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Conscience and Virtue, Selfdeceit and Vice: Concepts from Bishop Joseph Butler's Moral Psychology in Jane Austen's Mansfield Park

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

CONSCIENCE AND VIRTUE, SELF-DECEIT AND VICE: CONCEPTS FROM BISHOP
JOSEPH BUTLER'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY IN JANE AUSTEN'S *MANSFIELD PARK*

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Philosophy
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2012

Becka R LaPlant defended this dissertation on March 14th 2012.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful for the support of the Graduate School in the form of the Presidential Fellowship during the 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 academic years.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation has grown out of a simple observation. I happened to be reading selections from Bishop Joseph Butler's sermons and his dissertation *On the Nature of Virtue* around the same time that I was reading Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and was struck by the similarities I perceived between the two works. The more I read in each, the stronger was my sense of a general resemblance between Butler's and Austen's interests and convictions regarding the moral life of human beings. Personal interest alone would have been enough to encourage me to investigate the nuances and finer points of the two authors' shared ethic and moral psychology, but I am additionally persuaded of the value of such a project to both Austen scholars and those philosophers who are concerned with sustaining and nurturing a mutually beneficial dialogue between the works and disciplines of literature and philosophy. At its broadest, my aim here is to provide textual support from both authors for my claim that *Mansfield Park* expresses and endorses views about the moral nature of human beings and about the causes and effects of virtue and vice that strongly coincide with Butler's.

Essentially, my argument rests on two observations. The first is that of the number and prominence of shared concepts between the two authors including: the nature and importance of moral judgment to moral behavior and the corresponding unreliability of reference to moral rules for producing moral behavior, the idea that there is a natural and beneficial hierarchical organization of motivational principles within an individual agent's psychology, and an appreciation of the dangerous connection between self-deceit and vice. My second observation is that the plot of *Mansfield Park* bears out these commitments beyond simply affirming them in particular characters whom Austen wants her reader to accept as moral role models or exemplars. That is, while it is true that Fanny Price, as an individual, demonstrates the value of judgment and critical reflection, and of successful moral action without reference to strict moral principles or rules, what seems to me to be more important is the fact that controversial elements of the plot of the novel seem to be expressions of Butler's views as well. Austen is worried about Edmund Bertram's infatuation with Mary Crawford because she, like Butler, is worried about the reinforcing effect of self-deceit on establishing morally problematic action as a habit. This causes her to be anxious about the morality of her characters' efforts to perform the play "Lover's Vows". It seems to me that when we properly appreciate the moral thought underlying this

worry, Austen's much-maligned 'priggishness' regarding the play becomes more understandable and less alien than it first appears. In other words, when we have Butler's Sermons and the dissertation *On the Nature of Virtue* at hand when we read *Mansfield Park* we are less likely to be perplexed by events in the novel and the narrator's perspective on them for the simple reason that we have better access to the moral psychology Austen was working with.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has grown out of a simple observation. I happened to be reading selections from Bishop Joseph Butler's sermons and his dissertation on the nature of virtue around the same time that I was reading Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and was struck by the similarities I perceived between the two works. The more I read in each, the stronger was my sense of a general resemblance between Butler's and Austen's interests and convictions regarding the moral life of human beings. Personal interest alone would have been enough to encourage me to investigate the nuances and finer points of the two authors' shared ethic and moral psychology, but I am additionally persuaded of the value of such a project to both Austen scholars and those philosophers who are concerned with sustaining and nurturing a mutually beneficial dialogue between the works and disciplines of literature and philosophy. At its broadest, my aim here is to provide textual support from both authors for my claim that *Mansfield Park* expresses and endorses views about the moral nature of human beings and about the causes and effects of virtue and vice that strongly coincide with Butler's.

Before outlining the chapters that follow, I would like to suggest a few reasons for regarding my project as important. For Austen scholarship, this should be fairly clear. A number of scholars have taken up the question of Austen's moral views with an eye towards associating her with a particular philosophical tradition. These scholars look deeper than Austen's admitted intellectual debts to Samuel Johnson and to Cowper and attempt to discern the philosophical roots of their interpretation of the moral tone or message of her novels. Both literary and philosophical tradition place Austen among those moral thinkers concerned with virtue, but there is disagreement among literary critics as to whether she is aligned more closely with one or another of the British Moralists (her relative contemporaries), or if she was classically inclined, and more resembles Aristotle, or if we ought rather to look to Augustine or Aquinas to find the clearest mirror of her moral thought. Butler has been a neglected, though not wholly passed over, candidate for having the most significant influence on Austen, and I mean to remedy that neglect by offering a sustained, detailed account of the points of resemblance between the moral

positions advocated in *Mansfield Park*, as I understand them, and Butler's thoughts on conscience, judgment, self-deception, and vice.

At the very least, this dissertation is a contribution to an ongoing discussion, which, according to some literary critics, is of renewed importance. Andrew Miller, in *The Burdens of Perfection*, notes that there has been a resurgence of interest in the moral content and context of novels, particularly those from the British Romantic and Victorian periods. Writers of these periods – not only writers of fiction, but certainly including them – often explored answers to the question of how one ought to live, and acknowledged this question to be in large part a moral question. As such, authors like Austen were not just offering us amusement for a few hours, but rather sketches of characters and ways of living to observe and evaluate, and perhaps to learn from in directing our own lives. Clearly, for Miller and others, understanding the moral content of a novel like *Mansfield Park* is a critical component of appreciating its plot, form, and other themes. Accordingly, it seems that correctly identifying the moral underpinnings of *Mansfield Park* matters for successfully approaching the novel as a whole, or other critically interesting elements of it. What I hope to do, then, is to address recent arguments from Austen scholars on the subject of Austen's ethics and put forward a few reasons for concluding, as I do, that Bishop Butler's moral thought cannot, at least, be disqualified as a possible influence (directly or indirectly) on Austen.

