fruitful way to understand the challenges to Elizabeth’s judgment, but candor’s kinship to charity helps explain why Elizabeth’s education must follow the fundamentally Christian pattern of humility and contrition.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Elizabeth’s character growth may be understood as an education in Christian charity, as exemplified by candor. As a virtue, candor describes the operation of charity upon one’s judgments and thoughts regarding others; moreover, this understanding of virtue is one that Austen shares with contemporary moralists, including minister Hugh Blair and author Jane West. Elizabeth’s prejudice and misjudgment of Darcy can be traced to her failure to practice this virtue. Although, as has been established in the preceding chapter, Darcy truly is guilty of rudeness and selfish pride, Elizabeth is far too hasty to condemn his entire character and to interpret his every action in light of the weaknesses she perceives in him. Following their first awkward encounter, Darcy’s behavior towards Elizabeth is, for the most part, gallant, friendly, and interested. Since he is a reserved and introverted person, his interest is not so overt as it might be from someone more outgoing, such as his friend Bingley. Nonetheless, Darcy’s behavior is not so inscrutable that it is impossible or even unlikely that it bespeaks friendly, positive motives. Hence, Elizabeth’s inability to see anything but unkindness in him reveals her own defect, which is not quite a “propensity to hate

every body,” (the flaw she rather ironically attributes to Darcy) but at least the propensity to think ill of one man in particular (63). It is no surprise that Elizabeth must learn to replace her animosity with the generosity of candor before she can discover Darcy is a man worthy of her love. In her great moment of self-knowledge, she recognizes that, with regards to Darcy, she had dismissed candor; as she reevaluates him later, she reverses her mistake by practicing the candor she always should have shown him. In so doing, she proves not only a moral heroine, but a Christian one.



To understand what candor meant for Jane Austen, we must first recognize that the word’s meaning has shifted significantly between Austen’s time and our own. White clearly explains the difference:

[*Candor*] now means, among other things, a willingness to tell truths, even unpleasant ones, without much regard for how the truths will be received. “Let me be candid with you,” we say, before saying something we know will wound. But “candor” had an almost opposite meaning in Austen’s day. To be candid with others was to be generous and sympathetic, to allow for all possibilities of extenuations when it seemed another was doing wrong. (*Jane Austen’s Anglicanism* 148)

Given the term's centrality to my argument, it is worth retracing White's research.<sup>1</sup> She directs our attention to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which indicates that the meaning "freedom from mental bias; . . . impartiality" first appears in 1616, whereas the meaning "freedom from reserve in one's statements" first occurs in 1769. Both usages predate Austen's birth in 1775, yet the usage for which I argue was the longer established one. Next, White points us to Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*. In the fourth edition, first published in 1773, Johnson defines *candid* as "[f]ree from malice; not desirous to find faults; fair; open; ingenuous." The inclusion of "open" indicates that *candor* already carried overtones of frankness; compare Johnson's entry for *ingenuity*: "Openness; fairness; candour; freedom from dissimulation." Nonetheless, the predominant sense of the word is that of fair and generous judgment.<sup>2</sup>

Although the word's meaning was already beginning to shift even in Austen's day, we can still be confident of Austen's usage in this novel by looking at the term in context. The terms "candor" and "candid" together occur four times in *Pride and Prejudice*. We should not let this low count deceive us, however. The word is key to understanding Jane Bennet's character—indeed, every time *candor* appears, it describes her. Early on, Elizabeth declares that Jane is free from the mere "[a]ffectation of candour"; her great

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<sup>1</sup> White is not the only critic to note that Austen uses *candor* in this older sense. K. C. Phillipps observes that *candor*'s modern "[suggestion] of being frank to the extent of being outspoken . . . is an implication rarely found in the eighteenth century. A character like Mrs Candour in [Sheridan's] *The School for Scandal* is, in practice, outspoken, but this is not the point of her name; Mrs Candour retails scandal under the guise of being *candid*, or charitable" (26). It is worth noting that Austen herself is remembered to have once played the part of Mrs. Candour during some Twelfth Night festivities (Tucker 89). See also Tave, who shows that the *candor* embodied by Jane Bennet is also a theme in *Sense and Sensibility* (86-90).

<sup>2</sup> As White points out, George Crabbe's *English Synonymes* (first published 1816) reflects *candor*'s shift towards meaning "openness." Crabbe discusses the word in entries entitled "Candid, Open, Sincere" and "Frank, Candid, Ingenuous, Free, Open, Plain" (182, 493). Nonetheless, Crabbe distinguishes *candor* from other types of openness by its unselfish motive: "*Candor* arrises from a conscious purity of intention. . . . it is disinterested" (182).

virtue is “to be *candid* without ostentation or design—to take the good of every body’s character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad” (15-6, italics mine). When Wickham’s story of Darcy’s misdeeds has spread through the neighborhood, we are told, “Miss Bennet was the only creature who could suppose there might be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the society of Hertfordshire; her mild and steady *candour* always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes—but by everybody else Mr. Darcy was condemned as the worst of men” (157, italics mine). In both of these instances, Austen is not primarily praising Jane’s frankness, though Jane certainly is admirable for openly defending Darcy against his detractors. Rather, the above descriptions show Jane to be candid in Johnson’s sense of “not desirous to find faults.” The final instance of *candor* in the novel brings this point home. After reading Darcy’s letter, Elizabeth laments having “often disdained the generous candour” modeled by Jane (230). Elizabeth is certainly not wishing she had practiced openly speaking her mind—after all, such frank and forceful declarations of her opinions are precisely what have gotten Elizabeth into trouble. Rather, Elizabeth wishes she had not been so eager to find fault. Thus we can be confident that in this novel, Austen uses *candor* in the older sense described above.

Considering what she meant by the term, we should not be surprised to learn that for Austen candor was not only a virtue, but one associated with the highest Christian virtue of all, charity. This connection is explicitly established in a sermon by Hugh Blair. Austen mentions Blair’s sermons in her juvenile work, *Catharine or The Bower*, as well as in her later novel *Mansfield Park* (*Minor Works* 232, *Mansfield Park* 108). We also

know that Blair's works, both his sermons and his famous *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, appeared in the Austen family library at her girlhood home in Steventon (Tucker 133).<sup>3</sup> Austen's letters reveal that she was fond of reading sermons, and thus it is likely that her understanding of candor was influenced by Blair. In the sermon titled "On Charity," Blair establishes the source of all Christian virtues: "[Charity] is not properly a single virtue, but a disposition residing in the heart, as a fountain whence all the virtues of benignity, candour, forbearance, generosity, compassion, and liberality, flow, as so many native streams" (24). In other words, candor cannot be practiced in exclusion from other virtues; it must be preceded by an attitude of charity, and it exists in harmony with a number of other sister virtues. The link between candor and charity is further cemented by Blair's tenth published sermon. Called "On Candor," this sermon is based on I Corinthians 13:5, "Charity thinketh no evil," a verse from the well-known Biblical passage on Christian love.<sup>4</sup> In this sermon, Blair claims, "That Candour which is a Christian virtue, consists, not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment" (281). As he did in the sermon previously quoted, Blair links

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<sup>3</sup> Blair's works, both religious and rhetorical, also feature in *Elegant Extracts*. Austen was likewise aware of Blair's renown as a rhetorician. In *Northanger Abbey*, Miss Tilney names Blair during a playful argument amongst herself, Catherine Morland, and Henry Tilney: "The word 'nicest,' as you used it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as you can, or we shall be overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way" (109). Tucker points out that the mention of Johnson is likely in reference to his dictionary (131).

<sup>4</sup> As noted earlier, White directs us to the *Oxford English Dictionary's* entry for *charity*, where we find the following definition: "3.a. A disposition to judge leniently and hopefully of the character, aims, and destinies of others, to make allowance for their apparent faults and shortcomings. . . . (But often it amounts barely to fair-mindedness towards people disapproved of or disliked, this being appraised as a magnanimous virtue.) Apparently a restricted sense of 1.c [the Christian love of one's fellow human beings], founded upon one of the special characteristics ascribed to Christian charity which 'thinketh no evil.'" Examples for this usage appear from the years 1483 to 1874. Blair's sermons (published 1777-1801) reflect usage well-established by the eighteenth century. Despite the parenthetical qualification in the dictionary entry, Blair clearly draws upon the fullest sense of charity.

candor and liberality, for the two concepts are closely related: *liberal* in this sense means “free from bias, prejudice, or bigotry.”

Blair is not the only one of Austen’s contemporaries to link candor and charity, for Jane West, author of novels and courtesy books, makes the same connection. We know from Austen’s letters that she was familiar with West’s writings.<sup>5</sup> In *Letters to a Young Lady*, West calls candor “a heavenly emanation from the pure spirit of charity” (286). West refers to the same scriptural passage on love from I Corinthians, as well. She writes, “An adept in the practice of christian candour knows that we must invariably conform to the precept of ‘thinking no evil’” (358).<sup>6</sup> In another conduct book, *Letters Addressed to a Young Man*, West likewise advises, “Let them not confine the duty of charity to the act of giving, but extend it to candid judgment” (329). In context, she is talking about how to behave towards dissenting Calvinists, but her advice is certainly applicable for all who practice Christian charity. The first volume of Blair’s *Sermons* was published in 1777 (“On Candour” is in the second volume); West published her conduct book for young men in 1801 and the one for young women in 1806. Yet it is not necessary to posit any direct influence between these authors. Both Blair and West draw on a common Christian ethical tradition, which locates the root of all moral behavior in charity, “that great principle in the Christian system,” as Blair says (“On Candour” 278).

In practice, candor is the exercise of charity when forming judgments of other people. We know that Austen wanted candor to guide her own actions, since the three

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<sup>5</sup> Anne West is mentioned twice in Austen’s published letters (*Letters* 28 September 1814, 8-9 September 1816).

<sup>6</sup> White quotes this passage as part of her evidence for Austen’s usage of *candor* (*Jane Austen’s Anglicanism* 148).

prayers she wrote ask for grace and guidance when dealing with other people. Bruce Stovel observes, “[T]he difficulty and yet the necessity of self-knowledge is the principal theme in Jane Austen’s prayers. A parallel theme is the struggle for Christ-like forbearance and charity (the ‘candour’ that Jane Bennet exemplifies and Elizabeth acquires in *Pride and Prejudice*)” (187). Austen’s first prayer includes the petition, “Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls” (*Minor Works* 453). These words reveal Austen’s belief that, in addition to hurting others, sinful attitudes and words also harm the self. Similarly, in the second prayer, she asks, “May the comforts of every day, be thankfully felt by us, may they prompt a willing obedience of thy commandments and a benevolent spirit toward every fellow-creature” (*Minor Works* 455). Attitudes and actions do not operate independently, but rather thoughts and deeds inform one another: gratitude produces obedience and kindness. Thus, candor, understood as charity of judgment, is not merely expressed by speaking generously of others (an action); it begins with thinking generously of them (a disposition). Austen would certainly have agreed with Blair that candor “consists not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart.”

Austen’s third prayer specifically addresses the subject of judging others. The prayer reads, “Incline us oh God! to think humbly of ourselves, to be severe only in the examination of our own conduct, to consider our fellow-creatures with kindness, and to judge of all they say and do with that charity which we would desire from them ourselves” (*Minor Works* 456). Here humility (itself a Christian virtue) and self-

knowledge are linked to kindness and charity. As we will shortly see from Elizabeth's own character growth, the knowledge of one's own faults prepares one to be generous when judging the faults of others. While Austen does not use the word *candor* itself in this prayer, she nonetheless describes the generous attitude towards others that candor denotes. Indeed, this line from the prayer echoes Blair's description of the truly candid man, who "commiserates human frailty; and judges of others, according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable that they should judge of him" ("On Candour" 283). The cultivation of candor was a present concern for Austen in her life, and so it is no surprise that candor is a central theme in her fiction.<sup>7</sup>



It is Jane, not Elizabeth, who most clearly exemplifies candor at the beginning of the novel. The eldest Miss Bennet is not nearly as popular with readers as her witty younger sister is, but Elizabeth's greater appeal was surely not accidental on Austen's part. With her impetuosity and energy, Elizabeth offers more material for an exciting narrative than her reserved and self-controlled sister does. Henrietta Ten Harmsel has pointed out that a novel focused on Jane's adventures would be rather dull in comparison: "Very subtly, then, Jane Austen does use Jane Bennet as a conventional heroine throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. And nothing could display more authentically the artistic inadequacy of such a heroine than the constant contrast established between the simple passivity of Jane and the complex activity of her sister Elizabeth" (72). However, such an

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<sup>7</sup> Stovel further suggests, "The prayers . . . must reveal to us the failings to which Jane Austen felt she was most inclined. We can then see the novels as having at their heart the struggles that dominated Jane Austen's own inner life: the struggles for self-knowledge, charity of mind, gratitude, and the other virtues of the prayers" (194).

assessment, though true as far as it goes, does not fully account for Jane's presence in the book. To assume Jane is included simply to look dull next to Elizabeth is to discredit Austen's efficiency and artistry.

Nonetheless, many critics (even those who acknowledge that Jane serves a key role in the narrative) have persisted in seeing Jane as weak or foolish, inadequate not just as a heroine but as a mature and independent person. Ten Harmsel and Ivor Morris concur in finding her "naive" (Ten Harmsel 68, Morris 6). Scott simply finds Jane "less intelligent" than Elizabeth (55). Even Marilyn Butler almost follows suit, arguing, "Jane is an ineffective guide to the failures of Elizabeth's consciousness, since as far as the reader knows Jane herself hardly thinks at all" (216). Emily Auerbach even goes so far as to imagine that Jane Austen herself did not entirely approve of her creation: "The phrase 'pliancy of temper' suggests the narrator's ambivalence about Jane Bennet" (147). Ryle believes Jane lacking in confidence and possibly even a sense of self-worth: "Jane is quite uncocksure. She is too diffident. She does not resent being put upon or even realise that she is being put upon. There is no proper pride, and so no fight in her" (289). And Bernard J. Paris offers a psychological explanation for such perceived diffidence: "Jane is insecure about her own worth and acceptability and needs to approve of everyone lest they disapprove of her. She defends herself against fears of rejection by being mild, affable, and unthreatening. If she likes others, they will like her" (111). Douglas Murray further anatomizes "the sad case of Jane Bennet," whom he takes to be an insecure and repressed young woman whose smiles are a sign that, "while trying to show herself approved, she does not have the leisure for insight" (45). Yet if we see Jane as deficient or

even pathologic insofar as her mild character differs from Elizabeth's more forceful one, we overlook the way that Jane actually provides an instructive counter-example to her sister.

Indeed, if we are fully to understand Elizabeth, we must first properly understand Jane. John Pikoulis offers a much more helpful reading of Jane, noting that Elizabeth's "emergence as [the heroine] is inseparable from the substance of her conversation with Jane" (39). Pikoulis continues:

It is as if the very real virtues Jane enacts are the unstated ideal which governs the novel even though she herself is inadequate in their defense. Jane is central because behind her we sense the pressure towards the closely bound but, within its limits, free and ordered community whose values are harmonious and elevated—a society, it is important to insist, which does not yet exist. (47)

While I hold that Jane is hardly the only character who displays the virtues Austen believes necessary for a free and ordered society, insofar as Jane's candor is an expression of charity, Jane does exemplify the moral virtues at the heart of the novel. Furthermore, Jane's candor corrects Elizabeth's habit of hasty and often uncharitable judgment.

The theme of candid judgment first arises as Elizabeth and her elder sister reflect on the Meryton assembly ball the following day. After Jane speaks of her admiration for Mr. Bingley, Elizabeth gives her sister permission to like him, claiming, "You have liked many a stupider person" (15). When Jane protests, Elizabeth explains further:

“Oh! you are a great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life.”

“I would wish not to be hasty in censuring any one; but I always speak what I think.”

“I know you do; and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough;—one meets it every where. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of every body’s character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone.” (15-6)

In this passage, Elizabeth both praises and gently criticizes Jane with the affectionate freedom of a close sibling. Jane truly does follow the injunction to think no evil, unwilling as she is to think or speak poorly of others. The characterization of Jane in this passage fits very closely with Blair’s own description of the candid man: “He expects none to be faultless; and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. . . . He is not hasty to judge, and he requires full evidence before he will condemn” (“On Candour” 282). Jane’s impulse to look for the good in others and to avoid “hasty” judgments truly is in the spirit of candor. Still, the candid man acknowledges others’ faults as well as their virtues, and he does, when the evidence warrants, condemn. Jane, in her mildness, is

uncomfortable passing such negative judgments. According to Elizabeth, Jane carries her candor too far, for surely others do have real faults, follies, and nonsense; and it is neither wise nor prudent to overlook such flaws. Nevertheless, Jane's own fault has an admirable cause: her candor results from real generosity of heart, rather than feigned feelings, as is much more often the case. The novel does bear out Elizabeth's assessment, showing Jane to be sometimes misled by too much kindness in her judgments. Still, before we are tempted to write Jane off as simply an example of excessive candor, we must remember that in regards to Darcy, it is she—not Elizabeth—who has treated him fairly from the beginning. Jane certainly errs to the extreme of over-generosity, but she possesses real goodness that must not be dismissed. Susan Morgan argues:

Jane's prepossession to think well of people does not lead her to be perceptive, and she is obviously wrong about the Bingley sisters. Yet Jane's kind of misunderstanding is acceptable to her author in a way that the disposition to think ill of people is not. And her role as the opponent of negativity is central to understanding Elizabeth's mistakes, her choices, and her intellectual growth. ("Intelligence" 64)

Jane is not perfect, nor does Austen try to convince us that she is. But Jane's generous judgment, growing as it does from a real desire for goodness in other people, bears an affinity to charity in a way that Elizabeth's cynicism does not. Furthermore, Jane's characteristic generosity provides a useful yardstick by which we may recognize the opposite extreme, towards which the keen-witted Elizabeth inclines.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tave likewise observes, "[candor] is . . . something that Elizabeth would do well to learn by way of correcting her own tendency in the opposite direction" (87).

However, readers, like Elizabeth herself, have a tendency to confuse Jane's virtues with her weaknesses. For instance, Emily Auerbach writes, "Certainly one would not wish to have a rigid, unyielding, utterly stubborn temper, but Jane's pliancy allows her to be too easily bent, influenced, and manipulated by others. She is constantly described as 'sweet' and 'mild,' adjectives suggesting goodness but also feminine weakness" (147). Jane's excessive candor does truly cloud her vision at times; however, we must not allow Jane's imperfections to prejudice us against the principles of her character. When Auerbach finds hints of feminine frailty in Jane's sweetness and mildness, she passes over the fact that these two qualities also have distinctly religious connotations associated with Christian humility. Fully understood, the meek and mild sweetness of true humility implies neither a weak nor foolish understanding. Nonetheless, Austen arranges the narrative to allow us to think so: "At the beginning of the novel we are assured of Elizabeth's intelligence and Jane's blindness, in part because Elizabeth can see immediately that Bingley's sisters are not well intentioned. And we are quick to think of Jane as sweet but a fool" (Morgan, *In the Meantime* 98-9). Like Elizabeth, the reader may not do full justice to Jane's position until Elizabeth's judgment is proved faulty; however, early on Austen gives us enough evidence that we may decide Jane is not simply foolish for her judgment of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst. For instance, when the narrator notes that Jane has less "quickness of observation" and more "pliancy of temper" than her sister Elizabeth, Austen's purpose is not to explain that Jane is unintelligent

(16).<sup>9</sup> Rather, Austen mentions these characteristics to explain why an intelligent young woman could understandably overlook Miss Bingley's insincerity, behavior that is far more evident to Elizabeth because her "judgment [is] too unassailed by any attention to herself" (16). Thus while Austen showcases her characters' judgment, she also tests that of the reader.

The Bennet women's first discussion of Darcy after the assembly ball offers perfect examples of what charitable judgment is versus what it is not. Jane, of course, models a candid judgment; in contrast, Elizabeth and her mother demonstrate the harsh and unforgiving judgment that is candor's opposite. The passage begins when Charlotte recalls how Darcy snubbed Elizabeth. Mrs. Bennet readily adds further evidence of his disagreeable nature, saying "Mrs. Long told me last night that he sat close to her for half an hour without once opening his lips" (20). Jane protests, "Are you quite sure, Ma'am? —is not there a little mistake? . . . I certainly saw Mr. Darcy speaking to her" (20). Her gentle correction models candor to all involved in this story: she vindicates Darcy from the charge of ignoring Mrs. Long; then she attributes the misunderstanding to "a little mistake," rather than any intentional unkindness on the part of either Mrs. Long or Mrs. Bennet. The conversation continues with Mrs. Bennet forced to acknowledge the hyperbole of her previous statement:

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<sup>9</sup> Myra Stokes observes that this passage, illustrating Elizabeth's and Jane's different judgments of Bingley's sisters, "presents a muted version of [the contrast in character] between Darcy and Bingley . . . which is not to say that either girl is foolish or ill-natured (any more than either Darcy or Bingley is)" (40).

“Aye—because she asked him at last how he liked Netherfield, and he could not help answering her;—but she said he seemed very angry at being spoke to.”

“Miss Bingley told me,” said Jane, “that he never speaks much unless among his intimate acquaintance. With *them* he is remarkably agreeable.”

“I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If he had been so very agreeable he would have talked to Mrs. Long. But I can guess how it was; every body says that he is ate up with pride, and I dare say he had heard somehow that Mrs. Long does not keep a carriage, and had come to the ball in a hack chaise.” (20-1)

There is a great contrast between the motives and character attributed to Darcy by Mrs. Bennet and by Jane. Mrs. Bennet (along with the absent Mrs. Long) interprets Darcy’s enforced answer as resentful and angry, the product of a prideful spirit. According to their interpretation, Darcy’s silence proves his disgust at being addressed by a woman who cannot afford her own carriage and had to rent one for the evening. On the other hand, Jane suggests that Darcy’s silence is not, in fact, a personal insult directed at Mrs. Long but rather the habit of a socially reserved man, one who is capable of agreeable manners but prefers the companionship of friends to strangers. Mrs. Bennet surely does not exemplify the Biblical standard of judging others as one would wish to be judged herself. Of course, her temperament is such that she probably struggles to imagine any circumstances in which one would prefer silence to speaking. Yet this lack of imaginative

sympathy for others is another a sign of Mrs. Bennet's insufficient charity. In fact, the truth about Darcy lies somewhere between the judgments of Jane and Mrs. Bennet: Darcy is indeed proud, yet he also struggles to make small talk with people he has never met before. In the scene in question, his silence probably owes a lot to his lack of interest in a stranger. Yet regardless of Darcy's own sentiments, the judgments of Jane and her mother reveal their own moral character, and there is no doubt that Jane's generosity is far more admirable than her mother's petty resentment.

Elizabeth does not offer her opinion of Darcy until the end of the conversation, yet her judgment has more in common with her mother's opinion than with her sister's. When Mrs. Bennet urges Elizabeth to turn down Mr. Darcy should he ever ask for a dance, Elizabeth readily returns, "I believe, Ma'am, I may safely promise you *never* to dance with him" (21). Elizabeth's "never" precludes the possibility that her initial impression of him is wrong. "Never" also denies that he could improve. Like her mother, Elizabeth has chosen a negative interpretation of Darcy's behavior and is not interested in giving him the benefit of the doubt for past or future actions. "I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*," she quips, revealing even through her jest that her dislike of Darcy is an intentional decision (21). She admits they are both guilty of pride and by implication, equally in need of grace from one another, but she—out of injured pique—will give him none. Of course, she speaks lightly, and it would not be fair of us readers to judge her solely on the basis of a comment that she says in jest. However, her subsequent interactions with Darcy prove that her words were not only a joke.

Although Elizabeth's initial assessment of Darcy's proud disdain is, in many ways, an accurate assessment of his chief character flaw, disagreeableness and pride are by no means the whole of his character. However, Elizabeth's lack of candor means that she focuses on these flaws and misses the good qualities he really does possess. Ironically, Elizabeth's perception of the ball also resembles Darcy's own, as Martha Satz points out: "Although [Elizabeth and Darcy] claim commitment to a reasonable and clear-eyed attitude, they have a naturally satirical eye. They reject charitable impulses to spotlight foibles and defects. Thus, at the ball, they see some disturbing elements" (174). Perhaps it should not be surprising that they each take a negative first impression of the other. But while Darcy—under the influence of Elizabeth's playful manner and intelligent glance—almost immediately revises his opinion, Elizabeth chooses to remain offended. As a result, she misinterprets his friendly overtures as hostile.

Their second meeting produces a series of comic misunderstandings which show just how determined Elizabeth still is to interpret everything Darcy does in a negative light. Indeed, their interaction is especially delightful to read if one pays attention to the difference between what Darcy probably means and what Elizabeth thinks he means. The scene opens with Darcy listening in on Elizabeth's own conversation "as a step towards conversing with her himself" (26). In such a social gathering, it is neither odd nor rude for one person to observe the conversation of others. As we learn later, Darcy finds it difficult to talk to people he barely knows; thus his eavesdropping is his first quiet step towards friendship. Yet when Elizabeth notices him, she remarks to her friend Charlotte:

“What does Mr. Darcy mean . . . by listening to my conversation with Colonel Forster?”

“That is a question which Mr. Darcy only can answer.”

“But if he does it any more I shall certainly let him know that I see what he is about. He has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him.” (26)

The dialogue between the two friends offers the reader two different understandings of Darcy’s actions. Charlotte’s answer contains understated wisdom, implying that Darcy’s motives are hidden and that an attempt to guess them may result in error. And Charlotte is right, for neither woman seems to suspect that he eavesdrops because he finds Elizabeth attractive. Despite Charlotte’s caution, Elizabeth does not hesitate to offer her own interpretation that Darcy observes her so that he may mock her to himself. The irony, of course, is that only a few minutes before now, Darcy had “looked at her only to criticize,” even going so far as to “[make] it clear to himself and his friends that [Elizabeth] had hardly a good feature in her face” (25-6). Paris offers a further insight on this moment of Elizabeth’s judgment: “She is projecting her own attitudes onto Darcy; and she fears that he is regarding her as she regards those to whom she feels superior” (123). In other words, Elizabeth’s dislike of Darcy reveals more about her own attitude than it does about his. We readers know that Elizabeth was almost right about him, and so we judge her mistake less harshly than if she had been completely wrong from the beginning. But by the time Darcy eavesdrops on her conversation, he has been enchanted by her lively, intelligent glance, and Elizabeth’s negative judgment is no longer correct. If she had

shown Darcy greater candor, Elizabeth might have discovered his positive qualities much sooner. But instead, she has already assumed the worst about his intentions.

Before we proceed to Elizabeth and Darcy's first conversation in the novel, I wish to pause and consider Elizabeth's initial opinion of him, since at this point in the story her judgment is based almost entirely on their first encounter at the Meryton assembly ball. The great challenge for Elizabeth is to judge fairly when, as yet, so little information is available to her. However, her dislike is already settled, as their ensuing interactions will show. Blair describes the dangers of such hasty decision making:

In order to form sound opinions concerning characters and actions, two things are especially requisite, information and impartiality. But such as are most forward to decide unfavorably, are commonly destitute of both. Instead of possessing, or even requiring, full information, the grounds on which they proceed are frequently the most slight and frivolous. . . . From an action they presently look into the heart, and infer the motive. This supposed motive they conclude to be the ruling principle; and pronounce at once concerning the whole character. ("On Candour" 287-8)

Right now, Elizabeth clearly lacks the two requisites for sound opinion. Having met Darcy only once before, she does not possess much information about his character. Furthermore, his unfortunate and thoughtless snub has left her injured and anything but impartial. While in general she is not the kind of harsh and suspicious person Blair describes throughout his sermon when characterizing the person without candor, with regards to Darcy she has made the mistakes Blair enumerates in the passage above.

Elizabeth has taken Darcy's previous aloofness and his insulting words as the indicators of his whole character, and she thinks of him at their second meeting only as "the man who made himself agreeable no where, and who had not thought her handsome enough to dance with" (26). Elizabeth has "presently" (i.e., immediately) inferred negative motives not only for that past encounter, but for the present one as well. In contrast, the person of candid judgment does not jump to conclusions on scanty evidence, but, like Jane, exercises patience and caution before censuring others.

Even once she begins speaking to Darcy directly, Elizabeth persistently misinterprets his motives. She tells him she knows he has been watching her:

"Did not you think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?"

"With great energy;—but it is a subject which always makes a lady energetic."

"You are severe on us." (26)

Because she is ready to think the worst of him, Elizabeth takes Darcy's reply as a disparaging comment about the frivolity of female interests. Yet readers already know of Darcy's real admiration for Elizabeth; therefore we ought to doubt that Darcy—after going out of his way to talk to her—would intentionally insult her when she starts a conversation. More likely, he means that he does not know Elizabeth well enough to distinguish her true feelings about a ball from general feminine high spirits. His

generalization, therefore, provides an opening for her to share her individual opinion. Yet Elizabeth has shut out this much more complimentary possibility.

Elizabeth likewise entirely misses the compliment in Darcy's request to dance with her. Humorously, his request comes as something of shock to himself as well as to Elizabeth. Sir William Lucas recommends Elizabeth as a partner to Darcy: "'You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you.' And taking her hand, he would have given it to Mr. Darcy, who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it" (28-9). The suggestion that Elizabeth is too beautiful to refuse makes a poetically ironic counterpoint to Darcy's first encounter with her; even more interesting is the fact that Darcy is willing to reverse his previous assessment, and by accepting her hand, to correct that first failed introduction. Yet Elizabeth remains true to her promise to her mother and protests she does not wish to dance. We are told that "Mr. Darcy with grave propriety requested to be allowed the honour of her hand; but in vain. Elizabeth was determined" (29). When Sir William tries to persuade her, she merely smiles and returns, "Mr. Darcy is all politeness" (29). As Reuben A. Brower discusses, the irony in this exchange hinges on the words "grave propriety" and "politeness." Elizabeth understands Darcy's propriety as haughty and perfunctory, in keeping with her assessment of his previous behavior. Thus her praise that he is "all politeness" is equally perfunctory (Brower, *Controlling Hand* 101). Her words are also a subtle jab at his previous failure of politeness when he refused to consider her a suitable partner. Yet both deserved and gratifying as this set-down is (both to her and to readers), Elizabeth's focus on his past misconduct blinds her to the other possibility that Darcy's "grave propriety" in

fact expresses a real willingness to dance with her. As Brower notes, Austen leaves open to the reader the ironic possibility that “all politeness” may, in fact, refer to Darcy’s true interest in Elizabeth. Her smile and subsequent arch look “have for the reader an added ironic value: Elizabeth’s interpretation of Darcy’s manner may be quite wrong” (Brower, *Controlling Hand* 101).

Elizabeth continues to be quite wrong about Darcy, even before Wickham arrives to feed her his spurious tale of abuse at Darcy’s hands. During her stay at Netherfield to nurse her ill sister, Elizabeth notices that Darcy cannot take his eyes off her. She finds herself at a loss to explain this phenomenon:

She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange. She could only imagine however at last, that she drew his notice because there was a something about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present. The supposition did not pain her. She liked him too little to care for his approbation. (56)

Given Darcy’s first negative (though brief) initial impression of her, plus his wealth and status, it is understandable that Elizabeth still struggles to imagine he admires her. But the alternative—that Darcy stares because she offends him—is admittedly an even more bizarre idea to her. Thus it is telling of her prejudice against him that, of these two possible motives, Elizabeth decides upon the less reasonable of the two. As Nora Foster Stovel dryly observes, “The fact that men do not usually stare at women because they do

not like the way they look serves to emphasize Elizabeth's rigid mind-set that will not admit any data that does not fit her schema" (187). Elizabeth's interpretation of Darcy's motives does not seem to be a sign of modesty, either. After all, throughout the novel Elizabeth shows herself to be a woman well-assured of her own worth. "Compliments always take *you* by surprise," she tells Jane, "and *me* never" (15). However, in this instance, even modest Jane would likely acknowledge the possibility of a compliment from Darcy. Such is the far more candid option; in contrast, there is something almost malicious in supposing that Darcy enjoys looking at Elizabeth only to despise her. Darcy's attempt to speak to her at their previous meeting provided some evidence that he thinks better of her than his first rude remark suggested. Thus, Elizabeth is not entirely without grounds for arriving at a candid reading of Darcy's behavior now. But she cares too little for him either to wish his approbation or to give a generous explanation of his actions, even in her thoughts.

Paris's interpretation of this scene is worth addressing. He argues that Elizabeth's judgment of Darcy is a defense mechanism: "She will not allow herself to suppose that she might be an object of Darcy's admiration because to do so would make her vulnerable if she should be wrong. Darcy has hurt her once, badly; and she is going to make sure that it does not happen again" (123). While I do not think Elizabeth's desire to protect herself fully accounts for her reaction to Darcy's gaze, surely there is some truth to Paris's interpretation. It must be difficult for Elizabeth to realize that her own feelings are coloring her response to him since she also has legitimate reasons to find his admiration unwelcome, reasons that have little to do with vulnerability. As I have shown

in this and the preceding chapter, Elizabeth has correctly identified Darcy's faults as pride and disdain for the feelings of others. Thus she thinks her negative interpretation of his gaze has a solid foundation, even though the most recent evidence is much more ambiguous. In other words, when Elizabeth's feelings of injured pride are involved, it becomes especially easy for her to think her judgment is right.

Not even Darcy's subsequent suggestion that they dance while Miss Bingley plays the piano is enough to overthrow Elizabeth's belief that he secretly scorns her. Their exchange runs thus:

“Do you not feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?”

She smiled, but made no answer. He repeated the question, with some surprise at her silence.

“Oh!” said she, “I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say ‘Yes,’ that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare.”

“Indeed I do not dare.” (56)

One would expect that Darcy's offer to dance would finally prove his benevolent, even admiring intent. Surely there is nothing in the wording of his question to suggest he

means to trick her into revealing her poor taste. Regarding such episodes of verbal sparring between Elizabeth and Darcy, Brower observes:

It is important also that in these ironic dialogues no comment is included that makes us take Darcy's behavior in only an unpleasant sense. When there is comment, it is mainly used to bring out the latent ambiguity without in any way resolving it. So in general the earlier Darcy scenes are left open in preparation for a fresh estimate of his character. The pleasanter interpretation of one of Darcy's or Elizabeth's remarks or of one of the author's comments allows for the later choice and for the consequent recognitions. (Brower, "Light" 71)

The dual elements of ambiguity and interpretation are key to the theme of candid judgment. The ambiguous dialogue is carefully crafted to challenge the candor, not just of the heroine, but of the reader, too. Elizabeth is lively and persuasive, and one is tempted to accept her uncharitable perspective as accurate; yet at the same time, Austen offers the reader just enough insight into Darcy's growing admiration to support a positive interpretation of his actions.<sup>10</sup> In this instance, given Darcy's previous failure to secure Elizabeth's hand, his repeated offer to dance could imply that he knows she holds his first dismissal of her at the assembly ball against him, that he regrets his rudeness and means to make it up to her by dancing now. Surely Jane, were she in Elizabeth's position, would conclude as much and then demonstrate charity by accepting. Yet Elizabeth sees no

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<sup>10</sup> See Jan Fergus's *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* for an exploration of how Austen carefully crafts scene and dialogue to test (and ultimately educate) the reader's judgment. Fergus demonstrates that Austen offers the reader chances to judge differently than Elizabeth does while setting up the narrative so that Elizabeth's mistakes are appealing and easy to accept (93).

benevolence in Darcy to excite her sympathy, and she enjoys teasing him by her saucy refusal. Perhaps we should also remember that because she has already promised herself and her family never to accept a dance from him, her own pride is at stake; she must not find him pleasant because that discovery might weaken her own resolve to hold out against him.

It is important to note that Elizabeth does, on at least one occasion, prove she is able to take what Darcy says in the positive sense in which he means it. During a scene that occurs between the two requests to dance discussed above, Mrs. Bennet and her younger daughters call at Netherfield to visit the convalescent Jane. During their stay, the conversation turns back to Elizabeth's penchant for studying the character of others. The conversation proceeds:

“The country,” said Darcy, “can in general supply but few subjects of such a study. In a country neighbourhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society.”

[Elizabeth returned,] “But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever.”

“Yes, indeed,” cried Mrs. Bennet, offended by his manner of mentioning a country neighbourhood. “I assure you there is quite as much of *that* going on in the country as in town.”

Everybody was surprised; and Darcy, after looking at her for a moment, turned silently away. Mrs. Bennet, who fancied she had gained a complete victory over him, continued her triumph.

“I cannot see that London has any great advantage over the country for my part, except the shops and public places. The country is a vast deal pleasanter, is not it, Mr. Bingley?”

“When I am in the country,” he replied, “I never wish to leave it; and when I am in town it is pretty much the same. They have each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either.”

“Aye—that is because you have the right disposition. But that gentleman,” looking at Darcy, “seemed to think the country was nothing at all.”

“Indeed, Mama, you are mistaken,” said Elizabeth, blushing for her mother. “You quite mistook Mr. Darcy. He only meant that there were not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in town, which you must acknowledge to be true.” (47)

This moment is important because Darcy makes a statement which, like many of his remarks, is capable of both a negative and a positive interpretation. Brower observes that Darcy’s actions are so often capable of being understood in more than one light: “Mr. Darcy makes his inquiries (polite or impolite), asking with a smile (scornful or encouraging) questions that may be interpreted as pompous and condescending or gallant and well-disposed” (“Light” 67). In the above conversation, Elizabeth herself is the one to defend a positive sense of Darcy’s words. Of course, Mrs. Bennet’s misunderstanding of his claim about country neighborhoods says as much about her slow wit as it does about her prejudice against Darcy. Nonetheless, it is telling that when she fails to follow

the subtle distinctions of his statement, she falls back on the assumption that he must be offering an insult to country life, and by extension, to herself and her family. This assumption has little real basis in the context of the conversation, for while there may be an implied value judgment in his comparison of town and country life, there is still no overt indication that Darcy means the remark as much more than a statement of fact. Indeed, if anything, the remark is something of a veiled compliment to Elizabeth's bright mind, which deserves more scope than it has yet been afforded. Yet Mrs. Bennet relies on the poor opinion she has already formed of Darcy and turns his statement of fact into a negative judgment.

While Elizabeth may not be in the same danger of misunderstanding Darcy in the literal manner her mother has, she has shown herself just as apt to misunderstand his intentions. The fact that she can vindicate him now shows that she is able to look for the positive interpretation of his words when she chooses. Interestingly, she is more fair to him when worried about curbing her mother's real follies than when she is inventing false affronts for him. Thus, this moment gently foreshadows Elizabeth's eventual change of attitude towards Darcy. Only when she is humbled and made aware that she has treated him with foolish prejudice can she appreciate the real affection he has long tried to express, no matter how imperfectly. But she is not there yet, and so her defense of Darcy in this scene highlights the difference between her accustomed ungenerous attitude—so like her mother's simple-minded dislike—and the charity she must yet learn to extend to him.



With Wickham's arrival, Elizabeth's judgment of Darcy's character is most fully tested and her lack of candor towards him most fully revealed. When she meets Wickham, Elizabeth knows as little about him as she first did of Darcy, yet Wickham's easy manners and pleasing address recommend him to her just as quickly as Darcy's hauteur had disgusted her. Wickham's interest for Elizabeth is also heightened by the immediately evident fact that he and Darcy have some prior connection, one that has left them on no good terms. The mystery intrigues Elizabeth, whose thoughts on the first cold meeting of Wickham and Darcy we receive via colored narrative: "What could be the meaning of it?—It was impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to long to know" (81). With characteristic deft irony, Austen alerts the reader to Elizabeth's danger as she seeks to find the answer: it is "impossible to imagine"—that is, Elizabeth as yet has no information whatsoever about Wickham and Darcy's shared history. Thus she has no good evidence upon which to base a guess. Yet with both common human curiosity and a personal motive for discovering something more to dislike about Darcy, she is impatient to find out.

Elizabeth accepts Wickham's goodness and Darcy's wickedness both on slight evidence. Wickham tells his story and Elizabeth believes him because, as she puts it to herself, he is a young man "whose very countenance may vouch for [his] being amiable" (90). While we might expect her to say "truthful" rather than "amiable," real moral goodness does seem to be included in Austen's idea of amiability.<sup>11</sup> In turn, Elizabeth does not hesitate to believe that the worst must be true of Darcy. She accepts

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<sup>11</sup> See Tave for a discussion of the moral qualities implied by true amiability (116-31).

Wickham's account, exclaiming, "I had not thought Mr. Darcy so bad as this—though I have never liked him, I had not thought so very ill of him—I had supposed him to be despising his fellow-creatures in general, but did not suspect him of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this!" (90). She admits that the fault Wickham accuses Darcy of is much more serious than the general contempt she had previously attributed to him. But despite her admission that Wickham's charge is so grave, she does not take any trouble to confirm it before accepting Wickham's word as the truth and believing Darcy guilty of malice and inhumanity. It appears that her habit of thinking badly of Darcy has prepared her to accept this greater charge. We cannot be surprised that she fails to offer Darcy the benefit of the doubt now, since she has not been accustomed to offer it to him over relatively smaller matters. Of course, candor to Wickham does not require that she believe him, either. It requires only that she suspend judgment till sufficient evidence is available. And so far, compelling as Wickham's account is, it is only one side of the story.

In contrast to her sister, Jane models the candid response to Wickham's story. Elizabeth relates what Wickham has told her and

Jane listened with astonishment and concern;—she knew not how to believe that Mr. Darcy could be so unworthy of Mr. Bingley's regard; and yet, it was not in her nature to question the veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Wickham.—The possibility of his having really endured such unkindness, was enough to interest all her tender feelings; and nothing therefore remained to be done, but to think well of

them both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account of accident or mistake, whatever could not be otherwise explained.

“They have both,” said she, “been deceived, I dare say, in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side.” (95)

Elizabeth protests against this generous speech, teasingly begging Jane to clear those interested people, lest the two young women “be obliged to think ill of somebody” (95). Elizabeth is right to argue that in a situation like this, there is surely someone among all those involved who can be justly blamed. Candor does not, as we noted earlier, require that one refrain from all condemnation, but only from hasty and groundless condemnation. However, Jane, who shows what Michael Williams calls “a useful capacity for doubting her own judgment,” makes an argument containing a good deal of wisdom (71). She does well to remind Elizabeth that without knowing the more intimate details of Darcy and Wickham’s falling out, it is “impossible” to be sure who is at fault and who is innocent. Ultimately Jane will have to recognize Wickham is to blame in this instance, but as yet she does not possess sufficient facts to do so. Thus, in the meantime it is both fair and charitable that she consider both men with candor. The word *impossible* also recalls Elizabeth’s own observation, upon first meeting Wickham, that it was “impossible to imagine” what went wrong between him and Darcy. Although she has now

heard Wickham's side of the story, Elizabeth is not yet in a good position to judge all the facts of the case.

Of course, she is not entirely without information; however, it is important that she interpret what information she has with candor. Jane continues the conversation:

“It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can [Mr. Darcy's] most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? oh! no.”

“I can much more easily believe Mr. Bingley's being imposed on, than that Mr. Wickham should invent such a history of himself as he gave me last night; names, facts, every thing mentioned without ceremony.—If it be not so, let Mr. Darcy contradict it. Besides, there was truth in his looks.”

“It is difficult indeed—it is distressing.—One does not know what to think.”

“I beg your pardon;—one knows exactly what to think.” (96)

Jane relies not merely on her own judgment when reiterating the impossibility of Darcy's being so very wicked; she falls back on the judgment of Darcy's close friends, who are in a position to know whether or not he can truly be so vicious and inhumane as Wickham's story purports. A deference to others' opinion here is not simply diffidence on Jane's part, nor is it solely due to her personal admiration of Bingley; it is a prudent acknowledgment that others are better able to interpret the facts than she and Elizabeth are. Furthermore, Wickham's facts and name-dropping are not as unambiguous as Elizabeth would like to

think. She observes accurately that the details of Wickham's story are not patently invented, yet even the reality of the places and people named by him is not a guarantee that his version of events is accurate. As far as the honesty of his narrative goes, the best foundation for truth Elizabeth can provide is his "looks." Elizabeth may believe herself more penetrating in her judgment than either Bingley or Jane, who are both generous and unsuspecting of malice from others. But her readiness to see wickedness in Darcy is not necessarily a sign that she is more right than they. Here we should refer again to Blair's description of the candid man:

He is not hasty to judge, and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, *he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst*. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided; and, during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction which an action can bear. ("On Candour" 282-3, italics mine)

In this case, Elizabeth's judgment is entirely the opposite of candid. She possesses only half of the story—hardly "full evidence"—but is ready to argue that, for those who see clearly, there is no doubt regarding what to think. In contrast, Jane's reservation of judgment is both charitable, and in this instance, completely just to the blameless Darcy.

Morgan offers a thoughtful analysis of the difference between the sisters' attitudes:

"Jane's optimism has to do with her faith that there is much in life that is beyond what she knows and that certainty as to the minds and hearts of others is rare indeed. Elizabeth does not allow for her own ignorance and prefers the certainty of deciding the

worst” (“Intelligence” 65). Morgan draws our attention to the fact that what matters is not simply a lack of information on the Bennet girls’ part; equally important is how they act on that lack. Candor makes the best of what is unknown, whereas prejudice readily makes the worst.

Ironically, Elizabeth does prove herself aware of the dangers of a premature judgment, but naturally it is always easier to apply such moral principles to others than to oneself. As she pesters Darcy about his relationship to Wickham, she recalls a previous exchange:

I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its *being created*. . . . And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice? . . . It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first. (105)

Elizabeth speaks, blissfully unaware that in regards to Wickham, such warning is more needed by herself than by Darcy, for she has been neither cautious nor unprejudiced herself. Thankfully, Elizabeth is willing to change her opinion once she realizes her mistake.

Yet Elizabeth’s moment of self-knowledge must wait on Darcy’s *éclaircissement*, and in the meantime, no additional information offered by either Bingley or his sisters makes any difference to her thoughts. Elizabeth dismisses outright Miss Bingley’s warning about Wickham’s character as a “paltry attack,” mentally retorting, “I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the malice of Mr. Darcy”; the irony, of

course, is that Elizabeth addresses this internal speech “to herself” (106-7). Astonishingly, Elizabeth actually seems to believe that Darcy hates Wickham enough to commission Miss Bingley to deliver such a message in order to injure Wickham’s chances with Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth knows quite well that Darcy does not care for Miss Bingley, a fact which makes it unlikely that he would ask her to perform even such an unpleasant favor as this. Of course, Elizabeth will later discover that Darcy colludes with Miss Bingley to hide Jane’s presence in London from her brother—a collusion motivated by their mutual interest in Mr. Bingley’s affairs. Yet in the present case, it seems out of character and illogical for Darcy to take the trouble of collaborating with one person he dislikes merely to provoke another whom (as Elizabeth believes) he finds equally distasteful. To attribute such a petty motive to Darcy is to suggest he is more malicious than even his worst manners so far have warranted. That Elizabeth puts aside what she knows (from personal observation) to be true about Darcy indicates how much prejudice has taken the place of both reason and candor in her mind. Furthermore, while it is true that Miss Bingley enjoys disappointing Elizabeth by attacking Wickham, this fact does not necessarily make Miss Bingley’s information false. However, not even Mr. Bingley’s assurance of Darcy’s character holds any weight with Elizabeth. Jane admits that Bingley does not know the particulars of Wickham’s offense, but nonetheless “he will vouch for the good conduct, the probity and honour of his friend, and is perfectly convinced that Mr. Wickham has deserved much less attention from Mr. Darcy than he has received” (107). By reason of his longer and more intimate acquaintance, Bingley is much more qualified than either Jane or Elizabeth to speak to Darcy’s general character.

Thus his “perfect” conviction should carry more weight than Elizabeth’s own claim, “I am perfectly satisfied,” when she hears that because Bingley does not personally know Wickham, therefore he cannot be correct about Darcy’s good character (107). While such second-hand accounts are not actually enough to “perfectly” settle the matter, they are enough to reveal that the situation is complex and that further information is needed to resolve who is guilty and who blameless. Wickham, after all, has yet to produce anyone to vouch for his own good character; he is new to the militia and the best that can be known of him is that he is “universally liked”—a claim which makes little reference to actual moral character (101). As Blair expresses it, Elizabeth is still in the “period of suspense” before anything can be known for sure, and therefore candor dictates that she let charity and generosity guide her assessments of both men. However, despite the way that the question has become less—rather than more—clear, Elizabeth declares, “I shall venture still to think of both gentlemen as I did before” (108).

Elizabeth’s assessment of them both remains unchanged through the first half of the novel. Not even Wickham’s rather mercenary desertion of Elizabeth for a newly-made heiress changes her view of him as Darcy’s victim. And when she encounters Darcy again at Rosings, she continues to attribute unkind motives to his attention to her, as when she accuses him of meaning to frighten her as she plays piano (195). Although Charlotte more astutely suspects that Darcy may be in love, Elizabeth remains utterly blind to his pointed interest. When he implies concern at removing her too far from her family in Hertfordshire, she supposes him ignorant and insensitive to the feelings and situations of others (201), and she takes his expectation that she will soon stay at Rosings as a sign that

Colonel Fitzwilliam, not Darcy, has matrimonial intentions (204). Earlier, Elizabeth had laughingly remarked of Darcy, “Heaven forbid!—*That* would be the greatest misfortune of all!—To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate!—Do not wish me such an evil” (101). But as with many of her jests, there is truth behind the light words, and in this case, her actions prove her really determined—that is, willfully decided—not to find anything agreeable or lovable in Darcy. Her defect is “wilfully to misunderstand” others, Darcy says, perhaps understanding her better than she does herself (63).

What we have seen throughout this early part of the story is that Elizabeth’s interpretation of Darcy’s character has been a choice. And by no means has her interpretation been the only plausible one. With Darcy’s social behavior, aside from his first ill-mannered remark about her, there has always been the possibility of a positive meaning behind his words and actions. Though Wickham’s story gives reason to question Darcy’s probity, other good reasons for withholding final judgment about both men still remain. Elizabeth’s readiness to believe the worst about Darcy and her disregard for the reasonable cautions advanced by Jane reveal that her fault is a failure to practice candor in her dealings with Darcy. Such failure affects her judgment, but it is foremost an error, not of intelligence or reason, but of a heart and mind not yet fully mature in the Christian virtue of charity, which looks first for good, not evil, in others.



Elizabeth’s lack of candor represents the greatest obstacle, on her side, to a marriage with Darcy. Blair’s remarks about the importance of candor to all human relationships is particularly apt to Elizabeth’s situation:

Charitable and candid thoughts of men are the necessary introduction to all good-will and kindness. They form, if we may speak so, the only climate in which love can grow up and flourish. . . . What friendship or gratitude can you expect from him, who views all your conduct with distrustful eyes, and ascribes every benefit you confer to artifice and stratagem? (“On Candour” 285)

Elizabeth’s story offers a dramatized example of what happens when a relationship is begun without candor as a kind of mediator between the parties. Just as charitable thoughts introduce kindness in the heart, Elizabeth should have let charity guide her introduction to Darcy. For candor, Blair writes, “prevents those animosities from arising, which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or, by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen” (“On Candour” 286-7). But as we have already seen, the image of distrustful eyes looking for unkind stratagems in others serves as a fitting description of Elizabeth’s attitude towards Darcy, for she finds fault with even his most gallant actions. As Blair makes clear, before Elizabeth can love Darcy, she must necessarily begin by replacing her criticism and distrust with the charity of candor. Friendship and gratitude will follow, Blair suggests, and as Austen’s readers know, for Elizabeth, what follows friendship and gratitude is love.

Elizabeth’s education in candor is begun with Darcy’s letter, which teaches her that candor towards him was not the misguided or ignorant response she had supposed. When she first reads the letter, Elizabeth (not surprisingly) refuses to believe Darcy’s assertions. Yet as before, there are suggestions that her previous assessments of both

Darcy and Wickham have been guided more by her wishes than by impartial reason or candor. We are told that “[s]he wished to discredit [Darcy’s account] entirely,” and as she rereads the letter, for a brief time, “she flattered herself that her wishes did not err” (227). Yet finally she does resolve to reread the passages regarding Wickham and to evaluate them “with what she meant to be impartiality” (227). As a result, she reaches the following conclusion: “But every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent, as to render Mr. Darcy’s conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole” (227-8). We should remember that from the first, Jane had argued that there could be an explanation of events that would vindicate Darcy, if not both men. While Jane acknowledged that it was, at that time, still “impossible” to guess what the explanation might be, nonetheless, she wished to believe that such a vindication could be made. In this case, Jane’s candor was not merely wishful naivety, for as we saw, there were good reasons to believe in Darcy’s probity, while at the same time, the evidence against him was by no means conclusive. Elizabeth now recalls her own past insistence that vindication was impossible, yet for her, that impossibility owed more to prejudice than knowledge of the facts. Though at this point in the narrative, Elizabeth has not yet decided she believes Darcy’s account, this moment is important to her education in candor: she recognizes that she was wrong to dismiss a generous interpretation as truly impossible.

Elizabeth continues to ponder over the letter, slowly coming to recognize all the reasons for caution which she had earlier overlooked. In defense of Wickham’s character,

she finds “she could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him in the mess” (228). Further, she recognizes that Jane was right in trusting Bingley’s endorsement of Darcy, for “so gross a violation of every thing right could hardly have been concealed from the world; and . . . friendship between a person capable of it, and such an amiable man as Mr. Bingley, was incomprehensible” (230). Not only was Wickham’s disclosure of such information highly improper, but his very disclosure has proved false his claim of wishing to respect the late Mr. Darcy’s memory by forbearing to expose his son. Lastly, she must acknowledge that, little as Darcy’s manners have pleased her, “she had never, in the whole course of their acquaintance, an acquaintance which had latterly brought them much together, and given her a sort of intimacy with his ways, seen any thing that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust—anything that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits” (230). In revisiting and reinterpreting these facts, Elizabeth essentially rehearses the arguments in favor of a cautious and candid judgment. All this information was known to her prior to her receipt of the letter and was not sufficient to pass conclusive judgment on the matter. However, it does prove sufficient—as Elizabeth now recognizes—to justify generosity and suspension of condemnation, most especially regarding Darcy’s role in the affair.

In her moment of self-knowledge, Elizabeth addresses her prior failure of candor specifically. Not only does she lament that she has not followed Jane’s example of candid judgment, but her entire monologue enumerates the errors which candor opposes. Indeed,

a comparison of her speech with Blair's sermon reveals shared concerns. Elizabeth's defining (and oft-quoted) moment of insight and recognition runs thus:

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself.—Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

“How despicably have I acted!” she cried.—“I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.” (230)

With the clarity of hindsight and holding Darcy's letter in hand, Elizabeth readily sees where her judgment went astray. She opposes candor to vanity, distrust, folly, blindness, prepossession, ignorance, and lack of reason. In doing so, she has reversed her earlier opinion—implied during that early conversation with Jane—that candor hinders good judgment by inviting blindness to the “follies and nonsense of others” (16). Of course, Elizabeth was foremost criticizing what she saw as Jane's excessive candor in that prior passage. However, her attitude from then till now has suggested that she believes herself

more insightful than her sister because she is able to identify the follies Jane overlooks, thus obviating the need for candid suspension of censure as she proceeds directly to a judgment. Indeed, Elizabeth's confession that she has prided herself on her discernment likewise suggests that she has thought candor unnecessary when one's judgment is as keen as she has believed her own to be. She (and the reader) has learned that "Jane's candor, then, is not just the naive blindness Elizabeth would have [had] us believe it to be, any more than Elizabeth's lack of candor is true perception" (Morgan, "Intelligence" 65).

The task of judging well is much more difficult than Elizabeth once supposed. This lesson of her own fallibility is in accord with Blair's own cautions about the challenges of passing judgment on others:

Placed, then, in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, where our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men is so limited, and our judgments concerning them are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive, either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favourable side? especially when we consider that, as through imperfect information we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so through want of impartiality we are often tempted to decide wrong. . . . Were the mind altogether free from prepossession and bias, it might avail itself to more advantage of the scanty knowledge which it possesses. But this is so far from being the case, that on every side we are encumbered with prejudices, and warped

by passions, which exert their influence in nothing more than in leading us to think evil of others. (“On Candour” 290-1)

Blair repeats many of the key words that Elizabeth uses: *partiality/impartiality*, *prepossession*, *prejudice*. As he describes the obstacles to just judgment, it becomes clear that candor is the virtue that protects one from the dangers of both ignorance and bias. Had Elizabeth postponed her judgment of Darcy and extended the benefit of the doubt towards him, she would have avoided the pain and embarrassment caused by her harsh and inaccurate accusations regarding Darcy’s treatment of Wickham. We cannot imagine candor towards Darcy would have altered her answer to his proposal—Elizabeth does not “for a moment repent her refusal” (236)—and neither would we wish it; after all, the manner of his proposal has unequivocally proven that he, too, requires reform before he can become a worthy suitor. However, if Elizabeth had interpreted his words and deeds with candor from the very first, she would have less to regret now. For she does come to be sorry for how she has treated him, both during the proposal scene and prior to it: “[W]hen she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him, her anger was turned against herself. . . . In her own past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation and regret” (236).

As a result of his letter and her reflections upon it, Elizabeth changes her opinion of Darcy’s general character. Still, she cannot feel more than grateful respect: “His attachment excited gratitude, his general character respect; but she could not approve him; nor could she for a moment repent her refusal, or feel the slightest inclination ever to see him again” (236). The ultimate reversal of her feelings begins with her visit to

Pemberley. There, she learns about Darcy's good management of the grounds and his generous treatment of his tenants, his servants, and his sister.<sup>12</sup> All these particulars show him to be a man she could indeed "approve."

Not only does her visit to Pemberley provide Elizabeth with new information about Darcy's character; it also provides her with the opportunity to practice the candor which she had previously denied him. Darcy's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, speaks highly of her master, so highly that Elizabeth at first thinks "this was going pretty far" (275). Yet Elizabeth listens eagerly as Mrs. Reynolds continues:

"He is the best landlord, and the best master . . . that ever lived.

Not like the wild young men now-a-days, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw any thing of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men."

"In what an amiable light does this place him!" thought Elizabeth.

(276)

Mrs. Reynolds's insight that Darcy's pride may be attributed to his laconic personality confirms what Darcy had earlier said when explaining why he prefers to keep to himself rather than interact with strangers. His explanation was, as we noted in the preceding chapter, in part a request for understanding and generosity—that is, for the charity of candor. Mrs. Reynolds corroborates his account of himself, indicating that once again, the

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<sup>12</sup> For an examination of how Pemberley reveals Darcy's character, see Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, and Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*.

candid interpretation of Darcy's behavior was also fair and justified. Elizabeth's response to Mrs. Reynolds is likewise an expression of candor, for she acknowledges that there are multiple interpretations—different lights—by which Darcy's character may be understood. And she recognizes, as candor directs, that Darcy is capable of being understood as “amiable”—an adjective which, we recall, she formerly applied only (and erroneously) to Wickham.

Elizabeth's tour of the house culminates in a moment of candor as she contemplates Darcy's portrait. Just as discovering Pemberley has prepared her to encounter the picture of Darcy, so the picture will prepare her to meet the man himself. In the gallery

Elizabeth walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her—and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her. She stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery.

. . . Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression. (277)

This moment is an exercise in candor as Elizabeth softens and corrects her earlier harsh judgment. The Darcy in the portrait, we are told, looks true to life; but looking at him now, Elizabeth sees a better man than she ever did before. She also connects the smile of the benevolent and generous Darcy she now sees with the smile she remembers him having given her earlier.<sup>13</sup> As we saw, she had once interpreted that smile as mocking, but now she can read it more correctly as a sign of benevolence and generosity. Regarding a previous conversation at Netherfield when Darcy had said that Elizabeth's defect was to willfully misunderstand, Ray notes, "Darcy's smiling at her as he replies suggests the smile Elizabeth observes in his Pemberley portrait. . . . We may infer from her reaction to Darcy's smiling face in the portrait that his smile in the scene just discussed is congenial and gracious" (43). She even begins to forgive the hurtful things he said when he proposed to her. By focusing on his real love, rather than his unfortunate word choice, she practices the candid generosity of heart which, as Blair says, seeks for virtues amidst defects. Her suspicion and distrust are replaced by charity, which forms the climate in which love and friendship flourish. As Tanner observes, "Standing before the large and true image of the real Darcy, Elizabeth has in effect completed her journey. When she next meets the original, outside in the grounds, she is no longer in any doubt as to his true worth" (120).

Once Elizabeth approaches Darcy with charity and an understanding of her own faults, it is not so long before she discovers he is "exactly the man, who, in disposition

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<sup>13</sup> John Wiltshire examines the way that Jane Austen represents the action of memory in her characters (and engages her reader's memory of the text), especially in relation to how Mr. Darcy's recurring smiles ought to be interpreted (51-71).

and talents, would most suit her” (344). While some drama and conflict yet remain to the story, the obstacles to Elizabeth and Darcy’s love are now merely external, for the internal ones have been done away with. Thus far, I have taken it as given that a recognition of their faults produces a change in both hero and heroine. In the next chapter, I will consider their process of recognition more closely, paying special attention to the way that the virtues of justice and humility inform the characters’ understanding of themselves and one another.

### Chapter III

#### The Justice of Humility and Gratitude

“[P]ictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked,” Jane Austen wrote regarding the improbably flawless heroines she encountered in some novels (*Letters*, 23-25 March 1817). Her words should not be taken to mean she did not wish to see virtue on display in fiction, of course. She would hardly have written her novels the way she did if that had been her position. Rather, she cries out against portrayals of characters who are so idealized in their goodness that they hardly ring true to our experience of real human goodness, which, even in the best people, is always mixed somewhat with follies and sins. “Pictures of perfection” are not realistic, and perhaps just as bad, are not particularly interesting as the subject for a novelistic narrative. Elizabeth Bennet is certainly no such picture: her sharp tongue and playful impertinence are apt to lead her into serious trouble, but readers—even recognizing her faults—would not wish her different, at least not for the first half of the novel. An already perfected (or at least corrected) Elizabeth would have a far less entertaining story. And likely, her story would be a less instructive read, as well. *Pride and Prejudice* is a drama about good people who make mistakes, recognize them, and then take action to correct those errors. Naturally, Austen is therefore concerned with two virtues which are intrinsically related to self-knowledge and reform, the virtues of justice and humility.

I am certainly not the first to identify these virtues in the novel. Many readers have noted that humility is the corrective of pride, one of the story’s titular vices. Marilyn

Butler neatly summarizes what is a fairly well-accepted position among Austen's more conservative critics:

The subject of *Pride and Prejudice* is what the title indicates: the sin of pride, obnoxious to the Christian, which takes the form of a complacency about the self and a correspondingly lower opinion, or prejudice, about others. Darcy's pride is humbled mid-way through the novel, when he proposes to Elizabeth and to his astonishment is rejected. . . . Elizabeth's pride in her own fallible perceptions is her governing characteristic.

(206-7)

Stuart Tave further elaborates: "Elizabeth and Darcy change one another because each hurts the pride and self-importance of the other, humbling, humiliating, forcing a self-recognition that requires a giving up of part of the character for which each has always felt self-esteem and a taking on of a new character" (Tave 135). More recently, Thomas W. Stanford, III, has demonstrated that humility is prerequisite before Elizabeth and Darcy can accept the gift that is each other's love.

When it comes to justice, Sarah Emsley has probably done the most careful study of this virtue in *Pride and Prejudice*. "What is central to *Pride and Prejudice* is . . . justice, and how to get there," Emsley writes (89). She presents Austen's understanding of justice as largely Aristotelian, for Austen is concerned both with practicing the individual virtues at the right time and in the right way, as well as with giving others their due. In her book, Emsley acknowledges the connection between humility and education, ultimately finding humility a positive and desirable trait for Austen: "Humility in *Pride*

*and Prejudice* is not abject self-abasement, but a right sense of one's own fallibility" (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 84). Elizabeth is able to grow because she has the courage and humility to admit she was wrong. Yet while Emsley shows how humility is the result of acknowledging one's own faults, there is more to be said about the connection between justice and humility than Emsley covers. Thus in many ways, my chapter expands on assertions made by Emsley, but not fully explored in her readings of the text. For instance, while Emsley shows that Darcy's letter enables Elizabeth to grow by helping her to see herself better, Emsley does not closely examine the way that Elizabeth's sense of justice guides her through this process of reading and responding to the letter. Emsley also focuses her reading on Elizabeth's education; though she asserts that Darcy learns the same lessons as Elizabeth does, Emsley does not explore how Darcy's education via justice and humility mirrors Elizabeth's own.

My reading will show that Darcy and Elizabeth follow the very same educational process, whereby a strong sense of justice teaches them humility regarding themselves and their judgments. I will maintain that for Austen, the virtues of justice and humility cannot be disentangled from one another. Furthermore, the gratitude to each other which Elizabeth and Darcy develop is deeply linked to both justice and humility. Such is a fundamentally Christian understanding of justice, for humility is a fundamentally Christian virtue which has no real equivalent among purely classical accounts of the virtues.

This kind of reading is important for two reasons. First it counters the charge that Elizabeth's humiliation is actually an oppression of her judgment. Nina Auerbach has

argued that Darcy does not change or improve, but rather “Elizabeth’s selective memory serves her well . . . by erasing the fact that she had, and has, several good reasons for disliking Darcy; but she seems to need a sense of her own wrongness to justify the play of her mind” (54). Susan Fraiman likewise claims that “Darcy woos away not Elizabeth’s ‘prejudice,’ but her judgment entire. . . . [W]hile his representation of the world is taken to be objective, raised to the level of universality, hers (like that of women generally) is condemned for being subjective and dismissed as mere ‘prejudice’” (81-2). Such readings are founded on the idea that Austen shows an inherent inequality in the respective educations of these characters: Darcy is allowed to be right and Elizabeth forced to be wrong. However, I argue that, in fact, Darcy’s education parallels that of Elizabeth, as the two characters grow in both justice and humility. Austen is not portraying (or protesting against) the patriarchal domination of the female mind and will; there is no gender bias in the lessons the two protagonists must learn. Instead, Austen demonstrates that a mature relationship requires virtue and respect from both parties.

Second, focusing on justice gives us a better, less problematic way to talk about both the flaws and strengths in Darcy’s and Elizabeth’s characters. As a term, justice is perhaps more helpful than pride, which many critics understandably have relied on in their readings of Darcy and Elizabeth’s moral character. Of course, Austen herself invites us to use the term *pride*; the word appears not only in the title but is a key word throughout the book. We should not shy away from using it. But as with many key words in Austen’s novels, it denotes an idea not easily pinned down, one that is easily misdefined. Thus it is an oversimplification to assume, as some readers have done, that

moral terms such as *pride* have a single valence for Austen. For instance, in his book on Austen's language, Norman Page shows that C. S. Lewis and Arnold Kettle both find Austen's abstract terminology to be unambiguous (Page 60). Lewis finds "[t]he great abstract nouns of the classical English moralists are unblushingly and uncompromisingly used; . . . *generous candour, blamable distrust, just humiliation, vanity, folly, ignorance, reason* . . . All is hard, clear, definable" (363). Kettle (reading *Emma*) also declares that "the precision of [Austen's] standards emerges in her style. Each word—'elegance,' 'humour,' 'temper,' 'ease'—has a precise unambiguous meaning based on a social usage at once subtle and stable" (93). Likewise, Butler treats pride in *Pride and Prejudice* as if it were always necessarily bad. But Kathryn Davis has suggested that Austen is in the habit of shifting the meaning of traditional moral terminology to suit her unique aims.<sup>1</sup> Certainly pride is one of the chief vices which Elizabeth and Darcy must struggle with, yet in this novel pride is not categorically wrong in every instance. We are told at the end that Elizabeth is proud of Darcy's self-control, and Austen gives us no reason to question that in this case, her heroine's pride is good. Elizabeth also defends Darcy to her father by claiming, "Indeed he has no improper pride" (417). Darcy's proper pride is evident in the way that he holds himself to high standards: he has a sense of what is expected of himself, first as a moral being, and second, as a man of wealth and rank. His understanding of himself and of his relationship to others requires some revision, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Davis writes that in *Persuasion* Austen "[chooses] to favor a new sense of the word 'prudence': in previous novels, 'prudence' had been synonymous with practical wisdom, but in *Persuasion*, the word is used almost exclusively to refer to circumspection or cunning. . . . In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen does something similar with the two words comprising the novel's title. Such shifts in diction create inroads into the novels: our sensitivity to shades of meaning is heightened, and we are required to devote keener attention to Austen's lexicon" (229)

proper pride that Elizabeth sees in him is a reflection of the fact that he strives to be worthy.

Despite Austen's polyvalent usage of *pride*, relying solely on this term to describe what is positive in Darcy's (and Elizabeth's) character can tempt other misreadings. For instance, while rightfully arguing that not all pride is wrong in the novel, Anne Ruderman is too hasty to categorize most of Darcy's worthy actions as instances of a good kind of pride. As Ruderman sees it, Elizabeth must discover that Darcy's pride has been right all along, for it is a virtue that "that leads him to action *for others* simply because it befits himself" (108). Ruderman's focus on pride leads her to overlook or misunderstand several key moments when humility is on display, as I shall show. While Ruderman acknowledges the place of humility in Austen's works, she dismisses it as an instrumental rather than intrinsic good: "Love is a humbling experience for all her heroes and heroines, one that shows them their neediness. But such humility is presented as more necessary than praiseworthy" (99). But if Austen is a Christian author (and Ruderman concurs that she is), such would seem an odd position for her to take on what is a quintessentially Christian virtue. True, humility is often painful and difficult to practice, but I think we should be wary of a reading that suggests that humility ought not be praised.

Ruderman is not wrong to examine and account for the good kind of "proper pride" that Elizabeth and Darcy both display. Where her reading goes astray is in relying too much on the term pride, to the point that she overlooks the discussion of other very important virtues. I suggest that a better way to talk about the high standards held by the

protagonists is to focus on the virtue of justice. Justice not only guides Elizabeth and Darcy to chose morally befitting actions, but the love of justice also teaches them humility in the face of their own shortcomings. Whereas Ruderman's emphasis on pride as the central virtue in the novel makes it possible to discuss *Pride and Prejudice* without making more than a cursory mention of humility, the examination of justice in the novel necessarily involves a discussion of humility, gratitude, and even grace. Our vista of virtues in the novel may be narrowed by a focus on pride, but widened by focusing on justice.



How would Jane Austen have understood the virtue of justice? Once again, the ubiquitous *Elegant Extracts* furnishes us with a very helpful description of this virtue. In an entry entitled "Justice, its Nature and real Import defined," Oliver Goldsmith defines justice as

that virtue which impels us to give to every person what is his due. In this extended sense of the word, it comprehends the practice of every virtue which reason prescribes, or society should expect. Our duty to our Maker, to each other, and to ourselves, are fully answered, if we give them what we owe them. Thus justice, properly speaking, is the only virtue, and all the rest have their origin in it. (874)

Such is a truly Aristotelian account of justice, both in the idea that justice is giving what is owed and even more so in the claim that justice enables one to practice the other virtues appropriately. In the same way that Aristotle argues that each virtue must be

practiced in the right way, at the right time, with the right people in order truly to be a virtue (rather than a vicious extreme), so Goldsmith writes:

The qualities of candour, fortitude, charity, and generosity, for instance, are not in their own nature virtues; and, if ever they deserve the title, it is owing only to justice, which impels and directs them. Without such a moderator, candour might become indiscretion, fortitude obstinacy, charity imprudence, and generosity mistaken profusion. (874)

Jane Austen is certainly interested in this broad conception of justice as that principle which guides all aspects of one's behavior. For instance, Emsley demonstrates how, in the first proposal scene, Elizabeth and Darcy must struggle to find the just (that is, appropriate) balance between virtues of amiability and truthfulness. Both Gilbert Ryle and Amanda Marie Kubic suggest that Austen is concerned with the excesses and deficiencies of pride, and that the proper pride which both hero and heroine must learn is, as Kubic puts it, "that which Aristotle would call an 'intermediate,' and falls somewhere between the extremes of vanity and shame or self-effacement." Austen's characters use the term *justice* mainly in the more limited sense of giving to others what is their due, but she certainly appears to have the broader sense of justice in mind, as well.

In addition to this classical definition of justice, Austen would also have been working from a Biblical definition of this virtue. This Christian definition is likewise contained in *Elegant Extracts*, in a section on social duties and under the heading for "Justice."<sup>2</sup> It reads, "In thy dealings with men be impartial and just; and do unto them as

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<sup>2</sup> The passage is extracted from *The Economy of Human Life*, a moral text supposedly translated from an anonymous Indian manuscript, but in reality written by Robert Dodsley (1703-1764).

thou wouldst they should do unto thee” (Dodsley 365). This passage is nearly a direct quotation from Mathew 7:12, which reads in full, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Even in the Gospel context, this Golden Rule is linked to justice, for in this one rule, Christ summarizes all the Jewish laws. It is hardly coincidence that later Christian moralists would tie this verse to justice, that virtue which is intrinsically related to law itself. The passage in *Elegant Extracts* is not alone in using the Gospel verse to define justice. Samuel Johnson, too, relies to the verse as his sole definition of justice in his essay discussing this virtue in *Rambler* 81.<sup>3</sup> Johnson writes, “The measure of justice prescribed to us, in our transactions with others, is remarkably clear and comprehensive: ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them.’ A law by which every claim of right may be immediately adjusted, as far as the private conscience requires to be informed” (61). This Gospel definition of justice is germane to the command to charity given by Christ, to love one’s neighbor as himself. This similarity should not come as a surprise, for as we have already seen with politeness and candor, all virtues proper to a Christian are contained in charity.

Because it is concerned with how we ought to respond to others based on their desert, justice is a virtue largely concerned with one’s judgment. For one to act justly, she must first understand (so far as possible) the objective truth of another person’s character and actions before she can know what kind of response—admiration, censure, trust, caution—is merited. For the most part the difficulty is not necessarily to understand the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Henry Austen’s “Biographical Notice,” Jane Austen’s “favorite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse (7).

concept of justice, for in the abstract, this virtue is simple enough to grasp; but justice can be very challenging to apply in particular circumstances. Thus it is not surprising that Austen's treatment of justice is intricately linked to the problem of judgment. For the most part, Elizabeth and Darcy both possess good principles: they desire uprightness in themselves and others, and they detest wickedness and deceit. In other words, they both grasp the main tenet of natural law, which is (as Thomas Aquinas formulated it) that the good is to be pursued and evil shunned.<sup>4</sup> For Elizabeth, there is never a question that she does not know what is due to good or to wicked behavior; for her, the difficulty primarily lies in discerning which is which when her feelings and prejudices are involved. Darcy's case is slightly different. He seems to have a somewhat distorted view of what is due to himself and to Elizabeth. Yet his fault is not that he does not know what goodness truly deserves, either; his problem is rather that he has a self-centered, over-inflated view of his own goodness and needs to learn to see himself with greater humility before he judges others.

Indeed, it is with the individual's need for self-knowledge—which comes of judging the self justly—that Austen's idea of justice shows itself to be uniquely Christian. I do not mean to suggest that a secular understanding of virtue and justice has no place for self-reflection. In Plato's *Dialogues*, Socrates often returns to the temple inscription of the Delphic Oracle, "Know thyself," an injunction that, among other things, suggests the

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as Gene Koppel points out, Aristotle's natural law morality has a long tradition of incorporation in Christian thought, from Aquinas to Richard Hooker (3); thus we need not posit, as Ryle has done, that Austen's Aristotelianism is purely secular in origin or practice.

wise man understands his own limitations and faults.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Aristotle's Great-souled Man would surely approve of Darcy's saying, "[I]t has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule" (63). Such a study, of course, can only be successful if one seeks out the weaknesses in himself. However, Christian self-knowledge is distinct from secular philosophical self-knowledge in that it improves the self, not by promising that one can use his knowledge to perfect himself, but by producing humility (that most characteristically Christian virtue) in response to one's acknowledged failings. "How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!" Elizabeth cries in her moment of self-knowledge (230). Yet humiliation and humility is not a sort of masochistic end point of character growth. Rather, humility, in turn, enables one to approach others with greater justice, as well as with gratitude and love.



Austen shows that truly practicing justice entails a number of things. For example, if Elizabeth wishes to offer what really is due to others as well as to herself—rather than simply acting on her own passions, prejudices, or ignorance—she must be willing to recognize the instances when she has made mistakes and fallen short of justice. That is, often one must first recognize that she has been unjust before she can correct her behavior to be more just. In such cases, the restoration of justice is twofold in that it requires a change of attitude towards oneself and also towards others. When Elizabeth knows she has been wrong, her new attitude towards herself will be humility; thus she

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<sup>5</sup> According to Benjamin Jowett's index to the *Dialogues of Plato*, references to the Delphic inscription appear in the following dialogues: *Charmides* 164D; *Protagoras* 343B; *Phaedrus* 229E; *Philebus* 48C; *Laws* II.923A; and *I Alcibiades* 124A, 129A, 132C (Jowett 451).

restores justice with regards to herself. Knowing herself to be wrong, of course, necessitates acknowledging that others (and most especially Darcy) have been right; with this admission, she begins to restore justice towards others.

The first thing to note is that Darcy and Elizabeth both care about justice more than they care about being clever or proving themselves “right.” That is, they care about knowing and doing what is actually right, rather than justifying themselves by any means, regardless of facts, as is often the case with those of whom we say, “So-and-so always needs to be right.” Early in the novel, Elizabeth declares, “I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good” (62). While events prove that she can, at times, be carried away by her strong feelings and quick wit to ridicule those who do not deserve it, her expressed respect for goodness is genuine; she knows what is due to goodness, whether or not she always succeeds in acting by her principles in every instance. Darcy—who reads Elizabeth’s character very well, for the most part—recognizes Elizabeth’s good principles and clearly admires her for them. Even in his bitter disappointment at her refusal of his suit, he trusts she cares enough about what is right and true to seriously consider his letter. In his opening paragraph, he explains, “[T]he effort which the formation, and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read. You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but I demand it of your justice” (218). Darcy’s own principles are such that he cannot tolerate Elizabeth’s misunderstanding of his character and actions, and he believes that her own sense of justice will impel her to hear him out despite her dislike. While it is difficult for both of

them to set aside personal injuries and long-held assumptions, Elizabeth and Darcy do possess, from the beginning, a desire to think and act justly which will ultimately overcome the obstacles to seeing themselves and the world clearly.

Elizabeth's self discovery mid-novel very clearly illustrates how justice and humility work together. Her first discovery is a purely factual one: she mistook the truth about Wickham and Darcy's dealings with one another. Reading and reflecting upon Darcy's letter convinces her that his account of Wickham's career is both plausible and trustworthy. Consequently, Darcy is a better person than Elizabeth has previously credited him to be. But she does not limit her reflections to the facts of this history; she turns from this external data to consider her own internal disposition. Comparing the truth of the matter to her past thoughts and behavior, "[s]he grew absolutely ashamed of herself.—Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (230). This is indeed a "humiliating discovery" to make about oneself. However, the fact that she can admit the folly of her actions is a hopeful sign, for it proves she is not experiencing a passive, unproductive humiliation that merely depresses her spirits and oppresses her judgment, as Fraiman and others have interpreted this moment. According to such readings, Austen is complicit with—or at least powerless to resist—a patriarchal system which dominates women's thought and self-realization, and Elizabeth is therefore an unsuccessful feminist heroine. However, to read the scene thus is to overlook the way that the recognition of her error actually frees Elizabeth's judgment, both towards herself and to Darcy. As Emsley aptly responds to Fraiman's reading, "If Elizabeth were to attempt to maintain her self-esteem by persisting in her

initial impression of the letter, that would indicate a dark and downward vector” (99). By naming her faults, Elizabeth is in fact practicing two virtues. Her confession shows active, thoughtful humility, for in declaring this a most “just humiliation,” she submits herself to this discovery as something ultimately right and good for her. Furthermore, by choosing to view her experience thus, she has reestablished justice towards herself: her temporary sense of shame is the result of having finally assigned the proper merit to her past actions.

These humbling discoveries about herself next enable Elizabeth to view Darcy with greater justice. She begins by admitting that if she believes Darcy’s claims about Wickham, it is only just that she also believe what he says about Jane: “How could she deny that credit to his assertions, in one instance, which she had been obliged to give in the other?” (231). The language of obligation conveys both Elizabeth’s initial reluctance to believe Darcy, as well as her sense of justice: she owes credence to Darcy, thanks to the information his letter has brought to light. Elizabeth recalls “what Charlotte’s opinion [of Jane’s reserved affection] had always been.—Neither could she deny the justice of his description of Jane” (231). In such a case as this, it would certainly be more gratifying to Elizabeth’s feelings of loyalty to Jane and disgust with Darcy to dismiss his claim that Jane’s love was not evident. Yet the same sense of justice that makes Elizabeth face her own mistakes also drives her to acknowledge that Darcy’s assessment of Jane is reasonable and in keeping with what others have thought. Elizabeth reaches a similar conclusion about another of Darcy’s unpleasant claims: “When she came to that part of the letter, in which her family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying, yet merited

reproach, her sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial” (231). The repetition of the words *justice* and *merit* drives home the fact that Elizabeth wants to see the truth, no matter how uncomfortable the discovery is. Yet that mortification, while painful, is salutary, for it places her in a position to see Darcy more clearly.

Elizabeth’s initial revisions to her judgment of Darcy regard merely the justice of his own judgments. Yet soon enough, her feelings toward him as a person begin to change as well. After she has had several days to study both his letter and her own past behavior, Elizabeth’s thoughts are softened towards him:

When she remembered the style of his address, she was still full of indignation; but when she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him, her anger was turned against herself; and his disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. His attachment excited gratitude, his general character respect; but she could not approve him; nor could she for a moment repent her refusal, or feel the slightest inclination ever to see him again. (235-6)

We will recall that when Darcy originally proposed to her, Elizabeth “was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger” (211). Though later in that scene, she tells him she is “sorry to have occasioned pain to any one,” her words sound like a general apology, not a personal one (212). Then, she was certainly too angry and offended to feel much personal sympathy for Darcy. However, now, in light of her own harsh and undeserved words, she

recovers her compassion for him. Equally important, she is finally able truly to feel the gratitude which she had earlier acknowledged as the just response to an offer of marriage: “It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could *feel* gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot” (212). Back then, her lack of gratitude had been doubly a response to Darcy’s inconsiderate manner, as well as to his personal character as she then perceived it. Now that she understands his character better, the latter of her objections is lessened, and she is now able to value the fact that Darcy asked her to marry him. Right now, this is mainly gratitude for a compliment paid by a man of high social standing and good “general character.” Her esteem for him does not yet go beyond the general, for his particular behavior during his proposal was not admirable, and thus Elizabeth can remain content imagining she may never meet him again.

In her second to last discussion of Darcy before her arrival at Pemberley, Elizabeth even goes so far as to declare him a good man. She teases her sister’s generous sympathy for Darcy’s disappointment, claiming Jane’s “ample justice” to Darcy sets her own heart at ease, but even Elizabeth’s lighthearted manner should not distract us from her real admission that Darcy deserves kindness from them (249). Contrasting Darcy and Wickham, Elizabeth notes to Jane:

“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.”

“I never thought Mr. Darcy so deficient in the *appearance* of it as you used to.”

“And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one’s genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind.” (250)

The conversation builds on Elizabeth’s previous discoveries about herself. She admits that appearance is not the same as actual goodness, an implicit confession that her own judgment (which she once so prided herself on) was faulty because it did not see past appearances. Jane’s gentle observation that Elizabeth may never have given Darcy enough credit for goodness confirms Elizabeth’s earlier recognition that she should have followed her sister’s example of candor. By admitting that her original dislike was “without any reason,” Elizabeth agrees that she would have done better to see goodness in Mr. Darcy. And her confession that she wished to feel “uncommonly clever” by showing off her genius is the product of her earlier humbling discovery that vanity and prejudice, not justice, had informed her earlier judgments. It is appropriate that Elizabeth’s new opinion of Darcy is framed in terms of her own mistakes, for her self-knowledge invalidates her first judgment of Darcy and allows her to reevaluate him. Her new-found humility is also evidenced in this scene by the fact that Elizabeth admits her mistakes to Jane. It is one thing to name her faults to herself, but telling them, even in privacy, to her sister further proves that Elizabeth values justice in thought and deed more than she values saving her pride.

While we do not see Darcy’s arrival at self-knowledge firsthand, it is evident his discoveries mirror Elizabeth’s. As in her case, the easiest recognitions for him to make are the purely factual ones. In his letter, Darcy admits to a possible mistake in his

assessment of Jane: “If *you* have not been mistaken here, *I* must have been in an error. Your superior knowledge of your sister must make the latter probable.—If it be so, if I have been misled by such error, to inflict pain on her, your resentment has not been unreasonable” (219-20). He cannot argue with the fact that, as Jane’s sister, Elizabeth must certainly understand Jane’s feelings better than he can. His use of the word *unreasonable* is significant. While he indicates that he now understands why Elizabeth was angry, he does not yet call her resentment just. He explains, “I did not believe [Jane] to be indifferent because I wished it;—I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason” (220). He sees nothing to blame in his reasons for believing Jane unattached to Mr. Bingley; instead, the fact (as he believes) that he acted out of “impartial conviction” ought to justify him in Elizabeth’s eyes. Indeed, he concludes by saying, “On this subject I have nothing more to say, no other apology to offer. . . . [T]hough the motives which governed me may to you very naturally appear insufficient, I have not yet learnt to condemn them” (222). As an apology, the letter is not very satisfactory, for he spends more time justifying himself than truly apologizing for having done any real wrong to Elizabeth or anyone else. Indeed, the only deed which he comes close to admitting as a wrong is his concealment of Jane’s presence in London. While Darcy’s lack of contrition shows that his pride is yet to be overcome, the letter hints that Darcy is moving in the right direction. It is important that he realize he has been objectively wrong about Jane’s feelings. Elizabeth’s correction here has proven to Darcy that he is not infallible. Furthermore, he understands that Elizabeth is reasonably upset with his actions towards Bingley and Jane. While he has not yet recognized that his behavior and attitudes

towards Elizabeth were wrong, this discovery of his fallibility is the beginning of self-knowledge. Elizabeth had to realize that if she believed Darcy on one point, it was only fair that she believe him on another. Darcy, we may suppose, reaches a similar conclusion: if it is reasonable for Elizabeth to be angry with Darcy's interference with Bingley and Jane, her anger at his manner towards her may be equally reasonable.

Though Austen artfully (if perhaps a little disappointingly) leaves the precise moment of Darcy's self-knowledge up to her reader's imagination, she leaves no doubt that he, too, experiences a painful humiliation. Darcy reveals:

The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: 'had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.' Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me;—though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice. (408)

From his words, we gather that Darcy was troubled by Elizabeth's accusation of ungentlemanly behavior even before he understood she was right to say what she did. Surely he first thought she was doing an injustice to him, no less than when she accused him of cruelty to Wickham. However, he cares enough about the truth that he finally does recognize that her accusations were merited. "I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me," he says of his letter (409). Darcy further explains to Elizabeth, "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” (407-8). Darcy’s disgust with himself matches the way that Elizabeth felt “absolutely ashamed” when she understood how far she had gone wrong. Other key words in Darcy’s statement are *deserve* and *merit*; these words indicate Darcy’s concern for justice. His claim that Elizabeth’s reproof and his consequent abhorrence are “merited” is equivalent to Elizabeth’s recognition that she has experienced a “just humiliation.” *Unpardonable* is also an important term. Here, Darcy does not mean that his deeds are beyond the scope of forgiveness, either human or divine. If Darcy and Elizabeth inhabit a Christian world, as I claim they do, then grace and forgiveness are foundational to Austen’s presentation of human nature. Indeed, we know from elsewhere that Darcy does hope Elizabeth will choose to forgive him when she sees he has listened to what she said. What Darcy means now by *unpardonable* is that there is no justification for his behavior. This attitude is, of course, a distinct change from the one he expressed in the letter. When he wrote to Elizabeth, not only did he fail to acknowledge anything wrong in his manners, but he tried to justify, rather than apologize for, his actions with regards to Jane and Bingley.

Thus, equally important as his admission of having wronged Elizabeth is his similar admission to Bingley. Darcy reveals to Elizabeth: “I made a confession to [Bingley], which I believe I ought to have made long ago. I told him of all that had occurred to make my former interference in his affairs, absurd and impertinent” (411). Darcy can keep the truth of his mistakes from others no more than Elizabeth can, when

those mistakes have been the cause of injury. For Darcy, the word *confession* is important, for he repeats it:

I was obliged to confess one thing, which for a time, and not *unjustly*, offended him. I could not allow myself to conceal that your sister had been in town three months last winter, that I had known it, and purposely kept it from him. He was angry. But his anger, I am persuaded, lasted no longer than he remained in any doubt of your sister's sentiments. He has heartily forgiven me now. (412, italics mine)

In this passage, Darcy's desire for justice is clearly revealed to be stronger than his pride. He says he "could not allow" himself to hide his deception. A man with less desire for justice and with less humility might have reasoned that since things have ended well and his interference did not ultimately prevent Bingley's match, there is no need to reveal such unpleasant details. Neither does the fact that Bingley might conceivably learn of Darcy's actions from Elizabeth lessen the significance of Darcy's confession. If Darcy were concerned with preserving his pride before others, he need not have told Elizabeth that he had interfered between Jane and Bingley. Yet he did tell her then because he valued the truth too much to hide facts which he knew would upset her. His confession to Bingley now is proof of the way that his desire for justice has matured through his discovery of humility.

Darcy's estimation of Elizabeth's worth does not undergo a dramatic change as we saw happen with Elizabeth's judgment of Darcy. From almost the beginning, Darcy has valued her as a good person; his discovery is not that Elizabeth is more worthy of

love than he had believed, but rather that he himself has not behaved worthily of her. Such a discovery necessarily is a humbling one, for it goes hand in hand with the recognition of what his behavior really did deserve. Ultimately, Darcy's challenge is the same as Elizabeth's—to reestablish justice, both to himself and to others. In describing what she has done for him, Darcy says, "By you, I was properly humbled. . . . You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (410). His words encapsulate the problem and its resolution. He did not act in the way due to a good woman, hence he treated her unjustly. Furthermore, in his ignorance, he was unaware of how very inappropriate his behavior was, and therefore he also had an unjust understanding of himself. The beauty of humility is that it sets right both of these faults. As we saw in Elizabeth's case, humility is the just response to the discovery that one has been in error and done wrong to others. Furthermore, in humility, Darcy has discovered the appropriate—that is, just—attitude with which one ought to approach the worthy beloved, and so he has restored justice towards Elizabeth.



Thus far, we have considered how justice, practiced towards the self and others, leads to a sense of humility as it necessitates that one recognize his own faults. However, the restoration of justice we have discussed—the recognition that one was wrong and others were right—does not yet heal the human relationship which has been damaged by the injustice that Darcy and Elizabeth have done one another. Something more is needed beyond the mere recognition of the truth in order for hero and heroine to be reconciled. The characters must communicate their changed attitudes to one another.

Communication, of course, is necessarily an exchange: one party speaks through words or actions, the other listens and then responds with his or her own words and actions. Justice, too, may be understood as a type of exchange, since the just person gives the response (whether in deeds or esteem) which is owed to another. Conversely, the unjust person gives a response which is not owed.

If we think of human interactions as a series of exchanges—of words and deeds given and received—it becomes natural to see that the concept of gratitude describes a certain type of this exchange of giving and owing between individuals. What I intend to show is that not only is gratitude a form of justice, but it is a type that can only be practiced in humility.

As I enter on this topic, I must express my own gratitude to a number of authors who have laid the foundation for my own ideas. Thomas W. Stanford, III, examines Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship in terms of gift giving. He observes that because they struggle with pride, Darcy and Elizabeth are initially prevented from giving and receiving the gift of self that is love: Darcy's first offer of marriage is not freely made, and Elizabeth's wounded pride does not allow her to receive what he offers. Humility, Stanford recognizes, is key to properly receiving a gift: "Elizabeth's humbling is . . . inextricably bound up with the development of gratitude as the appropriate response to the gift of Darcy's love" (160). What Stanford does not explore, however, is the connection between justice and gratitude. Building on Stanford's argument, I will show that gratitude is an expression of justice. Stanford's reading, in turn, makes good use of

Kenneth L. Schmitz's discussion of gifts, and so it is by recourse to these two writers that I frame this next stage of my argument.

A primary quality of a gift, Schmitz explains, is that it be given freely and just as freely received. When something is given with the understanding (whether explicit or implied) that something will be offered in return, the exchange is not a giving of gifts, but a commercial transaction. However, although the true gift must be one for which the recipient does not offer compensation, it is not therefore true that no response is needed from the recipient. Schmitz writes:

Despite the absolute gratuity inherent in the gift as endowment, reciprocity is appropriate to the gift. A gift is meant to be reciprocated. The fundamental reciprocity called for, however, is not the return of another gift. It is rather the completion of the gift being given. Now, for its completion a gift must not only be offered; it must also be received. So that reception is the original reciprocity intended in the very meaning and reality of the gift. (47)

A gift which is offered but refused is only a partial gift, for it does not fulfill the giver's intention that it be accepted and enjoyed. The attitude with which a free gift is freely received is gratitude—not a surprising conclusion given, as Schmitz notes, the etymological kinship between the English *gratuitous* and *gratitude* (48). In other words, “[e]ndowment, then, does not alone realize the gift; gratitude is also called for” (Schmitz 48). A completed gift is one that has been received with the attitude of thankful appreciation.

If we wished to state this relationship in terms of justice, we can say that gratitude is what is owed in response to a gift. Certainly this is a different type of obligation than if I were to say “I owe my grocer fifty dollars for this week’s groceries” or “I owe the city a fine for a parking violation.” In the first example, the relationship being described between me and my grocer is a commercial one.<sup>6</sup> In the second example, the relationship is one of a political and social contract, whereby as a resident of a community, I have implicitly agreed to abide by the laws of that community. The common factor in both such relationships is the contract: a “mutual agreement” between parties which establishes terms by which certain things shall be done or provided. However, to say one owes gratitude to another for a gift is to describe a different sort of relationship between parties. Since the gift (if it is truly a gift) is given without expectation of repayment, the relationship it implies is one of friendship or love, as opposed to commerce or contract.

Gratitude is the response which respects and acknowledges the free nature of the gift, and prevents it from turning into a transaction (which requires a different kind of justice). First of all, gratitude itself cannot be considered compensatory in the way that my grocery bill or parking fine are compensatory in the examples above. For instance, while someone may give a “gift” with the expectation of being repaid by the actions which the recipient’s gratitude will produce, in such a case, the giver is not truly interested in gratitude *per se*, but in producing certain desirable actions from a sense of obligation. In this example, the giver is not truly offering a gift, but rather attempting a type of manipulation. If Darcy had told Elizabeth what he had done for Lydia in order

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<sup>6</sup> Stanford also makes this point about commercial transactions (153-4).

that Elizabeth would feel obligated to accept him out of recompense, he would be engaging in such manipulative, false gift giving (Stanford 162). Of course, such is not the case, as Stanford explains: “[Darcy] does not intend that she know his actions, so he performed them neither to pay her back, nor with the expectation that she would then change her mind about him. Thus, Darcy does not take advantage of Elizabeth’s own gratitude for the aid he provides her family. Indeed, his action was in a sense the freest and most loving of gifts, an anonymous one” (161).

This is not to say that the giving of a gift cannot, or should not, affect a change in the relationship between both parties. Indeed, most gifts are given with just such an intention. Stanford argues:

[A]uthentic gift giving is a free act by the giver, and is intended not to bind the receiver, but rather is a sign of a relationship that the giver hopes to establish, to confirm, to substantiate, and/or to nourish with the receiver. . . . [This change occurs] through the response of gratitude. Perhaps here it is worth noting the obvious: the relationship signified by the gift dynamic is, at root, a relationship of *caritas*, of other-centeredness, of love. (155).

The act of giving and receiving a gift, even though it places no contractual obligation between the parties, necessarily places them in relationship with one another. It is the love that is communicated by the gift that alters how the two parties see one another. Darcy’s gift of aid to Lydia, done without expectation of repayment from Elizabeth or her family, communicates his love for Elizabeth and his wish of maintaining, and indeed strengthening, his relationship to her. If Elizabeth chooses to recognize Darcy’s gift, she

thereby affirms all the significance it implies. Furthermore, gratitude is the only response on Elizabeth's part that preserves the gratuitous nature of the gift. For Elizabeth to attempt to repay Darcy, either by applying to her father and uncle for money or by agreeing to marry Darcy from a sense of duty and obligation, would be to alter the nature of the relationship between herself and Darcy from one of love to a more or less commercial contract. By feeling and expressing gratitude, however, Elizabeth may still give Darcy what is owed to his generosity without altering his gift into a transaction. In other words, gratitude preserves justice to the giver while respecting and acknowledging the special nature of the gift-giving relationship.

Gratitude, moreover, is distinct from other types of justice in that it can only be offered from a position of humility. Not all instances of justice are inherently humbling. For instance, we have considered commercial transactions, whereby goods and services are exchanged, as an example of justice, since each party renders to the other what they have agreed to owe one another. If the transaction has been entered into freely by both parties, neither the buyer nor the seller emerges from the exchange either superior or disadvantaged in regards to one another. As long as debts are paid on both sides, each party has fulfilled his obligation to the other. However, when one receives a gift as a gift, he accepts that he will not try to repay the giver; thus, the recipient's gratitude is, in a sense, an acknowledgement that he is in debt to the giver. Such a position understandably can involve the receiver in a certain amount of embarrassment or even pain. When Elizabeth discovers how much Darcy has done to forward Lydia's marriage, she reflects, "It was painful, exceedingly painful, to know that they were under obligations to a person

who could never receive a return” (361). It is humbling to recognize that her family has been given a gift which they cannot repay, especially when the secrecy of the gift prevents the rest of her family from doing Darcy the justice of gratitude. Ruderman notes that “[Elizabeth] as well as Mr. Darcy has a natural pride that makes it painful to receive benefits beyond what can be repaid” (113). Yet in the case of receiving a true gift, such “natural pride” is not (as Ruderman would have it) a positive quality. Here it is clear that humility is better than pride: Elizabeth’s pride, while understandable, threatens to make her unable to receive a gift and enter into a relationship with Darcy. Thomas W. Stanford, III elaborates on the connection between gratitude and humility:

In pride, one rejects the gift or seeks to cancel it out, release the giver, and dissolve the relationship. On the other hand, receiving a gift with gratitude makes one, [Mary] Stanford argues, ‘in a certain way, freely indebted to the giver, willingly obliged to him, and inextricably involved with him.’ Plainly, this position demands humility; it is only a humble person who is willing to accept something from a giver and not feel obligated to return a gift from pride. (156)<sup>7</sup>

Simply put, only by being humble can Elizabeth truly receive the gift and offer gratitude in return.

Because it requires humility, the act of receiving a gift with gratitude is an essentially Christian one. In illustration of this point, let us consider a passage from

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<sup>7</sup> In this passage, Thomas W. Stanford, III cites an article by Mary Stanford, “The Dynamic of the Gift: Authority and Submission in Christian Marriage.” All references to Stanford in my text are to Thomas Stanford, unless otherwise noted.

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the discussion of virtue, Aristotle describes the Great-souled Man, who strives for the highest in all his deeds:

He is also the sort to benefit others but is ashamed to receive a benefaction; for the former is a mark of one who is superior, the latter of one who is inferior. He is disposed to return a benefaction with a greater one, since in this way the person who took the initiative [with the original benefaction] will owe him in addition and will have also fared well thereby. But those who are great souled seem in fact to remember whatever benefaction they may have done, yet not those that they have been done (for he who receives the benefit is inferior to him who performed it, whereas the great-souled man wishes to be superior). (1124b. 10, bracketed phrase is in original text)

Aristotle acknowledges that receiving a gift places one in another's debt. However, the response he advocates here is to discharge those debts in order to remain entirely self-sufficient and superior to others. Such a policy may successfully prevent one from feeling the humility of obligation; however, it would not seem to foster intimacy. What real love could one feel for a man who treats friendship like commerce, or even worse, forgets past benefactions if he cannot repay them? The relationships built by such transactions can be little deeper than those built on trade. Despite seeing the Great-souled Man as a model for Darcy (99), Ruderman does acknowledge that "Austen portrays the relationship of a benefactor and recipient as not just cold or calculating" (113). I contend that this fact, contrasting as it does with Aristotle's description of the Great-souled Man's attitude

towards benefaction, ought to suggest to us that the Christian, not the classical, is the more important model of virtue for Austen's characters. Indeed, Theresa Kenney characterizes Darcy as an example of the Great-souled Man who must learn Christian humility. After all, it is humility which overcomes the prideful tendency to present oneself as self-sufficient and which opens one up to the love and relationship that are fostered by a gift.

Gift giving is problematic for the pagan philosopher, for whom humility is not very appealing, and certainly not a virtue. However, humility, gratitude, and other-centered love—all those dispositions essential to the giving and receiving of a gift—are central to Christian faith. The Bible continually enjoins an attitude of humility before other men and before God, and Austen's own prayers reflect this concern: "Incline us oh God! to think humbly of ourselves" (*Minor Works* 456). Her prayers likewise reflect the gratitude that is owed to God for His gifts of grace and material blessings: "We thank thee with all our hearts for every gracious dispensation, for all the blessings that have attended our lives, for every hour of safety, health and peace, of domestic comfort and innocent enjoyment. We feel that we have been blessed far beyond any thing that we have deserved" (*Minor Works* 456). For the Christian, to acknowledge one's indebtedness is not to fail of achieving personal excellence, as it is for Aristotle. Rather, in the humility of gratitude, one recognizes his relationship to a beneficent God. By acknowledging that he had been given gifts, and by offering gratitude in return, one therefore acts justly.



We are now in a position to consider Elizabeth and Darcy's gratitude as another important means by which they reestablish justice towards one another.

When Darcy and Elizabeth are reunited after the disastrous first proposal, gratitude characterizes their approach to one another. Their gratitude is important, not merely because it is a response to having been given a gift, but because it is a continued response to the self-knowledge and humility they have gained. After Darcy has made a point of renewing their acquaintance, Elizabeth reflects on her altered feelings for him:

But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within her of good will which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude.—Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection. . . . Such a change in a man of so much pride, excited not only astonishment but gratitude—for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on her was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means displeasing, though it could not be exactly defined. (293)

Even before this moment, she had learned to feel gratitude for Darcy's love, but now she finds an additional reason to be thankful. For, knowing that she does not deserve his friendship after the way she treated him, she values his kindness as a gift, a sign of his love and forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> Once again, justice and humility are (as Stanford puts it so well) “inextricably bound up” in each other. Elizabeth's sense of justice taught her she was

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<sup>8</sup> While Stanford identifies Darcy's forgiveness as a gift, he does not develop the connection between justice and Elizabeth's gratitude (160).

wrong; the knowledge of her error taught her humility; in her humility, she is able to recognize that Darcy now treats her better than she deserves; and by her gratitude, she offers the just response to Darcy's goodness. Her recognition of Darcy's love affirms the observations of Schmitz, Thomas Stanford, and Mary Stanford regarding the way that gift-giving brings individuals into relationship. Elizabeth's gratitude is a response to the love communicated by Darcy's gift of kindness. Bearing this thought in mind, then, Austen's lighthearted defense of her heroine's grateful love takes on a deeper significance:

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in her defence, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill success might perhaps authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. (308)

Love at first sight, as Austen humorously points out, is hardly founded on any rational communion or understanding between individuals: it can develop before the two people have even spoken any words to each other. While that kind of instant attraction may, of course, grow into a deeper sort of love, Austen makes it clear that lasting love must be supported by more than just a superficial attraction based on appearances only. In

contrast, gratitude and esteem depend on a knowledge of a person's character and actions. Gratitude especially implies an intentional relationship in which the giving and receiving of gifts (material or otherwise) establishes a reciprocal connection between people. Thus Elizabeth's attachment to Darcy is both "reasonable and just" (370).

Not every reader has been convinced by Austen's narrative aside about gratitude. Polhemus points to an apparent contradiction between the narrator's claim and the facts of Elizabeth's story: "Since Darcy has fallen in love with Elizabeth at second, if not at first sight, the text . . . hints at a suppressed dissatisfaction that such experience for a woman is so clearly wrong when it can be so right for a man. Elizabeth does not fall in love with Darcy the way Darcy falls in love with her" (50). While Darcy feels a romantic attraction to Elizabeth almost immediately—long before she reciprocates—it does not follow that Austen is ironically or unintentionally undercutting her statement by implying that men, if not women, are entirely justified in falling instantly in love. It is true that in eighteenth-century culture, prudence and convention restricted women from openly expressing their interest in the opposite sex, while men might act more freely on their feelings. However, in the passage above, Austen is not actually drawing a distinction between ways of arriving at the same end result. Rather, what she means is that the "love" someone, whether woman or man, feels after only a brief encounter with the object is not the same thing as the love one discovers after having engaged in a real relationship with another person. Thus, while Elizabeth and Darcy do come to acknowledge their romantic desire for one another in different ways and at different moments, the process by which they learn to truly value one another is remarkably

similar. Polhemus concludes, “‘Gratitude and esteem,’ the supposedly proper foundations of love for Elizabeth and other women, do not seem to figure equally for men in the general erotic picture” (52). Yet in fact, Darcy’s ability to feel gratitude for Elizabeth goes hand in hand with his learning to esteem her as she deserves, and both his gratitude and esteem are signs that he is finally a worthy suitor. Indeed, Austen’s position on male gratitude makes an interesting counterpoint to contemporary conduct book wisdom: “If Gregory [in *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters*] prescribes gratitude as a prerequisite for female love, Austen prescribes a similar gratitude on the part of men. Austen may agree or disagree with Gregory: it is hard to tell. But certainly . . . she does have an equal sense of the hero’s gratitude which deserves consideration” (Giffin 116). Indeed, Austen’s insistence on male gratitude extends beyond this novel; in *Northanger Abbey*, we are told Henry Tilney falls in love with Catherine Morland for no more astonishing reason than his gratitude that she should love him first (252-3).<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly, even critics who accept the probability of grateful love have still echoed Austen’s authorial observation that such attachment is not the most immediately appealing. Bernard J. Paris suggests that Elizabeth, in accepting a match founded on gratitude, must relinquish her earlier ideals: “[Elizabeth] must take, finally, a less romantic view of marriage and come to see gratitude and esteem as sound bases of a happy union” (99). However, this view may be less romantic only if by *romantic* we refer either to novelistic conventions or the popular fantasies which those conventions can

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<sup>9</sup> Katie Halsey also notes that Tilney’s grateful love for Catherine is a subversion of the conduct book rule that a young woman should not let a man know she loves him before he has made known his own feelings. Austen suggests it is quite probable that young men fall in love because they are loved, and thereby she reverses the trope that gratitude is a good motive for love in a woman (Halsey 48).

inspire. However, by emphasizing the value of gratitude, Austen is not discounting the goal of romantic love, which is to experience a fulfilling connection to another person. Rather, her narrative shows that pursuing romantic clichés is not the best way to secure such fulfillment.

Darcy, like Elizabeth, expresses his gratitude in terms of justice. After rehearsing the history of his prideful past, he exclaims:

Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. (410)

Darcy's concern with what is owed, proper, and worthy reveals that his gratitude is founded in his desire for justice. And as was the case for Elizabeth, his gratitude is preceded by and grows out of the recognition of his own past injustice. Darcy acts as soon as possible to correct his behavior to Elizabeth, starting with their meeting at Pemberley. His generosity to Elizabeth and the Gardiners proves that he has accepted the justice of Elizabeth's prior judgment of his behavior. He says later regarding his treatment of her at Pemberley, "My object *then* . . . was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to" (410).

It is one thing to concede, by words, that he was wrong, but to then change his actions as a result of that discovery takes even greater courage and humility.

Darcy further demonstrates his new sense of humility by providing for Lydia and Wickham's wedding. The very fact that he would willingly involve himself in the affairs of Wickham, a man he justly detests, speaks to his selflessness. Yet even more admirable is the way that Darcy takes on the blame for Wickham's elopement. Mrs. Gardiner writes of Darcy's involvement:

The motive professed, was his conviction of its being owing to himself that Wickham's worthlessness had not been so well known, as to make it impossible for any young woman of character, to love or confide in him. He generously imputed the whole to his mistaken pride, and confessed that he had before thought it beneath him, to lay his private actions open to the world. His character was to speak for itself. He called it, therefore, his duty to step forward, and endeavour to remedy an evil, which had been brought on by himself. If he *had another* motive, I am sure it would never disgrace him. (356)

We should not let our knowledge of Darcy's unspoken motive—his love for Elizabeth—distract us from the importance of his spoken motives, as some readers have done.

Ruderman suggests that “[i]n part, his stated reason may be a true one,” but because Jane and Elizabeth also agreed it was better “not to destroy Wickham's reputation, this reason seems chiefly to be a way to conceal the better motives that it would not be in good taste to proclaim” (109). While Darcy really does have reasons for concealing his involvement

in the wedding, we must not forget what else we know about Darcy's character. Given his hatred for disguise, we can infer that he would not say what he does if he did not mean it. He is certainly not the sort of person to claim responsibility for Wickham's misdeeds unless he truly believed himself at fault. Ruderman elsewhere imputes Darcy's silence about Wickham's past to the high-mindedness characteristic of Aristotle's Great-souled Man: "Mr. Darcy does not tell Elizabeth his opinion of Mr. Wickham because, as Aristotle puts it, 'he will speak no evil, not even of his enemies, except when insulted'" (99-100). While it surely would be charitable of Darcy not to needlessly defame Wickham, Darcy does not actually excuse himself by saying he meant to protect Wickham's remaining reputation, a claim he very well could have made and one which would throw Darcy's silence in a positive, if mistaken, light. Instead, Darcy takes the more personally humbling alternative of claiming he was too proud to justify himself by publicizing his private actions (something he could have accomplished even while protecting Georgiana's reputation—Wickham's misdeeds extend beyond his attempted seduction, after all). Darcy is intentionally admitting personal failings before Mrs. Gardiner, and her usage of the words *pride* and *confessed* hint at the humility required of him to do so. Since we have been tracking Darcy's concern for justice, it should be no surprise to see him claim that redressing his faults is a duty, an action that is due or owed. Hence his involvement is a restoration of justice, as much as it is a gift for Elizabeth.

His gift is all the more meaningful to her, for she recognizes what it really has cost him, not in terms of money, but to his pride. Elizabeth responds to the discovery of what Darcy has done for her family: "Oh! how heartily did she grieve over every

ungracious sensation she had ever encouraged, every saucy speech she had ever directed towards him. For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself” (361). Yet again, we notice that Elizabeth’s appreciation of Darcy is predicated on her awareness of her own mistakes. Marilyn Butler has observed that “the very admission of the value of an opponent forces both Elizabeth and Darcy to be more humble about themselves” (208). Here we see the opposite is true, as well: the knowledge of how easy it is to act on pride, rather than grace or reason, gives Elizabeth a fuller esteem for the good Darcy has accomplished. Elizabeth knows that dealing with Wickham (and Mrs. Younge, Georgiana’s former irresponsible governess) must have been painful, frustrating, and humbling to Darcy, and that his assistance to Lydia was more than simply benevolence; it was a true victory over his own feelings. Her pride—so often a problematic attitude in this novel—is here unambiguously good, for it is a just pride that springs from Elizabeth’s humility and is in response to Darcy’s own proof of humility. This last point is important if we are properly to understand the dynamic between Elizabeth and Darcy. Fraiman argues that, Darcy’s professions of humility notwithstanding, “in the end, both are skeptical of her, both proud of him” (364). We readers might be justified in sharing Fraiman’s concern that Elizabeth is subordinated to Darcy if she took pride in seeing Darcy elevate himself. Yet the opposite is true: she admires him for willingly lowering himself to perform a painful task. As I shall address later, Fraiman’s claim that Darcy is proud of himself is not supported by the text.

The fact that neither Elizabeth nor Darcy presumes that the other is in love is a further sign of the humility they have each learned. Although Darcy's benevolence to Lydia could be taken as a strong sign of his affection for Elizabeth, she is cautious about interpreting the meaning of his deeds. Upon hearing the news from her aunt:

[Elizabeth's] heart did whisper, that he had done it for her. But it was a hope shortly checked by other considerations, and she soon felt that even her vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on his affection for her, for a woman who had already refused him, as able to overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against relationship with Wickham.

(360-1)

Her caution is not the diffidence or lack of self-esteem of someone who does not believe in her own worth. Rather it is the humble refusal to suppose herself greater than any other concern in Darcy's life, the admission that his happiness does not depend solely on herself. She takes account of his feelings, those pertaining to a connection to Wickham and those pertaining to herself. Most courageous is her admission that her own actions may be a reason that Darcy is unwilling to pursue her. Darcy's renewed interest in her has not made her forget the lessons of justice.

Darcy, likewise, is careful about reading signs that Elizabeth loves him. It is not till he hears of her interview with Lady Catherine that he entertains the expectation that she might now be favorable to his suit. He later explains the effect of his aunt's report: "It taught me to hope . . . as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably

decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly” (407). Before his first proposal, he had considered his own merits—both of character and station—far too attractive to be refused. Now he considers Elizabeth’s own wishes and feelings. He remembers her just censure of him in the past, and is cautious about imagining she might change her mind about him—so cautious that even Elizabeth’s willingness to renew their acquaintance in Derbyshire was not, by itself, enough to raise his expectations. And when he does finally ask for her hand, he expresses himself in such a way that indicates he takes seriously and respects the possibility she may answer in the negative: “You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. *My* affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever” (406). Unlike his first proposal, this one takes into account Elizabeth’s feelings, and makes reference to the generosity he respects in her, rather than referring to his own character and what he thinks is owed to himself. Regarding this change of focus, Frantz observes, “[T]he expression of his love—‘*My* affections and wishes are unchanged’—occupies the least space in the speech, demonstrating that he has learned and is expressing his knowledge that his feelings are of less importance than hers in this situation” (171). His deference shows him a better man and a better suitor, one worthy of receiving a worthy woman’s hand. He has proven himself worthy by being humble enough to believe she may not want him; Elizabeth, in turn, is worthy for being humble enough to recognize the honor and compliment it is to be loved by him. Both know they are not entitled to acceptance, and so acceptance is proof of the other’s worth, not their own.

Some readers have argued that Darcy, while certainly educated and reformed, is still characterized by pride at the end of the novel. Ryle asserts, “He reforms into a man with pride of the right sort. He is proud to be able to help Elizabeth and her socially embarrassing family. He now knows what is due from him as well as what is due to him” (Ryle 289). The overall claim that Darcy has learned to think of others is accurate; however, nowhere is it indicated that Darcy takes pride in or otherwise congratulates himself for helping Elizabeth’s family, as Ryle and Fraiman have both argued. “If you *will* thank me,” Darcy insists, “let it be for yourself alone. . . . [Y]our *family* owe me nothing” (238-9). These are not the words of a man who wishes even his worthy deeds to be praised; they are the words of a lover humbly submitting the proof of his love. His focus is on what Elizabeth gains from the gift, not on thinking well of himself. The distinction is a fine one, for surely in order to do Elizabeth a service, he must consider himself capable of offering her a worthy gift. Yet overall, I maintain that the term pride, because it relates to what Darcy thinks of himself, fails to completely express Darcy’s other-centered attitude towards his services for the Bennet family. The term humility, on the other hand, readily directs our attention to Darcy’s newfound understanding that true virtue and benevolence require him to think of what he owes to others, instead of thinking, as he has always done before, mainly of what is owed to himself.

Ruderman also sees Darcy’s second proposal as proof that his character is still marked by pride, though now pride of a proper and superior sort. She argues that “[a] man of less pride would have backed away, lacking confidence to renew the subject. We see this in Mr. Bingley, who, despite his love for Jane, allows himself to be persuaded by

his friends that she does not return his love” (107). Ruderman does try to differentiate between lesser and more superior forms of pride, claiming, “A more common pride would have refused to renew his offer” (107). However, Ruderman would do better to remain with the terms self-confidence or self-worth to describe Darcy’s attitude towards a second proposal. Confidence and courage surely are necessary for Darcy to approach Elizabeth again, but he needs such attitudes precisely because repeating a proposal to a woman who once refused him is an inherently humbling act. Furthermore, his humility is responsible for his success now: having left behind the prideful manner that characterized the first proposal, he now submits to Elizabeth’s wishes.



In contrast to Elizabeth and Darcy, who both mature over the course of the novel, Jane Austen shows that those characters who have no sense of justice or humility cannot reform. Mr. Collins, who is Darcy’s foil in many ways, offers an example of pride that remains unhumiliated.<sup>10</sup> The pompous clergyman’s rehearsal of his qualifications as a suitor provides a concise summary of the proud attitudes which he and the unreformed Darcy share. Towards the end of the disastrous proposal scene, Mr. Collins insists:

You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses are merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly these:—It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of

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<sup>10</sup> Claudia Johnson offers a similar look at the “appalling resemblance” between the two suitors’ unsuccessful proposals (82).

De Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into farther consideration that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall chuse to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.

(121-2)

Like Darcy, Mr. Collins is convinced of his irresistible desirability as a husband. Darcy may not be so crass as to enumerate his own qualifications so explicitly, but we can easily imagine that he once rated his own social and material blessings as equally likely to secure Elizabeth's acceptance. Mr. Collins' proposal also shows a disregard for Elizabeth's expressed wishes; his insistence that Elizabeth's refusal is merely the ploy of an "elegant female" is a more comically ridiculous version of the way Darcy overlooks the possibility that Elizabeth's wishes may not coincide with his own. Previously, I noted how Darcy's grammar during his first proposal often denies agency to Elizabeth and thereby reflects his lack of consideration for her. Collins's language in this scene even follows a similar pattern: "In almost every sentence in his speech, he is the subject and the agent, and Elizabeth—when she is actually mentioned—is relegated to the status of an object" (Herrle 245). Mr. Collins even draws attention to the inferiority of Elizabeth's family, though unlike Darcy, he is primarily concerned with how little money she can

bring to the marriage. Furthermore, Mr. Collins is proud of himself for the benevolence he is doing Elizabeth by choosing her as his wife, thereby allowing Longbourne to remain her home. "I could not satisfy myself without resolving to chuse a wife from among [Mr. Bennet's] daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place," he says; "This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your esteem" (119). Mr. Collins (unlike Darcy by the end of the book) does not mind calling on Elizabeth's sense of obligation in order to gain her acceptance (Stanford 165).

Yet though Mr. Collins stands in as much need of reform as Darcy does at the end of the novel, Austen shows no improvement in Mr. Collins. The difference between these men is that Mr. Collins's pride is stronger than any other considerations. Following Elizabeth's insistence on her refusal, we are told, "He thought too well of himself to comprehend on what motive his cousin could refuse him; and though his pride was hurt, he suffered in no other way. His regard for her was quite imaginary; and the possibility of her deserving her mother's reproach prevented his feeling any regret" (77). Collins cares more about preserving his own sense of superior worth than he does about discovering whether anything he has said or done could have contributed to Elizabeth's answer; his pride is unassailed by any considerations of what is justly due to himself. Perhaps if he truly cared for Elizabeth, he might have wondered why she responds the way she does, but as his love is "imaginary," he has not really learned to think of anyone outside himself. Self-satisfied as he is, Collins has no motive for gaining knowledge of his own flaws. Unfortunately, the woman he does marry, Charlotte, does not require much better

from him. She accepts Collins, as unsuited as he is to be a rational and pleasing life companion. After their marriage, he remains as foolish and pompous as ever, and Charlotte's only recourse is to ignore or avoid him. This is not to say that Collins is not deserving of unconditional love; however, unconditional is not the same as indiscriminate. In contrast, because each values justice, Darcy and Elizabeth elevate one another by their love, as both learn that a worthy spouse deserves to be approached with humility and gratitude. Yet it is difficult to imagine that real humility characterizes Collins's approach to Charlotte. Given the way he addressed himself to Elizabeth, it seems likely that Collins is similarly proud of himself as a benefactor bestowing upon Charlotte all the advantages of the home and status of a respectable clergyman's wife.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the smugness with which he treats Elizabeth after he secures Charlotte's hand suggests that Charlotte's acceptance has reaffirmed his opinion of his desirability as a match rather than teaching him that to be accepted by a good woman—which Charlotte surely is, despite her very practical view of marriage—is a blessing for which he ought to be humbly grateful.

Mr. Collins's lack of humility is also evident in his relationship with his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. As already discussed, gratitude for a gift is an attitude that flows from a place of humility. Yet Mr. Collins's professed gratitude to Lady Catherine is, in fact, an expression of his pride; he turns the beneficence of such a prestigious patroness into a statement of his own worth and status. Mr. Bennet observes that "Lady Catherine de Bourgh's attention to [Mr. Collins's] wishes, and consideration for his

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<sup>11</sup> Stanford likewise suggests that Collins uses his future inheritance of Longbourn to establish "a relationship of power and coercion" with Elizabeth and Charlotte, in turn (165).

comfort, appeared very remarkable” (45). Of course, what the sharp-witted Mr. Bennet actually seems to find remarkable is the idea that Lady Catherine has any deep personal interest in her foolish rector, though unsurprisingly, Mr. Collins chooses to think himself truly remarkable for gaining her approval: he goes on to enumerate all the little condescensions and honors she has paid him, from asking him to fill a vacant seat at her card table to suggesting shelves for his closets (74-5). He lacks a just view of both himself and Lady Catherine, and is therefore unable to see the humbling truth that Lady Catherine’s attentions often proceed from her own selfishness and pride rather than from a wish to complement him.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, Mr. Collins’s inability to view himself with justice and humility—two virtues which complement one another—prevents him from experiencing the self-knowledge that is prerequisite to character growth. It is no surprise that his final appearance in the novel, via the letter to Mr. Bennet, proves him to be as self-righteous and uncharitable as ever.

Lydia and Wickham, too, suffer from a deficient—or perhaps perverse—sense of justice. And this deficiency of justice is responsible for the fact that both are, as Stanford observes, “not only poor givers, [but] they are poor receivers” (164). Lydia lacks both the justice and the humility to recognize that eloping and then living, unmarried, with Wickham was foolish and wrong. Without an awareness of the true significance of her actions, she is likewise unable to comprehend the Gardiners’ goodness in attempting to salvage her reputation. Elizabeth understands what the Gardiners have done, and she

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<sup>12</sup> Stanford explains that Lady Catherine’s gifts are just as bad as the ones Collins offers: “Lady Catherine, in pride, seeks to reinforce her power and to objectify—and bind—Collins through her influence and ‘gifts.’ Her gifts, however, plainly come with expectations, and hence are not really gifts at all” (164).

remarks, “The kindness of my uncle and aunt can never be requited. Their taking her home, and affording her their personal protection and countenance, is such a sacrifice to her advantage, as years of gratitude cannot enough acknowledge” (336). Yet beyond being concerned that someone be present to give her away at the wedding, Lydia is oblivious that any sacrifices were made to enable her to marry. She expresses no gratitude to her aunt and uncle, but on the contrary complains that they kept her at home, treatment that probably was not primarily meant as punishment, but rather to limit exposure of Lydia’s scandalous elopement (352). In the first letter she sends to Elizabeth on the latter’s engagement, Lydia is already asking for favors: “It is a great comfort to have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope you will think of us. I am sure Wickham would like a place at court very much” (428-9). Lydia’s habit is to think of what others can give her, without once thinking of what she may owe them by way of gratitude or respect. Unsurprisingly, Austen indicates that Lydia remains foolish and imprudent.

Wickham’s case is hardly better than Lydia’s; he has the charisma and intelligence which Lydia lacks, but like her, he is blind to justice and believes he is owed everything he asks for. He treats the living intended for him almost as a hereditary desert, rather than a gift offered out of love, and becomes angry when Darcy will not grant the living to him, even after Wickham has already taken other compensation for the living and proven himself morally unsuited for a career in the church. Like his wife, he also displays no humility or embarrassment over the scandalous circumstances of their marriage:

“Wickham was not at all more distressed than [Lydia], but his manners were always so

pleasing, that had his character and his marriage been exactly what they ought, his smiles and his easy address, while he claimed their relationship, would have delighted them all” (349). Wickham’s concern is only for his own comfort; he readily avoids any discussion of his real character, once Elizabeth implies she knows his true history. Wickham does not have the desire to confront and acknowledge his mistakes. Darcy and Elizabeth willingly endured the pain of self-inspection because they believe that a just humiliation is preferable to the ignorance of pride. The only pain Wickham evinces is the embarrassment of having been caught.



While justice is a very important theme in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen ultimately points to something higher than strict justice: grace. Elizabeth and Darcy reestablish justice (as Emsley puts it) by learning to treat each other as the other deserves by merit of his or her general good character. But equally important to their love and esteem for each other is the knowledge that they are themselves treated better than they deserve because of their blunders. Recalling their chance meeting at Pemberley, Elizabeth tells Darcy:

“Your surprise could not be greater than *mine* in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive *more* than my due.”

“My object *then*,” replied Darcy, “was to shew you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past; and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to.” (410)

Elizabeth recognizes that, had Darcy been strictly just, he would probably have ignored her; her past injustice to him does not entitle her to a warm reception. Likewise, Darcy's admission that he was seeking her forgiveness shows that he, too, is hoping she will choose to view him better than he has hitherto deserved. It is clear from the rest of their conversation in this scene that they have both forgiven each other. They each show a sympathy for the hurt they once had caused, and Elizabeth declares they need no longer dwell on the past, since they have both matured beyond it: "But think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it, ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure" (409). As Emsley rightly notes, Elizabeth is not actually advocating a life without reflection (103-4). What Elizabeth playfully recommends is the forgetfulness of forgiveness. She and Darcy have both learned from their mistakes and forgiven one another; there is little more to be gained by dwelling on painful memories and holding against themselves what they have ceased to hold against each other. In their forgiveness, they both practice the uniquely Christian kind of justice identified at the opening of this chapter, the justice guided by the precept of judging others as one would wish to be judged oneself. Strictly speaking, no one can properly be said to be owed forgiveness; rather, forgiveness cancels the debt an individual owes, replacing justice with grace.

Austen advocates grace, rather than strict justice, towards the other characters, as well. Strict justice towards Lydia, for instance, would look something like what Mr.

Collins recommends to Mr. Bennet regarding his daughter and Wickham: “You ought certainly to forgive them as a christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing” (403). Austen leaves us little doubt that, despite Mr. Collins’s Christian language, such an attitude is not a truly Christian one. “*That* is his notion of christian forgiveness!” exclaims Mr. Bennet (403). We may recall that he himself had struggled with accepting Lydia back into his home after her infamous behavior, but Jane and Elizabeth had argued for kindness and forgiveness (342-3, 346). We learn that in the future, the Darcys extend kindness to the Wickhams. Elizabeth (like her sister Jane) offers regular financial assistance to Lydia. Furthermore, Austen tells us, “Though Darcy could never receive *him* at Pemberley, yet, for Elizabeth’s sake, he assisted him farther in his profession. Lydia was occasionally a visitor there, when her husband was gone to enjoy himself in London or Bath” (429). Wickham’s past choices are not entirely without consequence, but the help he receives speaks to Elizabeth’s merit and Darcy’s generosity, rather than to any worthiness on Wickham’s part.

Darcy also extends grace to Lady Catherine following her harsh disapproval of her nephew’s choice of bride. We read,

Lady Catherine was extremely indignant on the marriage of her nephew; and as she gave way to all the genuine frankness of her character, in her reply to the letter which announced its arrangement, she sent him language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But at length, by Elizabeth’s persuasion, he was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation; and, after a little

farther resistance on the part of his aunt, her resentment gave way, either to her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself; and she condescended to wait on them at Pemberley. (430)

It would be entirely understandable, and hardly unjust, if Darcy had chosen to remain estranged from his aunt until such time as she repented of her bad behavior and asked for forgiveness. However, Darcy—the offended party twice over, on both his own and his wife’s behalf—is the one to initiate a reconciliation and offer forgiveness to Lady Catherine. Their reconciliation is not in word only, for the Darcys actively renew a relationship with her, even inviting her into their home.

Even the shallow and snobbish Miss Bingley is a recipient of grace. She visits the Darcys occasionally, presumably admitted for her brother’s sake: “Miss Bingley was very deeply mortified by Darcy’s marriage; but as she thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at Pemberley, she dropt all her resentment; was fonder than ever of Georgiana, almost as attentive to Darcy as heretofore, and paid off every arrear of civility to Elizabeth” (430). We cannot imagine that either Darcy or Elizabeth is deceived by Miss Bingley’s belated and insincere friendliness. But the fact that they do not treat her with resentment proves their maturity. Such is the same mature Christian love that Darcy shows Elizabeth’s family when he can finally declare of the relatives he once found unsuitable, “Much as I respect them, I believe, I thought only of *you*” (406). The welcome and forbearance the Darcys practice to Lydia, Lady Catherine, and Miss Bingley is in keeping with the grace they have learned to extend to each other. Indeed, if Darcy and Elizabeth could not practice generosity and forgiveness to all the others in

their lives, we would have to question the authenticity of their own reconciliation. It is not enough that they can learn to be good to one another; they prove the reality of their reform by being good to others, most especially those others who do not deserve or invite such notice. It is fitting that this novel, which has so focused on justice, should end on a note of grace. Justice—as Elizabeth and Darcy both perceive—is beautiful and desirable, but grace is more so. Furthermore, it is through justice that one gains the humility to receive grace with the gratitude which itself is fitting and just.

## Chapter IV

### Marriage, the Good, and Human Happiness

I have thus far examined the ways in which Darcy and Elizabeth are deficient in charity at the beginning of the novel; I then considered the process by which they submit themselves to justice and respond to the knowledge of their faults with humility, gratitude, and grace. It now remains to consider their reward for practicing these virtues: the happy ending.

In *The Pleasures of Virtue*, Anne Crippen Ruderman points out that “[i]t has become popular recently to discuss the ‘ambiguities’ of the endings of [Austen’s] novels, for ironic humor pervades all of them” (13). I suspect, however, that Austen’s deft irony is not solely responsible for this critical trend. For many readers, feminists in particular, the happy marriages which conclude the novels represent an ideological problem: can an authoress who otherwise offers such clear-sighted social commentary truly consider marriage a fitting conclusion to the heroine’s journey of self-knowledge and empowerment? The idea (so the argument runs) that a woman’s greatest fulfillment can be found in married love is at best a novelistic fantasy, and at worst a tool of patriarchal domination. Hence by pointing out the ambiguities and contradictions of Austen’s happy endings, such critics wish to rescue her from the charge of unthinking submission to restrictive literary and social conventions.

Critical distaste for the conventions of romance is nothing new. Beginning with the medieval literature that first bore the name, the term *romance* has long signified “trivial” feminine literature (Ross 1). Austen was well aware of the novel’s controversial

reputation, as her humorous defense of novels in *Northanger Abbey* indicates (30-1).

With the rise of the modern feminist movement, of course, the prejudice against romance has grown even stronger and more widely accepted. Ashley Tauchert summarizes the case against romance thus:

Romance is now widely received as the rump of an aristocratic fantasy, where idealised heterosexual love still offers the illusion of a ‘happy-ever-after’ in spite of a deluge of empirical evidence to the contrary; and in this sense is denigrated as performative of a powerful sexual ideology central to continuing economic domination. (22)

The problem is twofold. First, romances with their happy conclusions are considered unrealistic; that is they do not conform to what modern readers think of as the “empirical evidence.” Second, such narratives supposedly perpetuate sexual and economic inequality, enabling the subjection of a female minority. Mary Poovey implicates Austen because she

perpetuates one of the fundamental myths of bourgeois society. For the model of private gratification that romantic love proposes can disguise the inescapable system of economic and political domination only by foregrounding the few relationships that flatter our desire for personal autonomy and power. But the notion that romantic relationships actually have the kind of social power this emotional prominence suggests is only a fiction. (237)

Austen's happy marriages are dangerous, so the argument goes, because they hide the truth of female subjugation under the appealing cloak of romantic love; readers who accept Austen's vision swallow whole the "bourgeois myth" of romantic love and thereby become complicit in their own oppression.<sup>1</sup>

Given what they see as the problems of romance and the happy ending, critics often argue that Austen's novels end thus simply because traditional novelistic conventions left her no other possibilities. Claudia Johnson cautions that

marriage seems at times to be the way an author ends her novel, not the way she represents what could or recommends what should happen in life. . . . Austen's acute interest in probing and manipulating the conventional import of fiction . . . should make us chary about inferring that the marriages concluding her novels constitute an unequivocal ideological statement about marriage itself, considered either as a goal for women, or as a boon to society. (91)

Sulloway suggests that fictional conventions about marriage trump practical experience when it comes to Austen's endings: "[F]ictional tradition required that Jill should get her Jack, that the battle of the sexes should end in loving kindness, despite the bizarre compensatory equations built into every marriage" (217). Not merely the endings, but all that prepares for them, becomes suspect. In his reading of *Emma*, Wayne Booth asserts that novelistic conventions forced Austen to portray "conventional patterns of desire that she quite obviously did not herself embrace uncritically," patterns which will cause

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<sup>1</sup>For critics who read Austen's novels as narratives of female oppression, see Nina Auerbach, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Susan Fraiman, Judith Lowder Newton, and Alison G. Sulloway.

readers to “succumb morally to what was simply required formally” (431). In other words, the romance’s conservative narrative form forces Austen to dramatize desires which would be harmful if adopted by her readers. Booth goes on to argue that only an ironic reading of *Emma*’s happy ending can serve as the “antidote” to save readers from the poison of conventional novelistic endings which “implant a harmful vision of the sexes” (435).

However, readings that overemphasize ironic subtexts have their own dangers. As Laura Mooneyham White observes, “any method that demonstrates the contradictions of bourgeois marriage plots can be used to demonstrate equally well the contradictions of feminism” (“Jane Austen” 74). A focus on irony is especially problematic because it tends to privilege what is *not* said, but may only be implied, over what *is* said in a text.

Describing why Austen writes such excellent comedy, C. S. Lewis notes, “Unless there is something about which the author is never ironical, there can be no true irony in the work. ‘Total irony’—irony about everything—frustrates itself and becomes insipid” (370). The goodness of marriage as an end (both narratively and morally speaking) is an idea that Austen’s novels repeatedly ask us to take seriously. Discussing the novel endings, Ruderman cautions, “[W]e cannot take Austen’s ironic meanings to be the *only* meaning, to deny a certain surface truth” (13). Given that Austen ends her six completed novels in happy marriages, it seems unreasonable and even somewhat perverse to deny that there is not a fair amount of surface truth that she wishes to convey.

Ruderman is not alone; Ross, too, bases her readings on “the belief that Austen’s endings did have serious meaning for her and were not merely conventional or forced attempts to

provide ‘aesthetic’ solutions for insoluble problems, as some critics [in particular, Claudia Johnson] suggest” (227). Tiffany Schubert has also argued for taking happy endings seriously, in medieval Romance and Austen alike.

Understanding Austen’s happy endings requires modern readers to lay aside many of the prejudices or preconceptions about the function of marriage in a traditionally patriarchal culture. Yet this imaginative exercise, difficult as it may be given the values now so firmly entrenched in academia, is highly worthwhile if we are to gain the most from reading Austen. As some thoughtful readers have already recognized, to dismiss Austen’s understanding of marriage and relations between the sexes simply because her values do not fully match one’s own is to shut out the possibility that one can learn anything from the way she saw the world. Deborah Ross may overstate the universal acceptance of prevailing theories of truth, but she still makes a strong case for humility as we encounter Austen and her fellow eighteenth-century female writers: “Their truth may or may not accord with our own theories of sexual difference, and it certainly does not accord with the present belief in the partial and provisional nature of truth itself. Yet it had its moment in history; and at this moment in our understanding of the novel, it is an excellent truth to remember” (15). These women sincerely held such beliefs and it is important that we take their ideas seriously if we are to understand their writing. Indeed, to attribute anachronistic views to these authors is to lose what they have to say. Janet Todd warns:

But it is now time to accept that not all intelligent women of the past aspired to a modern feminist view and that to assume that they did so is to

silence them as thoroughly as patriarchy silenced enlightenment feminism. The desire to see covert messages may partly be a disinclination to hear the overt ones—already a feature of traditional Austen scholarship. (71-2)

If we truly respect Austen as a thinker and a storyteller, we must allow her (and her readers) to say things that may not accord with current sensibilities in philosophy and in art.

In her article “Jane Austen and the Marriage Plot,” White responds to many of the common objections to the marriage plot structure. While White’s article is not intended to offer a comprehensive defense of Austen’s marriage plots, she argues that a compelling defense

should be set along lines that allow for a larger understanding of marriage’s role in narrative closure. It is not enough to say, as did Booth, that marriage as narrative resolution is “simply required formally.” . . . [The marriage plot] persists in the fictive imagination for some compelling reasons, and while the attack on the marriage plot as indicative of repressive social conditions and ideologies is well justified, feminist critics might benefit from seeing beyond the historical and cultural dimensions of marriage. (76)

Looking beyond these dimensions allows us to see that the concluding marriages fulfill a symbolic function in Austen’s comedic vision. To discover this function, we do not need a complicated reading of the novel. In fact, I think we must only answer one simple

question: why does Jane Austen believe that married romantic love is a good image of human happiness? I suggest that the answer lies in the kind of thing that happiness is.

In this chapter, I will move towards a justification of the novel's happy ending by first examining the portrayal of happiness in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen's idea of happiness implies a hierarchy of goods, the highest of which involve knowing and loving others. Happiness also requires a generous spirit that wishes to share goods with others and considers others just as highly as the self. These ideas are informed by Austen's Christian beliefs that earthly happiness is a preparation for heavenly, eternal happiness. Marriage, of course, will be a good and successful relationship only insofar as both parties exemplify the qualities just enumerated, making each other's happiness intrinsic to his or her own. While not everyone will marry (as Austen herself never did), because of the way it unites two persons, married love offers an ideal picture of the kind of love—charity—which Austen believes makes humans happy. Furthermore, Austen's belief in salvation means that the happy ending is a realistic and essential part of every Christian's narrative, whether that happy ending is achieved on earth (as it is in the novel) or in the hereafter.



Jane Austen takes it for granted that human beings want to be happy. Even critics with distinctly different interpretations of Austen's moral philosophy have acknowledged this fact. For instance, Claudia Johnson insists that Austen's characters see themselves as having a fundamentally individualistic moral "right" to the pursuit of happiness, whereas Ruderman argues that happiness is the reward for pursuing the good of self and others

through virtue (Johnson 81, Ruderman 14). Nonetheless, both critics agree that Austen is deeply concerned with how to achieve happiness. Indeed, her interest in happiness is one of the primary indicators of the inherently Aristotelian roots of her ethical thought. While she herself never makes reference to the idea of *telos*, this philosophical term fits naturally into a discussion of her works. Alasdair McIntyre has suggested that the heroine's *telos* is "life within . . . a particular kind of marriage" (239). While it is certainly true that Austen repeatedly shows her heroines seeking their fulfillment within the context of happy marriage, I think McIntyre gives *telos* too narrow a definition. Kubic resists McIntyre's claim that marriage is the *telos* of Austen's heroines, instead suggesting that their ultimate happiness is found in living a unified and harmonious life. Emsley also argues that happiness—not marriage—is the true *telos* for Austen's heroines (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 20-3). "The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy," Emsley writes, "is one of fulfillment and happiness, and yet both of them, like Elinor, and Fanny, and Anne, are obliged to find fulfillment in the exercise of their own independent happiness first" (*Jane Austen's Philosophy* 22). Austen presents a good marriage as desirable, but this is so because happiness itself is desirable.

As the preceding suggests, happiness, for Austen, is connected to the good. Critics such as Ruderman and William A. Lindenmuth have observed that Austen is likewise Aristotelian in the way that she presents happiness as something objective: it is the possession of goods, both moral and material. Implied in this idea are the further notions that some goods are only instrumentally connected to happiness rather than intrinsic to it, while other false "goods" do not bring true happiness at all. Given the primacy of love,

both romantic and sisterly, in *Pride and Prejudice*, we can conclude that the “fullest happiness . . . consist[s] in attachment to others” (Ruderman 11). Intelligent companionship and love are the highest goods to which her heroines aspire, and with which their moral goodness is rewarded. Other goods—reputation, income, a comfortable home—tend to be good insofar as they allow one to enjoy the higher goods. This hierarchy is evident throughout *Pride and Prejudice* thanks to the way Austen portrays the desires and the happiness of the characters. Claudia Johnson rightly notes that in this novel “Austen’s care to establish the standards of her characters’ happiness provides us with an index to their moral imaginations, tempers, and resources”; however I cannot agree that Austen ultimately “[refuses] to settle the differences in what her characters seek as desirable” (80-1). Certainly Austen never assumes a preaching tone, nor does she present moral questions as rote matters of black and white;<sup>2</sup> yet Johnson goes too far in asserting that Austen “implies a toleration of some ethical relativity” (81). As I will proceed to show, Austen gives clear, though understated, indications of how her individual characters’ desires compare.

To talk about what Austen presents as good for her characters, we should begin by examining what it is not. While we may be accustomed to think of happiness and pleasure as largely synonymous in our everyday usage of these terms, for Austen, pleasure is not the same as the good, nor is it necessarily a reliable indicator for true and lasting happiness. When Lydia leaves for Brighton, “Mrs. Bennet was diffuse in her good

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<sup>2</sup> See Emsley (both her book, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues*, and her article “Practicing the Virtues of Amiability and Civility in *Pride and Prejudice*”) for a thoughtful discussion of how ethical behavior requires one to navigate the tensions between competing virtues. Emsley demonstrates that virtue is not relative, but neither is it a matter of simply following a set of rules without reflection or consideration for the particulars of one’s situation.

wishes for the felicity of her daughter, and impressive in her injunctions that she would not miss the opportunity of enjoying herself as much as possible; advice, which there was every reason to believe would be attended to” (261). Mrs. Bennet and her daughter alike see “felicity” as a matter of enjoying oneself as much as possible. Yet Austen reveals the shortcomings of such a philosophy even as Lydia fantasizes about the joys awaiting her in Brighton:

In Lydia’s imagination, a visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly happiness. She saw with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing place covered with officers. She saw herself the object of attention, to tens and to scores of them at present unknown. She saw all the glories of the camp; its tents stretched forth in beautiful uniformity of lines, crowded with the young and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet; and to complete the view, she saw herself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once. (258)

The entire passage is undercut with irony. We immediately recognize Lydia’s foolish shortsightedness for imagining that a single visit to a resort town can fulfill her every worldly desire—after all, we know Lydia well enough by now to realize that she will always wish for something more before she can be content. There is no doubt that she is the focus of the imaginary vision: to speak in cinematic terms, the scene opens with a panorama of Brighton and ends by zooming in on Lydia as the center of attention. The six (or more) officers seem faceless and interchangeable drones, existing only to flatter their queen bee. Clearly, Lydia’s idea of earthly happiness is limited by her lack of self-

knowledge and by her selfishness. Furthermore, the phrase “earthly happiness” itself reminds us that Lydia gives no thought to her eternal happiness, which surely is not served by her entirely frivolous and selfish pursuits. The only other place the words “earthly happiness” appear in Austen’s novels is the penultimate paragraph of *Mansfield Park*: “With so much true merit and true love, and no want of fortune or friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be” (547). While Fanny and Edmund’s happiness comprehends material goods, their virtue and love assures that they have achieved true happiness, rather than only temporary pleasure. Their earthly happiness promises to lead to a truly secure heavenly happiness; in contrast, Lydia’s focus on “earthly happiness” threatens to preclude her eternal good. Given this brief but pointed reminder that Austen is thinking of her characters’ salvation, it seems difficult to justify Peter Knox-Shaw’s remark that Lydia’s “breach of [the marriage] code is taken seriously . . . but the spirit of [Austen’s] analysis remains overwhelmingly secular. Collins may refer on one occasion to Lydia’s guilt, but the real issue is the shame brought on her family, and its ruinous effects on the marriage prospects of the other daughters” (99). Such a reading overlooks the fact that Lydia’s sexual license is a symptom of her own disordered soul, a disorder that threatens her own prospects for happiness, both in this life and the next.

As Elizabeth recognizes, Lydia’s pursuit of pleasure ruins even her chances of earthly happiness. Thankful that her youngest sister has been saved from ignominy, Elizabeth is nonetheless fully aware that “neither rational happiness nor worldly prosperity, could be justly expected for her sister” (339). We ought to note that *rational*,

in Austen's time, "was frequently used to distinguish what is serious or important from what is frivolous and vainglorious" (Stokes 146). Hence, rational happiness is happiness founded on important, rather than trivial things. Rational happiness, as we shall see, is of greater intrinsic value than material wealth (which is useful especially as it promotes the former), but Lydia can expect neither the greater nor the lesser of these two goods. She lacks the education which would prepare her to enjoy a rational sort of happiness; and while worldly prosperity is something that would give her pleasure, her intemperate habits likewise prevent her from achieving any sort of financial stability. Elizabeth reflects further, "But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could easily conjecture" (344-5). She speaks in Aristotelian language, reminding us that virtue is the foundation of real happiness. Furthermore, for Austen as well as for Aristotle, relationships of friendship and love are one of the very greatest goods;<sup>3</sup> yet neither Lydia nor Wickham possesses the moral character to offer such rational companionship to the other. Unlike Jane and Elizabeth, who (as Austen says of Fanny and Edmund) are united to their spouses by "true merit and true love", Lydia and Wickham have only their vices in common, defects which will ultimately divide rather than unify them.

Although rational companionship is Austen's highest ideal for happiness, she certainly does not deny the importance of wealth. Kubic and Emsley have both pointed

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<sup>3</sup> See Dougherty for a discussion of how Austen's presentation of love resembles Aristotle's descriptions of the three types of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with friendships of utility and pleasure being subordinate to complete friendship, which is founded on a love of the person for him or herself.

out that Austen once again follows Aristotle in her belief that material goods help promote virtue and happiness (Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy* 26-7). After all, one cannot fully enjoy the fruits of either philosophy or friendship if she is not comfortably housed, dressed, and fed. Mrs. Gardiner's sole objection to Wickham, when he first pursues Elizabeth, is that his "want of fortune" would make a match to him "so very imprudent," and Elizabeth agrees, even while she acknowledges that young love often disregards such considerations (163-4). Despite Elizabeth's promises that she is not in love with Wickham, it is Mrs. Gardiner who appears the more circumspect of the two in this exchange. We know that neither woman is a fortune hunter, so their concern here is simply with securing a sufficient income for health and comfort. Thanks to the art of fiction, Austen can reward her heroines' virtue and principles with all the blessings such goodness deserves, and clearly wealth is not the least of these. When Austen declares, "Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other," we understand that "every other source of happiness" includes their material wealth even as it does their superior husbands (427). However, we should not miss that even in this line, their wealth is in service of a higher end, the continued intimacy and friendship between their families. Bingley's wealth enables him to buy an estate near the Darcys' own, and both couples possess "fortune to make the expence of travelling unimportant," to use Elizabeth's words to Darcy from one of their conversations at Hunsford (201).

While wealth certainly contributes to the heroines' happiness, fortune alone is not the true reason that their marriages are good, as Elizabeth's attitude towards Darcy's

wealth illustrates. While she vexes Lady Catherine by claiming that “the wife of Mr. Darcy must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to her situation” that the disapproval of his family and friends must hardly trouble her, the truth is that she does not love him for his wealth (394). Back when she thought him ill-tempered and selfish, his fortune did not change her feelings for him or cause her to overcome her objections. (In contrast, we can imagine that Caroline Bingley would not have let any such objections—had they occurred to her—stop her from accepting him.) Of course, Elizabeth is not immune to the splendors of Pemberley; even before arriving at the house, where she will learn about Darcy’s excellent character from Mrs. Reynolds, Elizabeth feels “that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!” (271). But her “might”—rather than the more certain “would”—reminds us of the conditional nature of her conjecture: being the lady of this beautiful estate *might* be very fine *if* Mr. Darcy were the sort of man she could want as a husband. As of yet, she does not think him a suitable spouse, for it is her belief that he would have excluded the Gardiners from Pemberley that proves the “lucky recollection” which “[saves] her from something like regret” (273). The “like” is significant, for it indicates that, as much as she would have enjoyed Darcy’s estate, she still does not wish she had agreed to marry him.

What truly impresses Elizabeth about Darcy’s wealth is the use to which he puts it. Touring the estate, she finds that the landscaping and decor of Pemberley is tasteful, not ostentatious, and the most recent improvements to the house—the redecorated room and the new piano—have been done for his sister. His goodness extends beyond his family, for Mrs. Reynolds assures Elizabeth that he is held in high respect by his servants

and tenants (276). Elizabeth reflects, “As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship!—How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (277). Darcy uses his wealth, not merely to seek his own happiness, but to promote the happiness of all those who depend upon him. This fact speaks volumes about his good character, for as I shall demonstrate, real happiness proceeds from generosity. His care for his sister, his household, and his tenants indicates that he is someone who would show the same generosity to his wife.

We learn more about Austen’s hierarchy of goods by considering the marriage of Charlotte Lucas. While her unromantic, “prudent” marriage to Mr. Collins may seem to have little in common with Elizabeth’s love match, Austen has deliberately set up Charlotte’s choice of husband as the foil to Elizabeth’s. For, while Elizabeth would not let Darcy’s wealth blind her to real faults in his character, Charlotte does the exact opposite: she chooses a man with readily evident poor character simply because he has a good income. Now, Austen is sensitive to the social pressures and limitations that impel Charlotte to such a choice, and her portrayal of Charlotte’s marriage is sympathetic, rather than harshly condemnatory. However, I find that Austen provides clear evidence that Charlotte’s moral philosophy is severely flawed.

Charlotte’s views of marital happiness flow from an irresponsible view of virtue. These beliefs are settled even before Mr. Collins arrives on the scene, as we can see in the conversation Charlotte has with Elizabeth regarding Jane’s hopes of marrying Bingley. Charlotte says:

I wish Jane success with all my heart; and if she were married to him tomorrow, I should think she had as good a chance of happiness, as if she were to be studying his character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other, or ever so similar before-hand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always contrive to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life. (25)

It is telling that Charlotte wishes Jane success, rather than happiness. Her word choice, with its financial overtones, suggests that success and happiness are not the same thing: a successful marriage is one that secures financial support, but happiness in the relationship is not something one can count on or plan for. Her belief that married happiness is a matter of chance implies that there is no strong moral imperative directing the choice of a spouse. That is not to say she would recommend marrying an obviously immoral rake as Wickham proves, but her attitude nonetheless suggests that virtue and character are not constant, and therefore not helpful criteria in making a choice. And such is a dangerous position: “what she says is thoroughly subversive of every value because it removes every basis for moral or feeling or sensible action” (Tave 16). Tave further argues that characters such as Charlotte Lucas (and Frank Churchill) who rely on chance for their happiness are at fault because by giving things over to chance, they fail to take responsibility for their own actions and choices. Of course, while in one sense, her

reliance on fate for her happiness leaves too much to chance, in another sense it does not leave enough: “Charlotte has ‘exerted’ herself, but in a way that leaves no scope for the exertion of others in her behalf, for ‘chance’ to bring her something better. She has not trusted in Providence” (Ross 182).

One very important responsibility that an individual has is to live in a way that promotes the good of self and others. As we have seen in previous chapters, Austen’s prayers are infused with a concern for how one’s actions affect her “fellow-creatures,” as well as her own soul (*Minor Works* 453). If one’s daily actions ought to be subject to such scrutiny, it follows that one must also be circumspect in choosing her husband, whose daily companionship will be a constant influence on her actions. Such concern is in accord with Aristotelian as well as Christian ethics. Dougherty reminds us that “[i]f, as Aristotle suggests, this kind of relationship can not only improve self-knowledge but also virtue, then the most important relationships must never be left to chance, as Charlotte Lucas suggests, for not only one’s happiness, but also one’s future character is at stake” (63). Dougherty makes a very good point: can we imagine that Charlotte will be able to maintain her good character when she does not receive the moral encouragement from Mr. Collins that we know Elizabeth will receive from Darcy? Mr. Collins is a shallow, selfish, self-important man, and I find it nearly impossible to imagine that spending time with him will have a morally beneficial effect on Charlotte. Some readers

have optimistically suggested that Charlotte will improve Mr. Collins.<sup>4</sup> However, I think we ought to share Koppel's concerns: "[S]ince in Jane Austen's fiction human character is always in process, what could be in store for Charlotte Lucas other than continued deterioration?" (15). Charlotte's fault is not, as Nardin has claimed, that she lacks integrity and betrays her conscience (51). Her choice of Mr. Collins is in good accord with the principles she has already stated in the passage above. Rather, the problem is that Charlotte does not feel that a marriage to Mr. Collins goes against her conscience in the first place.

While my objections to Mr. Collins may seem somewhat harsh, we need to remember that mere foolishness is not the least of his failings. If he were merely silly, there would be less harm in him.<sup>5</sup> But the truth is that Mr. Collins is selfish and proud, ready to parade his own advantages in the hopes of inciting awe and jealousy in others. In the pursuit of his own desires, he is insensitive to the needs of others; he judges their failings without understanding or charity. He possesses many of the same flaws that so strongly disqualified Darcy at the beginning of the novel, without any of the corresponding virtues of justice, humility, and charity which ultimately aid in the hero's reform. In terms of mind and character, he brings very little of benefit to the match, and

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<sup>4</sup> Giffin writes, "This reader, at least, can imagine Mr Collins will be given a benefice within Mr Darcy's patronage, so that Charlotte can be near her dear friend Elizabeth. Secure in such a living, with a patron and patroness such as Darcy and Elizabeth—and with a wife such as Charlotte—Mr Collins will undoubtedly become a less obsequious character" (124). However, *this* reader and her dissertation director both agree that we cannot imagine Darcy offering a church living to someone with Mr. Collins's shallow morals. Surely the man who recognizes that "Mr. Wickham ought not to be a clergyman" sees that Mr. Collins is likewise ill-suited to lead the souls of others (223).

<sup>5</sup> Sir James Martin as portrayed in Whit Stillman's film *Love and Friendship* comes to mind as an example of a man who is foolish without being selfish or malicious. While his stupidity is such that it is completely understandable that Frederica Vernon would not wish to marry him, his heart seems generous.

hence I find it impossible to agree with Giffin that “Charlotte has much to teach Elizabeth about the role of necessity and pragmatism, and the function of good management, in Georgian marriages” (98). Because of Charlotte’s pragmatism, her “good management” of her household will always have to begin by limiting the moral influence of her husband, just as she limits her contact with him in the home.

After all, Charlotte is well aware of Mr. Collins’s character flaws when she accepts him. While the feeling of being in love often can blind one to the faults of the beloved (as it did when Mr. Bennet chose his wife), no such heady emotions blind Charlotte with regard to Mr. Collins, for we are told, “The stupidity with which he was favoured by nature, must guard his courtship from any charm that could make a woman wish for its continuance; and Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained” (137). There is irony in the words “pure and disinterested desire.” The phrase is a parody of what we expect pure and disinterested desire ought to be in the case of a marriage, the pure and disinterested love for the other person. But Austen includes this line directly after making it very clear that Mr. Collins is not someone who is very lovable for himself. So the lady who marries him must hope to gain something else from the marriage, since he brings little to it in terms of character and companionship. Austen allows us the following glimpse of Charlotte’s thoughts:

Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband.—Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony,

marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want.

(138)

The first few lines of the quotation are colored narrative, and they indicate that Charlotte herself fully recognizes that Mr. Collins is foolish, unpleasant, and self-deceived. Even so, none of his moral or intellectual shortcomings makes her any less determined to have him for her husband. For Charlotte, marriage is simply a means of gaining preservation. Even when she defends herself to Elizabeth, her words belie her: “Do you think it incredible that Mr. Collins should be able to procure any woman’s good opinion, because he was not so happy as to succeed with you?” (140). The fact is, Mr. Collins has not exactly procured Charlotte’s good opinion, either. She knows he is ridiculous and irksome. He is socially respectable, but not someone whose company is enjoyable. What has really won Charlotte’s approval is the idea of the comfortable lifestyle that he can offer her, but not even that can improve Mr. Collins as a companion.

Of course, discerning where virtuous prudence ends and mercenary selfishness begins is truly a challenge. Stokes points out that while Austen acknowledges the foolishness of marrying without being sure of a sufficient income for a family, prudence is nonetheless a “dubious virtue,” and “the line between *prudence* and unscrupulous self-interest in this matter [of marriage] emerges as a fine one in [*Pride and Prejudice*]” (139-40). Ruderman further articulates the problem thus: “[P]rudence is, on the one hand, *not* selfish or mercenary, and yet, on the other, . . . in being directed toward

individual happiness it cannot be free of self-concern” (77). It seems that if Charlotte’s choice is wrong, this is so not merely because she has her own wellbeing and happiness in mind. If anything, Charlotte does not demonstrate *enough* self-concern, both for her own virtue and for the happiness that comes from it. Her lack of romantic attraction for Mr. Collins does not seem to be the main objection to the match. The real problem is his lack of good moral character. I would suggest it is not entirely wrong to see Mr. Collins as the means to a comfortable lifestyle. Koppel asserts, perhaps a bit harshly, that “[m]orally, [Charlotte] is habitually guilty of the great sin (according to the Bible, to Kant, to Buber, and to many others) of using human beings as objects” (15). Yet even the Christian and the Kantian, for instance, would agree that, practically speaking, we do often treat others as means to certain ends; yet so long as we respect people as ends in themselves at the same time, there is no moral problem.<sup>6</sup> The danger for Charlotte is that, given Mr. Collins’s weak moral character, it will be a continual struggle to respect him as a husband who is worthy for himself, aside from the home he can provide.

While Austen remains sympathetic to Charlotte’s plight as a woman with limited marriage prospects, she nevertheless indicates that Charlotte’s philosophy is as much responsible as the rules of her society for keeping her from the fullest happiness possible. Elizabeth immediately recognizes the trade her friend has made, for she says to Jane, “You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and

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<sup>6</sup> Ruderman argues, “The friendship between them begins in utility, but they both have reliable virtues—Charlotte’s ‘prudent, steady character’ and Mr. Collins’s ‘respectability’—that make it likely to last” (76). I find the claim unconvincing. Their marriage—it seems a great stretch to call it friendship—certainly will last in the sense that it is highly unlikely they would separate or divorce even if they grew to despise each other. Yet even such permanence is not a guarantee of rational happiness and companionship.

insensibility of danger, security for happiness” (154). Elizabeth seems a bit too strong in condemning Charlotte’s actions as selfishness. However, she is correct to point out that feeling insensible or untroubled by financial hardships is not the same thing as being secure of real happiness. These are two types of good that cannot be equated: while both are desirable, the former is not a substitute for the latter. Charlotte has found a way to be safe from the evils of poverty but such safety, in itself, does not ensure that she will likewise be intellectually, spiritually, or emotionally fulfilled in the degree comprehended by the idea of true happiness. Conversely, of course, it is difficult to imagine full earthly happiness existing in the absence of financial and physical safety—indeed, Austen suggests these are prerequisites to happiness. But what troubles Elizabeth is the fact that she believes Charlotte has obtained such safety for herself by a marriage that precludes her from experiencing complete earthly happiness. In other words, Charlotte is pitiable because she has knowingly denied herself the opportunity to achieve the higher good: she “loses the opportunity to fulfill herself in life’s most important relationship through the love—the unique intimacy of passion and friendship—which is at the heart of a good marriage” (Koppel 15). For Elizabeth, who is more philosophical than her pragmatic, unromantic friend, such a choice is an irrational sacrifice of both “principle and integrity.”

While her desire for preservation is human and understandable, we are meant to see that Charlotte sacrifices an intrinsic good—companionate happiness—for an instrumental one. Certainly there is a problem with a society that leaves her no other options, but another half of the problem lies with her own understanding of human

happiness: she does not believe that she can actually predict her chances of happiness with another person, so she does not try to find a mate with good character. Her options truly are limited, but we (like Elizabeth) would respect her more if she had a higher, less fatalistic idea of human happiness. Her low opinion of marriage seems to go hand in hand with a low opinion of virtue. She says, “I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state” (140-1). Given that Charlotte does make something good (though not the highest possible good) of her marriage to Mr. Collins, it does not seem that Austen means to suggest that every marriage must be founded on romantic sentiments. However, Charlotte has low standards (relatively speaking) for Mr. Collins’s character and her possible happiness. No, he will not be unfaithful or abandon her, but he will not truly edify her, either.<sup>7</sup> It is undoubtably true that Mr. Collins’s poor character does cause inconvenience and unpleasantness for his wife, in ways that are completely predictable: he is unpleasant as a husband for precisely the same reasons he is unpleasant as an acquaintance or a suitor. However, once he is a husband, his society is far less easy to escape.

Ultimately, I do not think Austen condemns Charlotte’s choice as truly wicked—certainly not to the degree that some of her critics have done. But Austen shows that

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<sup>7</sup> In her entertaining overview of various modern sequels to Austen’s novels, Kathleen Glancy argues, “I must deplore a subplot that has Mr. Collins found in a compromising position and a haystack with the local Scarlet Woman. Mr. Collins so firmly believes himself to be a good husband that at least in such matters as fidelity, sobriety and refraining from wife-beating he *is* a good husband” (113). While a good husband must have the qualities enumerated, Glancy’s humorous implication is that Mr. Collins is a good husband in a rather limited sense only.

Charlotte really has gained only a secondary good. She may be “happy”—that is, content, in a way that is not to be dismissed. However, it is equally clear, I think, that we would never confuse the safety and contentment that Charlotte has with the real fulfillment that Jane and Elizabeth achieve. For instance, when Elizabeth declares her friend “perfectly happy,” we know the statement is a figure of speech; she is not describing the perfect happiness she (or we readers) wants for herself and her sister (200). Charlotte’s own moral growth will most likely suffer if she has to spend her life with a selfish and self-righteous man, no matter how good she is herself. Austen wants her heroines not merely to survive, but to thrive; she is concerned with how to live, not just a good life, but the best life. Maybe it is not possible for every woman to meet a Darcy; some may have to make do with a Collins. But Austen instructs us in what we ought to desire by showing the ideal marriages of her heroines.<sup>8</sup>



Because loving human relationships are the highest good, it naturally follows that true happiness has reference to the good of others and therefore must be shared to be fully enjoyed. As I shall demonstrate in this section, throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, we repeatedly find that the weaker characters seek happiness in a self-centered and ungenerous way, whereas the good characters always wish to include others in their happiness. This concept of shared happiness has important implications for how we understand Austen’s individualism.

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<sup>8</sup> In her dissertation conclusion, Schubert discusses how, with *Emma*, emotional participation in the characters’ happiness teaches the reader to desire the goods achieved by the characters (291-8).

Readers who see Austen as a progressive in her social and political views tend to emphasize the individualist concepts inherent in her work. For instance, Johnson locates the novel's liberalism in its distinctively individualist principles: "In marked contrast to counterrevolutionary literature, *Pride and Prejudice* is a passionate novel which vindicates personal happiness as a liberal moral category, rescuing it from the suspicion into which it had fallen" (77-8). Poovey also recognizes individualist elements in the novel, though she ultimately finds them at odds with other aspects of Austen's conservative ideology, arguing that "the private sphere, though it is the location and source of the greatest fulfillment Austen can imagine, nourishes the subjectivity that is potentially fatal to the claims of other people, to morality, and, implicitly, to society itself" (238). Polhemus also sees *Pride and Prejudice* as an important example of the "growth of individualism and the emergence of romantic love as the heart of private life and a popular expression of faith" (54). Not surprisingly, in an ethics that privileges individual fulfillment, love is a powerful motivation and reward. Thus, such critics have been convinced by Austen's vision of reform and happiness only to the extent to which they accept her portrayal of love, particularly romantic love. Poovey suggests that the very individualistic nature of love is what prevents it, "in the absence of institutions," from improving society in any appreciable way, claiming that "it is crucial to recognize that the moral regeneration ideally promised by romantic love is as individual and as private as its agent" (238, 236). Suzie Gibson also expresses serious doubt over love's power for reform: "Although love heals conflict in Austen's novels, once it is contained and settled within the institution of marriage, the question of whether it will continue to

operate as a curative agent remains uncertain” (30). These objections ought to be taken seriously, for if we cannot imagine lasting good to come from the romantic love of Jane and Bingley or Elizabeth and Darcy, the novel’s happy ending loses much of its meaning.

I wish to suggest that these concerns about the effectiveness of romantic love are mitigated if we understand Austen’s individualism in the context of her Christian faith. In this way, my reading goes counter to that of Polhemus, who suggests that *Pride and Prejudice* is one in a line of English novels revealing a cultural trend to replace religious faith with the secular, “erotic faith” of romantic love. With perhaps more irony than intended, Polhemus dismisses Austen’s romantic and seemingly also her religious experience as somehow deficient, claiming, “In her attitude toward love, Jane Austen seems at times like some nominal Anglican who understands Christianity and believes in its doctrine, morality, and influence, but cannot feel, herself, the mystical stab of faith” (53). While I find that Polhemus ultimately misunderstands Austen’s faith in matters both religious and romantic, I think he is right to couple the two when it comes to Austen. Only if we understand the power she finds in Christian love can we trust in the power she attributes to romantic love. Surely Austen does champion a type of individualism regarding her characters’ pursuit of happiness. However, it is a characteristically Christian individualism: each individual’s actions and desires matter because each person must have a care for the state of her own soul. The individual’s wellbeing—most importantly, her salvation—is valued as a goal. However, the good of one’s own soul necessarily involves the good of others, too. Romantic love, as Austen portrays it, is an expression of charity; and this virtue, insofar as it provides a universal

standard of unselfish love, overcomes the inherent selfishness of pure individualism. Kelly has recently written, with perhaps more bluntness than originality, that Austen's position in this novel is "Society be damned; Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship has nothing to do with anyone else" (148). But in fact Austen shows that Darcy and the elder Miss Bennets are very concerned with how their romantic relationships affect their society, beginning with those loved ones who are their closest associates. Of course, success or failure to reform are truly individualized, and marriage, by itself, does not guarantee that romantic sentiment will last. However, the factors that determine whether love really does change a person are quite universal: the virtues, highest of which is charity, remain the same regardless of the person. Where there exists real virtue, we can be confident of seeing lasting improvement.<sup>9</sup>

In previous chapters, we have already seen examples of how Austen's prayers are concerned with how one's actions affect those around her. Her petitions for humility and candor aim as much at the edification of others as they do at the improvement of the self. Not surprisingly, her prayers clearly imply that one's individual happiness is interconnected with the happiness of others. The third prayer indicates Austen believed there is continuity between earthly and heavenly happiness: "Give us grace to endeavour after a truly Christian spirit to seek to attain that temper of forbearance and patience of which our blessed saviour has set us the highest example; and which, while it prepares us for the spiritual happiness of the life to come, will secure to us the best enjoyment of

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<sup>9</sup> Poovey points to Henry Crawford as an example of a character whose love seems capable of producing the same reform we see in some of Austen's other lovers (236). However, if we consider his habitual failure to practice the virtues throughout the narrative, his failed reformation is neither a surprise nor a mystery.

what this world can give” (*Minor Works* 456). The idea that even during life, one’s deeds are rewarded (or punished) derives from the Anglican belief in natural law, a moral order which governs all workings of created nature (White, *Jane Austen’s Anglicanism* 79-83). The words of the prayer show that the same “temper”—the attitude or disposition—that will secure heavenly happiness will likewise promote happiness on earth.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the same prayer makes it clear that human happiness, both earthly and eternal, is found in community with others.<sup>11</sup> The third prayer concludes with a petition on behalf of loved ones:

More particularly do we pray for the safety and welfare of our own family and friends wheresoever dispersed, beseeching thee to avert from them all material and lasting evil of body or mind; and may we by the assistance of thy holy spirit so conduct ourselves on earth as to secure an eternity of happiness with each other in thy heavenly kingdom. (*Minor Works* 456-7).

This passage begins in a wish for friends’ earthly wellbeing and culminates in a wish for perfect happiness with them in heaven. Not only do we see that a desire for friends’ good encompasses both the temporal and eternal, but the ultimate goal for the Christian is happiness shared “with each other.” Given the continuity between earth and heaven, it

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<sup>10</sup> This prayer is in keeping with orthodox Christian teaching Austen would have received in church and in her reading of sermons. For instance, Hugh Blair’s sermon “On the Happiness of a Future State” argues that from the Biblical images of heavenly happiness, one learns “to look for [happiness], not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart; in good dispositions and a purified soul; in unity and friendship with one another, and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principle articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence; and he who seeks his chief enjoyment from an opposite quarter, errs widely from the path which conducts to felicity” (272).

<sup>11</sup> Regarding the happiness of those in heaven, Blair likewise teaches, “Each, happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and by reciprocal communications of love and friendship, at once receives from and adds to the sum of general felicity” (“On the Happiness” 252).

follows that even on earth, the fullest human happiness is tied closely to relationships; such happiness is found in friendship and love, and is supported by material blessings.

This understanding of happiness extends to Austen's fiction, for we find that the characters who are the most truly happy are also those who have the same generous attitude expressed in the prayers. The prayers ask blessings for others as well as for the self, and Austen's best characters likewise want their blessings to be shared with those they love. We have only to turn to the ending of *Sense and Sensibility* to see especially clearly how important the idea of shared happiness is for Austen. She describes the married lives of her two heroines thus:

Between Barton and Delaford, there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate;—and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands. (413)

As she describes the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, she draws a picture of happiness that is increased—rather than diminished—by intimacy between the sisters and their respective husbands. By contrast, we are told that the antagonists' lack of happiness is proven by their mutual quarreling:

They settled in town, received very liberal assistance from Mrs. Ferrars, were on the best terms imaginable with the Dashwoods; and setting aside the jealousies and ill-will continually subsisting between Fanny and Lucy,

in which their husbands of course took a part, as well as the frequent domestic disagreements between Robert and Lucy themselves, nothing could exceed the harmony in which they all lived together. (428)

The monetary generosity of Mrs. Ferrars draws our attention to the utter lack of generosity of any other sort among her family. Fanny's and Lucy's jealousy and ill-will are exactly the opposite of the Dashwood girls' sisterly love, as well as the opposite of the charity expressed in Austen's prayers.<sup>12</sup> The ironic avowal of "harmony" further emphasizes the reason for the characters' lack of happiness: none of these people knows how to live well with others.

If we consider the passages addressing happiness in *Pride and Prejudice*, we find a similar divide in attitude between the good and the weak characters. Elizabeth and Jane, like the Dashwood girls, have a generous view of happiness: they wish happiness for others and their own happiness is increased by knowing that others can share in it. On the other hand, the morally weak characters treat happiness as a limited commodity that they wish to keep for themselves. Though *Pride and Prejudice* does not dramatize blatant "jealousies and ill-will" among the characters, the same petty selfishness that predominates in the unhappy Ferrars household is still readily apparent in characters such as Lydia, Mrs. Bennet, and Mr. Collins.

Lydia is perhaps the most extreme example of a character whose idea of happiness is self-centered. As noted earlier, for her, happiness is pleasure, and the

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<sup>12</sup> Austen makes the same distinction between selfish and generous happiness in *Persuasion*: "Very, very happy were both Elizabeth and Anne Elliot as they walked in. . . . [B]ut it would be an insult to the nature of Anne's felicity, to draw any comparison between it and her sister's; the origin of one all selfish vanity, of the other all generous attachment" (185). As Ruderman points out, "such a contrast is always implied in the novels" (7).

pleasure that matters most is her own. Her behavior upon being invited to Brighton shows this second fact clearly:

Wholly inattentive to her sister's feelings, Lydia flew about the house in restless ecstasy, calling for every one's congratulations, and laughing and talking with more violence than ever; whilst the luckless Kitty continued in the parlour repining at her fate in terms as unreasonable as her accent was peevish. (255)

While Lydia and Kitty were formerly united in lamenting the departure of the militia regiment, Lydia has forgotten all sisterly solidarity in her excitement. All she can think of is her own good fortune, and in her selfishness, she does not care if her raptures exacerbate Kitty's disappointment. Kitty is equally self-centered as her sister, focusing on her own disappointment rather than being glad for Lydia's sake. We can easily imagine that if their situations were reversed, each would act as the other is now doing. Neither of them is in the habit of partaking of each other's joys or sorrows in the way we see Jane and Elizabeth do.

Indeed, Elizabeth's response to receiving her own invitation for a holiday makes a stark contrast to Lydia's behavior. Elizabeth anticipates her trip with the Gardiners thus: "Her tour to the Lakes was now the object of her happiest thoughts; it was her best consolation for all the uncomfortable hours, which the discontentedness of her mother and Kitty made inevitable; and could she have included Jane in the scheme, every part of it would have been perfect" (263). It is telling that while Kitty and Mrs. Bennet fail to participate in the happiness of others (in this instance, Lydia with her visit to Brighton),

they easily manage to spread their own unhappiness to the rest of the family. Yet even while anticipating the relief of an escape from home, Elizabeth's imaginings are not centered solely on herself. While Lydia's happiness was not lessened by the exclusion of Kitty from the trip to Brighton—if anything, we may in fact imagine Lydia happier at not having an elder sister at her side to compete for the attention of beaux—Elizabeth is truly disappointed that she cannot bring Jane to share in the pleasure of a sightseeing tour. Though we are not told of Jane's feelings in this instance, we can have no doubt that her foremost sentiment must be happiness for Elizabeth's sake.

Lydia's self-centered happiness closely resembles the happiness experienced and expressed by Mrs. Bennet (who is herself surely the source of Lydia's own learned and inherited habits). Mrs. Bennet tends to speak of happiness as if it were a commodity to be owned by one person or another, but not shared. At the Netherfield ball, when Mrs. Bennet is rejoicing in the marriage she expects to take place between Jane and Bingley, we are told, "She concluded with many good wishes that Lady Lucas might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it" (111). Mrs. Bennet, whose life's "business ... [is] to get her daughters married," is competing with Lady Lucas for the distinction of finding her daughter a wealthy husband (5). For Mrs. Bennet, the marriage will be a mark of her superiority and merit as Jane's mother. When she wishes Lady Lucas the same fortune, her words are actually expressing her pleasure in feeling superior for possessing a blessing that her friend does not. Her insincerity further suggests that she is, in fact, willing that Lady Lucas's daughters never achieve such good fortune, since a married Lucas girl would deprive Mrs. Bennet of the

sense of superiority she currently enjoys. Her happiness is selfish, for she means to keep it all to herself; she displays no sense that a marriage for one of Lady Lucas's daughters would be an added source of happiness for everyone connected to the Lucases, including herself.

Luckily, in the case of Bingley and Jane, Mrs. Bennet's selfish interest in the match does not run contrary to the happiness of the couple. However, when Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, Mrs. Bennet's own wishes make her entirely senseless of her daughter's own desires. Mrs. Bennet only thinks of the situation with regard to how it harms or benefits herself: she worries about losing Longbourn to the entail, and a marriage between Elizabeth and Mr. Collins would ensure that she could always remain in her family home. Her self-centered way of thinking prevents her from understanding or even imagining that Elizabeth's happiness is distinct from her own. She does not consider that a marriage to Mr. Collins might not, in fact, be pleasing or beneficial to her daughter. Once again, her failure of imagination is likewise a failure in charity, just as when she failed to imagine that Darcy may not talk at parties simply because he prefers silence to constant chatter (as discussed in chapter two). In both these instances, Mrs. Bennet reacts unkindly to others in part because she cannot imagine how their needs or feelings in a given situation would differ from her own. "Lizzy shall be brought to reason," she insists when first learning of her daughter's refusal, "She is a very headstrong foolish girl, and does not know her own interest; but I will *make* her know it" (123). In her mind, Elizabeth refuses merely from petulance, while Mrs. Bennet's own understanding of the situation represents the only right reason. Later, Mrs. Bennet even pleads with Charlotte

to persuade Elizabeth to accept, “for nobody is on my side, nobody takes part with me, I am cruelly used, nobody feels for my poor nerves” (126). Her words make it clear that she privileges her own “side”—her own wants and needs—to the exclusion of all other sides.

When Lady Lucas’s daughter Charlotte becomes engaged to Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet remains spiteful and begrudging in her expectations for the couple’s happiness. Already provoked by the fact that Elizabeth refused Mr. Collins, she is in no mood to see the daughter of her rival matron profit by the match. She tells her family that she “[trusts] that they never would be happy together; and . . . that the match might be broken off” (143). Such is a vindictive, selfish view: if she cannot have happiness (represented by a daughter married to the heir of Longbourn) for herself, she wishes no one else to enjoy the blessings she has been denied. Happiness, like the material possession of the estate, is something to be kept for oneself. Despite her hopes that the engagement will be ended, Mrs. Bennet eventually is forced to see Charlotte’s marriage as inevitable, yet even so she “repeatedly [says] in an ill-natured tone that she ‘*wished* they might be happy’” (165). Obviously she is wishing them just the opposite. Of course, Lady Lucas behaves no better, for we learn she

could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mrs. Bennet the comfort of having a daughter well married; and she called at Longbourn rather oftener than usual to say how happy she was, though Mrs. Bennet’s sour looks and ill-natured remarks might have been enough to drive happiness away. (144)

Focused as they are on outdoing one another, each woman tries to exclude the other from, rather than include her in, the happiness of having a daughter well married.

When her three daughters do finally get married, Mrs. Bennet is, of course, filled with happiness. Yet her happiness for them is limited by her characteristic focus on herself. It is telling that the joy she expresses on these occasions is only her own. “I am so happy!” she says each time one of her daughters—first Lydia, then Jane, and Elizabeth—is engaged (338, 386, 419). But not once does she explicitly rejoice in the happiness of each daughter on the occasion. While Mrs. Bennet does praise the merits of first Bingley and then Darcy, she does not truly enter into the happiness her two eldest daughters feel upon their respective engagements. She focuses on the wealth and good looks of the young men, the qualities that she finds most appealing, but she gives no sense of appreciating what her daughters value most in their future spouses: good character, intelligent companionship, and a loving disposition. In other words, Mrs. Bennet’s happiness in the situation is limited by what she herself is able to appreciate: she can only imagine what would make herself happy, not what would make her daughters happy. As a result, the happiness she sees for them is mostly a projection of her own happiness, rather than a participation in their happiness.

Mr. Bennet, on the other hand, does show himself capable of comprehending and sharing the happiness of his daughters. He supports Elizabeth’s refusal of Mr. Collins, and clearly cares that both she and Jane find respect and companionship in marriage. After giving his consent to Mr. Bingley, he tells Jane, “You are a good girl; . . . and I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of your doing

very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike” (386). His expectation of Jane’s happiness is rational, based on how well she and Bingley suit one another, and her happiness is the chief cause of his own. Later, his only objection to Darcy’s suit is his fear for Elizabeth’s happiness, for he cautions her, “I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband. . . My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life” (418). Mr. Bennet is truly able to participate Elizabeth’s happiness, yet his reference to his own conjugal unhappiness draws our attention back to his own weaknesses.

Examining Mr. Bennet’s relationship to his wife, we can see that his unhappiness correlates to his failure to understand and participate in Mrs. Bennet’s happiness. The opening scene of the novel presents us with an image of spouses at odds, as Mr. Bennet persists in evading and denying his wife’s request that he call on Mr. Bingley. She protests at last,

“Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way?

You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.”

“You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves.

They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.”

“Ah! you do not know what I suffer.”

“But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.” (5)

While Mrs. Bennet may not always understand the subtleties of her husband's sarcasm, she is aware that he often laughs at the expense of her and their daughters. Mr. Bennet protests that he has "high respect" for his wife's nerves, though he puns on the way that respect can mean "deferential regard or esteem" as well as simply "notice". Mr. Bennet intends his wife to understand the word in the former sense, though he takes private amusement from the latter meaning. Mrs. Bennet's rejoinder that he does not understand her suffering is comical, but accurate: Mr. Bennet does not make an effort to understand his wife's feelings. He dismisses them as foolish, without attempting to see what is of real significance beneath her hyperbolic complaints. "I hope you get over it," he says, suggesting that he believes there is nothing here truly worth troubling over, despite the fact that Mrs. Bennet would be justifiably frustrated if her husband were really (as he pretends) unwilling to make sure his daughters can be introduced to their wealthy and eligible new neighbor. While it turns out that Mr. Bennet does not intend permanently to refuse his wife's request, it is evident throughout the entire conversation that he sacrifices her immediate happiness to his own amusement. Rather than taking happiness in her pleasure by agreeing to her request, he takes what pleasure he can in "vexing" her.

Of course, the problem is not one-sided: Mr. Bennet does not share in his wife's thoughts and feelings because she is incapable of understanding him. Austen contrasts the two of them thus: "Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (5). The

fundamental problem seems to be that they are very unlike in temperament and education. But rather than working to make their differences complement one another, they have allowed these differences to divide them. He dismisses her as shallow and foolish, and she dismisses him as inscrutable. The problem, as Wendy Jones identifies, is a failure of empathy: “Rather than helping his foolish wife to develop whatever potential she might have, [Mr. Bennet] retreats to sarcasm. . . . As a result, [Mrs. Bennet] remains as silly as ever, learning only to ignore a husband she can’t understand and who doesn’t empathize with her” (xvi). The lack of empathy, of course, goes both ways.

While Austen suggests that the defects of Mrs. Bennet’s character and habit are too settled to be improved much at this point in her life, it is nonetheless clear that Mr. Bennet’s own habit of detachment does more harm than good. Elizabeth is aware that her father enacts “a continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible” (262-3); his “talents . . . rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife” (263). Austen implies that he should have tried to improve Mrs. Bennet. Whether or not she was capable of education herself, treating his wife with real consideration and charity would have provided a model of virtue and restraint for his daughters. Through Mr. Bennet’s failings as a father, Austen suggests that selfishness harms both the happiness of oneself and the happiness of others. If he had better educated his daughters, he would find the company of his family more pleasant, Jane and Elizabeth would not suffer from their younger siblings’ lack of propriety, and the youngest girls themselves would be capable of enjoying a more rational

and lasting form of happiness. However, by placing his temporary amusement ahead of his family's good, he has injured their chances for happiness.

Selfish understandings of happiness are not limited to the immediate Bennet family, however. Mr. Collins likewise is concerned mainly with his own happiness, to the exclusion of other's wishes and needs. His selfishness is especially evident during his proposal to Elizabeth. As he enumerates the reasons he wishes to marry, he claims, "I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness" (118). However, never once during his lengthy proposal does he explicitly address how Elizabeth's own happiness would be affected by the match. He is confident that any woman would be grateful and happy to receive the benefits he offers: his own excellent self plus the patronage of Lady Catherine and the future inheritance of Longbourn. However, his assumption that he is a desirable match relies mainly on his own high estimation of himself, rather than on the imaginative exercise of seeing himself from Elizabeth's perspective. His complete failure to believe or understand her refusal shows that he is incapable of transcending his own self-centered perspective: he simply cannot see that there is anything about himself or his manners that would be unappealing to a young woman. Indeed, when Elizabeth does first refuse him, he says he believes "that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour" (120). By insisting upon his interpretation of her refusal, he denies that she can mean or want anything contrary to his wishes. In essence, he asserts that what makes him happy must also make her happy. Of course, there is no way for him actually to share in Elizabeth's happiness if he is blind to her feelings, substituting his own desires for hers.

In contrast, Elizabeth recognizes that both her own and Mr. Collins's happiness requires consideration. "You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so," she says (120). The former claim—that a marriage to Mr. Collins would not make Elizabeth happy—is certainly sufficient ground for her refusal. However, Elizabeth demonstrates that, unlike Mr. Collins, she takes into account the wishes of others: a marriage to Mr. Collins would not only injure her own happiness, but his as well.

Mr. Collins only drops his suit when he begins to worry that Elizabeth will not conform to his expectations for a wife. After his failed interview with Elizabeth, Mrs. Bennet assures Mr. Collins that she will convince Elizabeth to accept him. However, he protests:

[I]f she is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether she would altogether be a very desirable wife to a man in my situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage state. If therefore she actually persists in rejecting my suit, perhaps it were better not to force her into accepting me, because if liable to such defects of temper, she could not contribute much to my felicity. (123-4)

His response is truly preposterous. Not only does he imply that he is somehow unique or privileged in hoping for happiness in a marriage, but he insists that his own happiness is of prime importance. Elizabeth's refusal is framed merely as a defect of her character, rather than as the choice of a rational, independent person. He faults her for not being able to make him happy, yet in no way does he acknowledge that if he were her husband,

he would have an equal responsibility to contribute to her happiness. Certainly he does not consider the fact that if he cannot be sure of adding to her happiness, he would not make a good spouse for *her*.

Eventually Mr. Collins does find a wife in Charlotte, “one of the very few sensible women who would . . . have made him happy,” as Elizabeth puts it (200). While he is not self-aware enough to recognize how truly blessed he is in his wife, Charlotte does appear to fulfill his expectations for a spouse. However, like Mrs. Bennet and Lady Lucas, Mr. Collins enjoys using his own good fortune as a sign of his superiority to others. At the conclusion of Elizabeth’s visit to Hunsford, Mr. Collins tells her:

[A]ltogether I trust it does not appear that your friend has drawn an unfortunate—but on this point it will be as well to be silent. Only let me assure you, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that I can from my heart most cordially wish you equal felicity in marriage. My dear Charlotte and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in every thing a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us. We seem to have been designed for each other. (239)

His use of *praeteritio* is hardly subtle, clearly emphasizing Charlotte’s very good marriage even as he falsely pretends to be too good-natured to remind Elizabeth of what she has forfeited herself. When he claims that he and Charlotte are of “one mind,” he reminds Elizabeth that she failed to agree with him when she refused him; in contrast, he asserts that he and Charlotte think so much alike that they are “designed”—that is, intended—for each other, a claim that offers an insult to Elizabeth by suggesting that it

was in fact the design of Providence that she failed to become Mr. Collins' wife because Charlotte was meant for that role instead. He concludes his speech by wishing Elizabeth "equal felicity in marriage," but his real aim is to incite jealousy and regret by making her think of the happy marriage she could now be enjoying if she had accepted Mr. Collins. In his speech, he uses the conventional language of wishing to share happiness with others, but his real motives belie his words: he no more intends that his happiness should gladden Elizabeth than he really intends to be happy if she finds a good husband. His own happiness is increased, not by knowing his blessings are shared by others, but by knowing he possesses what others do not.

Indeed, it is no surprise that when rumor reaches him that Elizabeth is engaged to Darcy, Mr. Collins responds in a way that shows he has his own well-being, rather than Elizabeth's, foremost in his mind. While acknowledging that Mr. Darcy is "blessed in a peculiar way, with every thing the heart of mortal can most desire,—splendid property, noble kindred, and extensive patronage"—Mr. Collins warns Elizabeth not to marry him because he has "reason to imagine that [Darcy's] aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, does not look on the match with a friendly eye" (402). His priorities are telling. First, he assumes that Elizabeth is interested in Darcy for his wealth and power, rather than for his character. Second, he takes Lady Catherine's side because she is his own patroness; not only does he wish to remain in her good graces, but one can easily imagine that when Lady Catherine is out of humor, she is less giving. Furthermore, it is likely that Mr. Collins would feel cheated of his superiority to Elizabeth if, after she refused to become Mrs. Collins, she was not doomed to spinsterhood but became Mrs. Darcy, a lady

undeniably more grand according to Mr. Collins's own materialistic standards. Though he says he wishes to warn Elizabeth and her father of "what evils you may incur" by the acceptance of Darcy's offer, it is clear Mr. Collins never has spent much time considering what truly would or would not contribute to Elizabeth's happiness. Even Mr. Bennet recognizes his cousin's self interest, for when he later responds to Mr. Collins' letter with confirmation of Elizabeth's engagement, Mr. Bennet writes, "Console Lady Catherine as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give" (424).

Unlike the morally weak characters in the novel who seek happiness only for themselves, Austen's good characters consider happiness a blessing to be shared. Jane offers perhaps the most obvious example of such generous happiness, for she is always considering the needs of others, and she readily and sincerely wishes them happiness without holding grudges. For instance, one could imagine that a sense of sisterly injury might prompt a less generous person to hope that Mr. Collins be punished by an unhappy marriage for his tactless proposal to Elizabeth; yet Jane is incapable of such vindictiveness. While the rest of her family is astonished by the news of Charlotte's swift engagement, Jane "[says] less of her astonishment than of her earnest desire for their happiness" (143). Unlike her mother, who takes a peevish satisfaction from hoping that the marriage will be unhappy, Jane really believes that Mr. Collins's "respectability" and Charlotte's "prudent, steady character" will promote a happy union, and she begs Elizabeth not to think poorly of Charlotte's judgment, for "such feelings as these . . . will ruin *your* happiness" (153, italics mine). Jane is equally generous in her hopes for Lydia.

It would be completely understandable for any of Lydia's sisters to be frustrated that her scandalous elopement has hurt the other girls' chances of making a respectable marriage and therefore to hope Lydia's selfish misconduct is punished by an unhappy match.

Nonetheless, Jane can earnestly say, "I hope and trust they will yet be happy. His consenting to marry her is a proof, I will believe, that he is come to a right way of thinking" (336). Her interjection, "I will believe," emphasizes that her positive outlook is a conscious choice, the same kind of choice she had urged Elizabeth to make in regards to Charlotte. Taken together, these two passages indicate that one's own happiness, far from being increased by wishing ill on others, is in fact promoted by wishing that others may be happy.

Jane also takes happiness from knowing that others are equally interested in her own happiness and wellbeing. After her greatest disappointment in the novel—the discovery that her friendship with Caroline Bingley is over, and with it, any hope of Mr. Bingley's courtship—Jane's main source of comfort is the love of her family. On the occasion, she writes to Elizabeth, "But I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make me happy, your affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear uncle and aunt" (168). For Jane, happiness is intrinsically related to love. After all, her wishes that Charlotte and Lydia be happy are an expression of her charity. And even in at her most discouraged, she knows that her own happiness will be soonest recovered when she focuses on the love she receives from Elizabeth and the Gardiners.

Naturally, when Jane herself is happy, her wish is to share that happiness with others, especially those dearest to her. Immediately after receiving Bingley's proposal of

marriage, Jane declares herself “the happiest creature in the world;” yet such is not a joy that she wants to hoard to herself, for she adds, “’Tis too much! . . . by far too much. I do not deserve it. Oh! why is not every body as happy?” (384). Knowing her mother’s concern for her daughters’ welfare, Jane hastens to share the good news with Mrs. Bennet, exclaiming, “Oh! Lizzy, to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!” (384). Her words “dear family” locate the cause of her multiplied joy in the love she already bears for her parents and sisters: her affection for them is the root of her interest in their happiness. Later that evening, Jane says to Elizabeth,

“Oh! Lizzy, why am I thus singled from my family, and blessed above them all! If I could but see *you* as happy! If there *were* but such another man for you!”

“If you were to give me forty such men, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness.” (388)

Once again, Jane’s response to her happiness is to wish that others may experience the same blessing in their own lives. She also repeats her earlier claim that she does not deserve to be made so much more happy than others. Her generous, loving disposition is clearly revealed by the way that she does not consider her blessings to be a mark of her own great merit. That is, she does not take pride in her blessings as a sign of her superiority to others, as someone like Mr. Collins does. Rather, she sees her blessings as a true gift that she wishes to share. Elizabeth, in turn, recognizes that Jane’s goodness is

what allows her to feel her blessings so fully. Jane's wishes for shared happiness are ultimately fulfilled when Elizabeth finally becomes betrothed to Darcy. "Now I am quite happy," Jane tells her sister then, "for you will be as happy as myself" (415). Jane's love for her sister is such that her happiness is complete only when she knows that Elizabeth enjoys the same blessing, a worthy and loving husband.

Elizabeth's skepticism and wit make her less effusive about her hopes for happiness where she sees little chance for others to find it. Nonetheless, like Jane she is fundamentally unselfish, for her happiness is intrinsically connected to the happiness of those she loves. For instance, Elizabeth readily participates in Jane's happiness. When Elizabeth is in need of consolation for her disappointed hopes of seeing Wickham at the Netherfield ball, she finds it helpful to consider Jane: "she turned her attention almost entirely on her sister and Mr. Bingley, and the train of agreeable reflections which her observations gave birth to, made her perhaps almost as happy as Jane. She saw her in idea settled in that very house in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection would bestow" (110). While the humor of "perhaps almost as happy" reminds us that a sister's good fortune in love is still an imperfect replacement for one's own romantic success, Austen's gentle irony nonetheless draws attention to the fact that Elizabeth does take true pleasure in knowing her sister is rightfully happy.

Furthermore, one of Elizabeth's greatest objections to Darcy's first proposal is that he destroyed Jane's chance for happiness. In response to Darcy's astonishment at being rejected, she replies, "Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would

tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?" (213). Jane's happiness is so essential to her own that Elizabeth cannot be happy married to a man who has injured her sister, regardless of how admirable he might be otherwise. True happiness, for Elizabeth, has reference to others' happiness, and it is a mark against Darcy if he can be careless with the happiness of others. If Darcy had remained responsible for separating Jane and Bingley forever, that thought would always poison Elizabeth against him; hence it is essential for Elizabeth's happiness that, before she accepts him as her husband, Darcy repair the damage and promote Bingley's marriage to Jane. Indeed, Darcy's actions in the final third of the novel prove that he has learned an other-oriented view of happiness. He rescues Lydia from infamy, thereby restoring peace of mind and respectability to Elizabeth, Jane, and all of their family. Next, by reuniting Jane and Bingley, he restores Jane's happiness, which is necessary for Elizabeth's happiness; in turn, Elizabeth's happiness is the source of Darcy's own happiness. Darcy is no longer the selfish suitor who asked for Elizabeth's hand while thinking and speaking mainly of himself. This time, he shows his selfless love by serving those whom Elizabeth loves most.

Darcy's care for Elizabeth's wellbeing reflects her own care for his. When their chance reunion at Pemberley causes Elizabeth to reevaluate her feelings for him, she lies awake reflecting that "she felt a real interest in his welfare; and she only wanted to know how far she wished that welfare to depend upon herself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that she should employ that power, which her fancy told her she still possessed, of bringing on the renewal of his addresses" (293). Such thoughtfulness is the

opposite of letting “fancy run away with [her],” the mistake which Mrs. Gardiner had cautioned against when Elizabeth had first been attracted to Wickham (163). Vanity and pleasure prompted that past flirtation, but this time she knows she must not encourage Darcy unless she is sure that such an attachment would be good for both of them. Her consideration of both her own and Darcy’s happiness indicates that she wants a husband whose happiness she can share, just as she shares it with her sister Jane. Furthermore, her real interest in Darcy’s welfare shows that she has matured in charity from the young woman who had amused herself with the thought that the “sickly and cross” Miss de Bourgh would “make [Mr. Darcy] a very proper wife” (180).

While Elizabeth and Darcy are the people whose happiness is most immediately at stake in the case of their marriage, Elizabeth also cares that her family approve her choice of husband. Before Darcy’s first proposal, her Aunt Gardiner warns Elizabeth of the imprudence of marrying Wickham, a man with little fortune. Although Elizabeth is reluctant to promise her aunt absolutely to resolve against him, she admits she “should be very sorry to be the means of making any of you unhappy” by accepting his suit (164). The reader may suspect that Elizabeth could have allowed her feelings to get the better of her reason if Wickham had pursued her more seriously. However, her reluctance to grieve her family appears sincere and, most importantly, it is consistent with her actions elsewhere. For instance, regarding Darcy’s application to Mr. Bennet for Elizabeth’s hand, we learn:

She did not fear her father’s opposition, but he was going to be made unhappy, and that it should be through her means, that *she*, his favourite

child, should be distressing him by her choice, should be filling him with fears and regrets in disposing of her, was a wretched reflection, and she sat in misery till Mr. Darcy appeared again. (417)

It is not merely the thought of making her father unhappy that upsets Elizabeth; she is wretched because she knows her father wants *her* happiness and that he will fear that a marriage to Darcy will ultimately make her unhappy. In other words, both father and daughter are most happy when they know the other is likewise happy; their mutual love gives each an interest in the other's happiness. We know that Elizabeth is now more mature than she was earlier, because she only risks upsetting her father since Darcy's true character justifies her choice. With Wickham, however, there seemed the danger that she might have disregarded her aunt's advice and made a financially imprudent marriage—a danger all the more likely since Elizabeth knew that her father was indeed "partial" to Wickham back then (164). Elizabeth finally gains her father's approval of Darcy after she has shared enough to convince Mr. Bennet that Darcy is a worthy and deserving man whom Elizabeth can love, respect, and be happy with. Austen tells us that "Elizabeth's mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight" once her father's fears are allayed (419).

Similarly, Elizabeth needs Jane to believe that Darcy is truly the man her sister loves. For though Elizabeth takes private happiness in Darcy's betrothal, her happiness is not complete without knowing that her family can also approve of her marriage. Of course, given Elizabeth and Darcy's history, Jane is initially concerned Darcy will not make Elizabeth happy. The elder Miss Bennet asks:

“My dear, dear Lizzy, I would—I do congratulate you—but are you certain? forgive the question—are you quite certain that you can be happy with him?”

“There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world. But are you pleased, Jane? Shall you like to have such a brother?”

“Very, very much. Nothing could give either Bingley or myself more delight. But we considered it, we talked of it as impossible. And do you really love him quite well enough? Oh, Lizzy! do any thing rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?” (414)

In this passage, each sister demonstrates that her own happiness cannot be complete without knowing the other shares it; their unselfish affection is such that neither could be fully happy if she knew that Elizabeth’s marriage would cause any present or future distress. Generous Jane has already believed in Darcy’s goodness for some time, for the sake of Bingley’s own friendship to Darcy and for the love Darcy has long had for Elizabeth. Jane only wishes to be sure that her sister is making this decision for the right reason. Once Jane is assured that her sister will be happy with Darcy, there is nothing to prevent her from feeling equally so.

After her immediate family, Elizabeth’s aunt and uncle Gardiner are the ones with whom she wants to share her happy news. She had previously been reluctant to write and disappoint them by revealing that she and Darcy were not so close as they had imagined.

But now that she is engaged, she has “*that* to communicate which she knew would be most welcome, [and] she was almost ashamed to find, that her uncle and aunt had already lost three days of happiness” (423-4). This line beautifully exemplifies the principle of generous, shared happiness. Elizabeth’s happiness makes the Gardiners happy, and she in turn is glad she can give them joy. Unlike characters such as Mrs. Bennet, Lady Lucas, and Mr. Collins (all of whom have trumpeted their own happiness in order to incite jealousy in those less blessed), Elizabeth tells her news because, by sharing it, she and those around her are all made more happy.

Because Austen repeatedly shows that her heroines consider the happiness of others, it is both important and instructive to consider the two instances in the novel when the heroines knowingly resolve to disregard the wishes of others. Early in the novel, Elizabeth urges Jane to dismiss the disapproval of Bingley’s sisters; later, Elizabeth herself is equally willing to disoblige Lady Catherine by accepting Darcy. Rather than contradicting the characters’ established generous understanding of happiness, these moments further affirm that the sisters wish to secure a happiness that can be shared. In other words, these passages do not amount to an individualist manifesto on the characters’ or the author’s part. Austen is not suggesting that individual happiness is of the prime moral importance, as Johnson suggests. Instead, these moments are further evidence that the characters are guided by the conservative and traditional ideal of Christian charity.

Not surprisingly, Jane appears more distressed by the idea of upsetting future in-laws than Elizabeth is. Yet while their different attitudes reflects their different

temperaments, it is not the case that Jane is simply more caring and charitable than her sister. Jane is more troubled by the idea of upsetting her future sister-in-laws because she struggles to imagine that their disapproval of her could stem from anything but an unselfish wish for their brother's welfare. When Elizabeth tries to convince Jane that Bingley's removal from Netherfield reflects only his sisters' meddling, not his indifference to Jane, Jane resists such an explanation: "Why should they try to influence him? They can only wish his happiness, and if he is attached to me, no other woman can secure it" (155). She imputes to Bingley's sisters the same unselfish love she feels for her own siblings, inferring that Caroline and Mrs. Hurst will share in his happiness if he truly loves Jane. Therefore if they are, instead, promoting a marriage to Miss Darcy (as Caroline's letter claims) then they must believe Bingley would be happier with her. Bearing in mind Jane's belief in his sisters' disinterested affection, we can easily understand the misgivings Jane had already expressed in a prior scene.

Before the conversation just quoted, Elizabeth had already argued that Caroline must be to blame for trying to separate Mr. Bingley from Jane in order to match him with Miss Darcy. Then Jane had protested:

"But, my dear sister, can I be happy, even supposing the best, in accepting a man whose sisters and friends are all wishing him to marry elsewhere?"

"You must decide for yourself," said Elizabeth, "and if upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disobliging his two sisters

is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife, I advise you by all means to refuse him.”

“How can you talk so?”—said Jane faintly smiling,—“you must know that though I should be exceedingly grieved at their disapprobation, I could not hesitate.” (134)

Elizabeth’s teasing yet serious reply draws attention to the point upon which she and Jane both agree: the happiness which deserves the most consideration in the case of a marriage is that of the young couple themselves. This focus does not indicate that the opinions of family and friends do not matter—as we have seen, Jane and Elizabeth both understand that their marriages will affect others beyond themselves and their spouses. However, because marriage is a union of two persons, it stands to reason that the wishes of husband and wife—the parties most intrinsically concerned in the relationship—are paramount. After all, the marriage can promote the happiness and good of others only insofar as it serves the happiness and good of the couple itself. (We recall that for Austen, true happiness and the good are fundamentally connected.) Jane would be upset if her sisters-in-law could not share in the happiness of herself and Bingley. However, if she and Bingley could find true happiness together—and Jane rationally believes they can—then the sisters’ inability to share in that happiness indicates something defective in them: either they misunderstand their brother’s good, or worse, they value it less than their own selfish desires. In either case, such disapproval ought to carry little weight with either Jane or Bingley.

Although Jane comes to see that Bingley's sisters, especially Caroline, have selfish motives, she still hopes that they have enough true sisterly feeling to appreciate their brother's happiness. After Jane's betrothal, she and Elizabeth discuss Caroline and Mrs. Hurst's role in concealing Jane's presence in London from their brother. Jane acknowledges that his sisters must have wanted a more "advantageous" match for him, yet concludes, "But when they see, as I trust they will, that their brother is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once were to each other" (387). Beyond this statement, Austen does not show Jane suffering over the sisters' disapproval. Jane has not injured them morally; their unhappiness is due to their own ungenerous hearts, and the only remedy is for them to learn unselfish pleasure in their brother's good. Jane seems to recognize that the sisters lack the moral character ever to be fully happy with their brother's choice, but in time she hopes they may at least be "content."

Elizabeth acts on the same principles when she refuses Lady Catherine's demand that she promise not to marry Darcy. When Lady Catherine suggests that Elizabeth seems "resolved to have him," Elizabeth clarifies her position: "I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me" (396). By first declaring what she has *not* said, Elizabeth communicates two things. First, she reasserts her claim, from earlier in the conversation, that Elizabeth's personal affairs are not Lady Catherine's business. Second, she denies that to marry Darcy is her absolute end. The real end of her actions is, she explains, to secure her own happiness. Of

course, rational companionship through marriage is something Elizabeth values as a final good, and if Darcy proves to be the sort of man who could share that kind of relationship with her, she will accept him. But she is not (like Caroline appears to be) resolved to marry him regardless of other considerations, such as his own wishes and welfare.

Given the fact that Elizabeth values the happiness of her own family, it is significant that she dismisses Lady Catherine, Darcy's aunt, as unconnected to her. Elizabeth is almost certainly not referring merely to the fact that, as yet, Lady Catherine is no relation. After all, at this point of the story, Elizabeth believes that Darcy is "exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her" (344). Thus she is willing, should Darcy propose to her, to become Lady Catherine's relation by marriage. However, even that potential connection does not qualify Lady Catherine's opinion for Elizabeth's consideration because Lady Catherine clearly does not have Darcy's personal happiness or good in mind. She only considers the aggrandizement of herself, her daughter, and their family name. Surely if Lady Catherine were truly concerned for her nephew's wellbeing, Elizabeth would be desirous of her approval, just as she cares that her own aunt and uncle should be friends with Darcy. It is only because Lady Catherine is unreasonable and selfish that Elizabeth can retort, "[W]ith regard to the resentment of his family, or the indignation of the world, if the former *were* excited by his marrying me, it would not give me one moment's concern—and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn" (397). Because Elizabeth values Darcy's happiness as well as her own, she would only accept his proposal if she really believed she could contribute to his wellbeing. By continuing to oppose the marriage, Lady Catherine, much

like Bingley's sisters, is blind or indifferent to her nephew's good. Ultimately, Elizabeth is not selfishly individualistic to value her happiness (which makes reference to Darcy's happiness) over Lady Catherine's wishes; rather, in doing so she asserts that charity and generosity carry more moral weight than Lady Catherine's shallow and selfish elitism.



Marriage is a fitting ending for a story concerned with the nature of happiness. While all relationships rely to some degree on the principles discussed in this chapter, marriage is perhaps the best example of a relationship in which two people's happiness most clearly depends on their ability to place each other's needs first according to charity. According to Austen's traditional Christian values, marriage—the joining of husband and wife—is a union in a way that friendships and other familial relationships are not. I do not mean to suggest that Austen thought other relationships could not also be deeply fulfilling; after all, her closest relationship was not with a spouse, but with her sister Cassandra. However, marriage by its nature as a fruitful, other-centered relationship, is particularly suited to be a symbol of human happiness.

Austen's representation of marriage as an ideal has been challenged by feminist readers. Johnson expresses a fairly typical complaint when she argues that we ought to be chary about inferring that the marriages concluding her novels constitute an unequivocal ideological statement about marriage itself, considered either as a goal for women, or as a boon to society. But even if marriage in Austen's novels is not always described realistically as a woman's purpose in life, nothing else is, and because *Pride and Prejudice*, unlike all of the

other novels, actually celebrates marital felicity as an ideal, it has been particularly vulnerable to cogent feminist critiques. (91)

Furthermore, Johnson laments that Austen's failure to show a place for female friendships for married women, considering Austen's own biography, seems "either a failure of nerve, or—worse perhaps—a failure of imagination" (91). However, I would suggest that Johnson's objections stem in large part from the fact that she primarily focuses on the political aspects of Austen's social commentary; from such a viewpoint, an endorsement of marriage is an endorsement of a particular social institution as an ideal condition for humanity (or at least the female portion thereof). Even setting aside the ideological differences between a modern feminist critic and a conservative eighteenth-century Christian, I think Johnson is reasonable to question a claim that all other human happiness is inferior to "marital felicity." But I argue that Austen only seems to be saying so if we take marriage to represent a purely temporal ideal. It is true, as Johnson and numerous other critics have pointed out, that not all marriages in Austen's novels are particularly ideal or desirable relationships. However, if we understand that marriage also represents an eternal, heavenly ideal and reward, then it becomes possible to accept and enjoy the happy marriages in her novels without requiring these endings to mean that every woman needs to get married if she wants to be happy. In other words, Johnson's problem with *Pride and Prejudice's* ending remains a problem mainly because she wishes to find a political bent to the novel, when perhaps Austen's real interest has more to do with the order of the soul than with the order of the state (though the latter certainly affects the former).

I do not want to go too far in the opposite direction, either, and suggest that Austen does not think that marriage is a desirable and good arrangement for most people. To argue that Austen devalues marriage is to dismiss a very great deal of surface evidence again. I concur with Ruderman that Austen presents humans as naturally sociable, mating creatures (13). *Pride and Prejudice* shows that marriage to a wisely-chosen partner can provide emotional and intellectual fulfillment. At the same time, Austen also suggests that marriage may not be the most fulfilling choice for some people, as we see with Charlotte, a woman who thinks highly neither of men nor of matrimony, but who marries because she has few other options. But even such a case as Charlotte's does not mean that happiness is a fundamentally different thing for some people than for others. For Charlotte, as it is for all other humans, the highest happiness is found in relationships. The main question in Charlotte's case is whether some combination of temperament and education render her unlikely to find relationship to a spouse the most meaningful one in her life.<sup>13</sup> In my reading, I find Austen suggests that deficiencies in Charlotte's moral education are a real obstacle to her finding a mate with whom she can share more than a superficial connection. Nonetheless, there is always the additional risk that an individual will never be presented with a really suitable mate, in which case she is faced with the choice between settling for a lesser good (as Charlotte does) or remaining unmarried (as Austen herself did). Are we to conclude that this novel which presents marital felicity as a reward has no significance for readers who fall into these latter categories—readers,

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<sup>13</sup> While there is no textual evidence for such a reading, I can imagine that the arrival of a child will give Charlotte someone in whom she can invest emotionally in a way that she cannot with her pompous, silly husband. Of course, she will have to counter Mr. Collins's influence over their child's education. I see more hope in the prospect of a child than Tave does, though he is certainly right to caution that "the children of mismatches without respect or affection do not begin life with advantage" (137).

furthermore, whom Austen was well aware truly existed? Or perhaps worse yet, does Austen suggest that to live an unmarried or poorly married life is without significance? Whether or not the modern reader accepts a heterosexual, normative view of marriage, it seems evident that Austen herself did. Even so, if we pay attention to the symbolic meaning of the happy ending, we will find that it speaks to a fundamental cause for happiness that is independent of the subject of marriage.

As we have already seen from Austen's prayers, her hope for happiness in the long-term, eternal perspective, is founded on a belief in heaven. The most important cause for happiness in heaven is, of course, the individual's union with God. Furthermore, according to the Bible, every human marriage is an image of this relationship between God and the faithful. Austen would have been familiar with this teaching, because every marriage service in the Anglican church began with the declaration, "[W]e are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this Congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church" (*Book of Common Prayer* n.p.). Every marriage, therefore, looks forward to the heavenly union between God and man, foretold in the book of Revelation using the image of the marriage feast of the lamb,

Christ.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Thomas Sherlock, one of Austen's favorite sermon writers,<sup>15</sup> describes the importance of this symbolic image:

As to the nature of the happiness of another life, we know but little of it; the descriptions we meet with in scripture are figurative, and lead not to the true knowledge of the glories they describe. Possibly this world affords no notions or ideas proper to express the happiness of heaven, which can therefore only be described in the figures taken from the present sense we have of pleasure and enjoyment. Hence the happiness of heaven is sometimes painted under the figure of a marriage-feast, which is a time usually stolen from sorrow, and dedicated to mirth and good-humour.  
(235-6).

The wedding, a joyful celebration of union, is a fitting representation of heavenly happiness. Thus the significance of Revelation's symbolic wedding goes beyond the earthly, literal idea of marriage to encompass spiritual truths which apply to all Christians, regardless of whether they were married on earth. Given Austen's Anglican belief that human marriages can offer an example of such spiritual truths, we should expect the good marriages in her novels to do so as well.

Understanding the novel's concluding marriage as spiritually symbolic helps clear Austen of the charge of being unrealistic, for a happy ending is essential to a

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<sup>14</sup> As Schubert has pointed out, the marriage feast of the Lamb is echoed by the marriage festival that concludes most traditional comedies (282).

<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Anna Austen (later Lefroy), Jane declares, "I am very fond of Sherlock's Sermons, prefer them to almost any" (*Letters* 28 September 1814). Anna is the same niece, of course, who received Austen's copy of *Elegant Extracts*.

Christian view of reality. Such a view does not entail naivety in the face of worldly struggle and misfortune; rather, it asserts that hardships are not, in fact, the end of the story. Ross reminds us that Austen's novels invite us "to trust that all will be well in the end, if not necessarily on earth—though it is only on earth that she can describe it" (174). As we have seen, Austen drops the occasional significant hint to remind us that she is thinking of what will become of her characters in the next life. However, as a realistic novelist, she is also limited to describing what happens in this life: while heaven is the object of her sincere belief, it falls outside her experience and likewise outside the scope of the novel. Thus, a character's eternal salvation must be signified in the character's earthly salvation. Giffin notes, "In her neoclassical context, Austen takes for granted the truth of the other-worldly or Aristotelian sense of *soteria* [salvation]; however, it is the this-worldly senses of *soteria* that dominate her novels. Each novel is directed towards achieving the physical and emotional *soteria* of its characters and its communities; and, for Austen, this physical and emotional *soteria* is analogous with the Christian hope of a metaphysical *soteria* of eternal life in God through Christ" (7).

Paying attention to the eternal context of the happy ending allows us to see the marriage not as a mere formal concession, but as a statement of Austen's belief in a salvation narrative. Tauchert observes that Austen's novels are characterized by the themes of "the resurrection over the cross, the comedic over the tragic, the happy ending in spite of carefully designated empirical odds. Romance is in Austen's hands a comedic formation; wish-fulfilment [sic] towards restoring the fallen world otherwise apprehended in myth" (90). This is not wish-fulfillment in an empty, pejorative sense.

Resurrection, the triumph of comedy, the restoration of the fallen world—all of these are promised by Christian faith. By appealing to the reader's desires for these things, Austen's comedy reaffirms that such desires are good and gives an imaginative foretaste of their fulfillment.

If the novel's happy ending is, in part, a spiritual and eschatological image, then to what extent is the heroine's courtship and marriage of any literal significance? That is, are we to take Elizabeth's happy marriage as only an artistic and symbolic representation of a spiritual truth, or can readers use Austen's characters' as models for their own lives where romantic relationships are concerned? Certainly, many readers want to imitate these heroes and heroines, both in the characters' romantic success and in their general virtues. Is the reader's desire to imitate merely part of the "harmful view of the sexes" that Booth claimed readers imbibe from Austen's novels? Even if a Christian reader sincerely hopes for eternal happiness, does reading a novel like *Pride and Prejudice* cause her to "buy in" to a harmful fantasy by imagining that romantic love, especially in the context of a traditional marriage, can offer earthly fulfillment?

I answer that the novel teaches readers to want the right things—companionship and rational love founded in virtuous character—and it shows such good desires rewarded in the only convincing way the novelist can, by earthly blessings.<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth and Darcy's greatest reward, we must imagine, is the heavenly happiness that they move towards together, but a conventional novel can hardly trace their story that far. If, as I

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<sup>16</sup> In her discussion of how happy endings, in medieval romance and Austen, teach the reader joy, Schubert notes, "The whole story works to elicit our affections for the characters, our admiration for the goods the story endorses, and our approval of the characters' reception of those goods" (292).

argue, Austen has done her work well, the reader can distinguish between the instrumental and the essential elements of the characters' happiness. Darcy's ten thousand pounds are clearly the generous novelist's invention, created to reward her deserving heroine; his excellent moral character, on the other hand, is utterly essential to the domestic happiness Austen depicts for the couple.

Naturally, storybook happy endings have to smooth over the daily challenges of real life, yet I think Austen practices no deception by offering Elizabeth and Darcy as a pair worthy of imitation, both in their virtues and in their desire for fulfillment through marriage. Unselfish love and rational companionship are Austen's standards for happiness under any circumstances, and marriage, when it unites two people of strong character, promises both. Austen's fictional couple models the virtues necessary for marital happiness: politeness, candor, justice, humility, and gratitude. Yet these qualities belong to a greater kind of love than merely romantic love; they are the marks of Christian charity, that love which should govern all human relationships, romantic and otherwise. By studying these characters, therefore, the reader learns a more universal lesson than simply how to court and marry well; she learns how to be happy.

## Conclusion:

### “Circumstances of the Story”: Charity and Grace

Throughout my dissertation, my general claim has been that, while *Pride and Prejudice* is not explicitly religious, Austen’s concerns in the novel are characteristically Christian. Put another way, the novel’s values are those central to Christian moral teachings. Austen does not address doctrine or matters of religious practice, such as how to worship or how to perform explicitly religious activities like prayer or charitable giving. These things are certainly hinted at, in Darcy’s generosity to his tenants, in his conviction that Wickham “ought not to be a clergyman,” in the author’s implicit concern that Lydia thinks only of “earthly happiness” but not eternal salvation. While these key details give insight into Austen’s priorities, for the most part, Austen is concerned with the daily moral actions of her characters. These are the actions that fall outside Sunday service, but which are nonetheless governed by Christian principles—principles that are not usually stated outright but at which we can arrive nonetheless. It is clear that Austen values candor and politeness, justice, generosity of thought and word. These are not simply secular virtues, for Austen’s understanding of them is fundamentally Christian.

The politeness that Darcy learns is not simply a social grace, an external polish, or an expeditious rule of the social contract. It is a reflection of how much he loves and estimates his “fellow-creatures,” to use a phrase that occurs both in the text of the novel and in Austen’s own prayers. His initial inability to be truly polite—not only to Elizabeth but to nearly everyone else—shows that he does not fully understand charity. Christ identified the second greatest commandment as “love thy neighbor as thyself,” but Darcy

does not yet care enough about other people to concern himself with how his actions and words will make them feel (Mark 12:31).

Likewise, the candor that Elizabeth comes to value is another expression of charity. Love “thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” and it “hopeth all things,” but at first Elizabeth too readily thinks badly of others, seeing the worst motives in their actions (1 Cor. 13: 5-7). While her negative judgments may often seem realistic, in Darcy’s case, it is clear she is neither a fair nor an accurate judge, for her dislike colors her perception of even his most gallant actions. Just as Darcy does, Elizabeth needs to change the way she views her fellow-creatures, judging them with the generosity that she herself would wish to receive.

Central to Darcy and Elizabeth’s growth in charity is another Christian virtue, humility. In both their cases, their lack of charity is tied to a sense of moral and intellectual superiority. Darcy thinks himself and his high principles—among them, a truly admirable disdain for disguise—above reproach. Similarly, Elizabeth believes herself clear-sighted and unerring in her judgments. Thus they are both guilty of pride for thinking themselves more perfect than they truly are; and such pride is an obstacle to love, which is not “puffed up” (I Cor. 13:4). Hence, before they can love one another, each must be humbled. Yet as Austen shows, to be humbled—while momentarily painful—is not ultimately an evil which oppresses or weakens. Darcy and Elizabeth are humbled, first of all, because they rightly care for justice: they want to know the truth about themselves and others. And as a result of seeing how wrongly they treated one another, they are able to give and receive grace: the knowledge of their own mistakes

makes them forgive the other and in turn, both are grateful for the forgiveness they have received. The central movement at the heart of Darcy and Elizabeth's romance reflects the fundamentally Christian idea that one must acknowledge his sins and shortcomings to improve, to be healed, to receive grace and salvation (Emsley 10).

For Austen, though a sense of justice first teaches the need for grace, grace is ultimately more powerful than justice. Indeed, the story ends on a note of grace. Darcy's successful proposal is also the moment of full reconciliation between him and Elizabeth. Austen does not treat readers to the words of the proposal proper, focusing rather on the following conversation which proves much more essential to the characters' moral growth, as Darcy and Elizabeth both offer apologies and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> Their final actions in the narrative are also conciliatory: Darcy enables Lydia's marriage and return to her family; he and Elizabeth forgive Lady Catherine, once the enemy to their union; and the Darcys hold no grudges, admitting Lydia, Lady Catherine, and even the petty Caroline Bingley into their home.

If the novel's final note is one of grace, it is also emphatically one of happiness. We can take the happy ending seriously—that is to say, we can take the characters' happiness seriously—because it is founded in charity. While they are not entirely perfect, Darcy and Elizabeth have both learned to be humble and more selfless, and to approach all others with greater love, attitudes that are essential to a good marriage. Furthermore, we know that Jane and Elizabeth find happiness in the right things: in the wellbeing and

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah S. G. Frantz demonstrates that “[a]lthough the proposal scenes are superficially about love, . . . these scenes primarily provide the reader with a rare opportunity to experience the hero's understanding of his own moral education, unmediated by the narrator's words” (168).

happiness of their family and those others who love them. Though they both become wealthy through marriage, we know that they are not people who enjoy wealth for the status or prestige it offers—they are not, that is, like Caroline. Rather, their wealth is a source of happiness in large part because it enables them to maintain the relationships that matter most to them. The sisters see each other often, and Pemberley is visited by the Gardiners, who are surely the Darcys' most sensible and beloved extended family on either side of the family tree. In other words, the happiness of Elizabeth and Jane is believable because it grows out of genuine, unselfish love for others.

Happiness, Austen believes, is a real and attainable thing. As I have shown, her faith in the happy ending reflects her faith in the gospel promise of salvation and heaven: the earthly happiness of Elizabeth and Darcy foreshadows the heavenly happiness that is the fulfillment and perfection of the Christian virtues which they display. Salvation theology, of course, is never explicitly mentioned; such are the “Sunday thoughts” that Austen does not consider the proper subject of a novel (Ryle 297). Yet the notion of Christian salvation—the recognition of sin and the receipt of grace—is reflected in the narrative. At the beginning of the story, Darcy and Elizabeth are both imperfect: they have good principles but they do not practice those principles with charity. Like the Christian who must become aware that he has sinned before he can recognize his need for salvation, the characters must submit to justice and recognize where they have been wrong in their words and judgments. The discovery of transgressions is a necessary precursor to grace: without an acute sense of their own faults, neither Darcy nor Elizabeth would improve. Yet the true point of transformation for both hero and heroine is not

merely the discovery of their mistakes; it is forgiveness that reconciles and changes them. The grace they receive from one another reminds us of divine grace and forgiveness of sins. And as a result of forgiveness come gratitude, intimacy, and love—both Christian and romantic. Such qualities are both the substance of happiness on earth and a preparation for eternal happiness in heaven.

God is far from being “totally absent” from the novel, as Laurence Lerner has claimed (23). While God is only seriously mentioned by characters thrice during the narrative,<sup>2</sup> the “circumstances of the story” are infused, from beginning to end, with the principles of Christian religion (Whately 360). Yet as Whately so perceptively suggested, Austen’s novel is not a pedantic sermon poorly hidden inside an entertaining novel, like a bitter pill coated in sugar but nonetheless recognizable by its unpleasant, medicinal aftertaste (359-60). Indeed, the idea of a novel as sermon or medicine would imply that the story contained distasteful moralizing elements that might be excised, to the improvement of the general flavor of the book. But Austen draws little attention to the religious nature of her ethics, making it difficult to locate any moralizing to excise; Christian actions are not presented with ostentation or fanfare, but quietly embodied in the daily actions of her virtuous characters: Elizabeth, Jane, Darcy. Christian religion is not an unpleasant lesson which Austen has hidden inside a delightful novel; rather, her religion is one of the essential elements that make her story a very real delight.

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<sup>2</sup> Jane, after hearing that Bingley is not to return to Netherfield, declares, “I have nothing either to hope or fear, and nothing to reproach him with. Thank God! I have not *that* pain” (152). Darcy closes his letter to Elizabeth with the benediction, “I will only add, God bless you” (225). And when Darcy discovers Elizabeth in distress over Lydia’s elopement, his first instinct is to cry, “Good God! what is the matter?” (304). The only other characters who use the Lord’s name are Mrs. Bennet and, more especially, Lydia; their frivolous use of “Lord!” as a mild imprecation contrasts significantly with the above serious invocations.

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