The concern with identifying and describing Jane Austen's moral views as illustrated in her novels is healthily present among scholars of literature, but philosophers have made no substantial contribution to the conversation since Gilbert Ryle's essay "Jane Austen and the Moralists". Surely moral philosophers must be interested in those novels which explore the matter of how we ought to live in sophisticated and informative ways, and surely few would argue that novels, short stories, or the like have no value to someone interested in practical moral issues. Nevertheless, it is not my project here to show that *Mansfield Park* tells us something unique or new about virtue or vice, right or wrong. I am not sure that it does. Rather, from the perspective of philosophy, this dissertation is important because it serves as an example of the kind of valuable contribution that philosophers can, and I would say ought, to make to literature. It is popular these days for philosophers to offer analyses of terms and concepts that frequently appear in the sciences and psychology, and to bring to the attention of those communities relevant work done by philosophers of various molds. Regardless of the success of individual

philosophical attempts to do this, the effort such thinkers put into maintaining a dialogue between the disciplines is surely admirable. It might be that certain valuable contributions to psychology could most likely come from philosophers. Similarly, it seems to me that some worthwhile contributions to the study of a given work, author, or literary time period might, at this point, most likely come from philosophers. There are few others in a better position to recognize moral content, notice and understand subtle distinctions therein, and correctly pick out affiliations and resemblances between that thought and schools or trends of ethical theory than those whose business it has been to study the history, major figures, debates, and implications of moral thought. Moral philosophers, and scholars of the history of philosophy surely have the resources to make original contributions to the study of literature and to offer suggestions for avenues to pursue or common misconceptions to avoid for those who are interested, especially, in analyzing the moral content and context of a work like *Mansfield Park*. While it might be wrong to say that philosophers therefore have an obligation to make such contributions, it would be mean-spirited for them to refuse to participate in conversations and debates in which their participation would be largely welcome and helpful.

My hope, then, is that this dissertation is a useful and thought-provoking addition to the Austen scholarship, and that it is also an encouraging example of the sort of work there is to be done in literature for those trained in the history, methods, and various sub-disciplines of philosophy. In the following chapters I will be concerned with two tasks. First, I will articulate and defend my reading of *Mansfield Park* as a novel which endorses a number of Butler's views on the moral nature of human beings, or our moral psychology, and expresses this endorsement through the direction of the plot and the portrayal of its characters. This will be the subject of the next two chapters. In Chapter Two I will focus on the character of Fanny Price, the organization of the greater Mansfield household, and the much-maligned resolution of the plot. It seems to me that Fanny Price, uniquely in the novel, thinks and acts in just the sort of ways that Butler has in mind for the well-functioning moral agent. She is able and eager to engage in critical reflection about her own actions, and the actions of those around her, and she is guided by the judgments that she arrives at through such reflection. Her place in the household, however, is not one that properly acknowledges or relies upon her abilities for reflection and judgment. In fact, the Bertram and Norris families, along with the Crawfords, once they arrive, are in a state of some disarray. Those with the least judgment have the most power to direct the life of all the

component residents and visitors. Austen is concerned to show us how such an arrangement of power and moral judgment sets up the household for unnecessary errors and suffering, and this idea reflects Butler's contention that for an individual to act rightly, their faculty of moral judgment must be the guiding authority when it comes to determining how to act. He believes that all of the various motivational forces that participate in bringing an agent to act one way rather than another ought to be organized in a particular way, and I will argue that the hierarchy of the Mansfield estate, the events that befall, and the key to restoring stability that Austen gives us match Butler's picture.

Scholars and recreational readers alike have often been left perplexed or even dissatisfied with Austen's decision to ultimately banish the Crawfords to their own devices and return Fanny to Mansfield Park just when it seems that she might have been able to escape what has been a home characterized by neglect and hostility towards her. However, I will argue that if we keep Butler's moral psychology in mind as we read this ending, and since it is plausible that Austen shared this view, in fact the ending she wrote is the only ending we could reasonably expect. In part, this is due to the simple fact, on my view, that *Mansfield Park* is not about Fanny Price. Rather, it is about Mansfield Park. If we regard the estate and household as a single character in its own right, then we see that its inhabitants function in much the way that Butler takes desires, goals, emotions, and judgment to function in each individual. *Mansfield Park* is about the errors of an individual (household), the source of those errors, and the means to reform and avoid those errors in the future. Accordingly, if Fanny Price is the faculty of moral judgment of the household, it is clear that she must return there and take her rightful place as a respected and relied upon source of guidance. For her to marry Henry Crawford and leave the Bertrams behind forever is, as I will explain in more detail, just as unthinkable as Austen regarded it, and to wish for such an ending is to miss the moral point of the novel.

Chapter Three will continue to other aspects of my reading of *Mansfield Park*, focusing on Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford. These two characters and their interactions are the stage for Austen's exploration of the relationship between self-deceit and vice, as well as the role of education in quieting or suppressing the capacity for moral judgment that all moral agents have. Here too there is a controversial aspect of the novel to be considered: Austen's implicit but severe disapproval of the Bertrams' and Crawfords' assays into home theatricals. Austen has been accused of priggishness or prudery regarding her attitude towards her characters' plans and

efforts to perform “Lover’s Vows” for their own amusement. Again, however, it seems to me that her disapproval of their activities is justified by her Butlerian view of human moral psychology, and the way this particular play triggers or is a catalyst for that dangerous human capacity for self-deceit. After all, events surrounding the play present the most significant challenges for Edmund in terms of attending to his own better judgment, and what we find is that by ignoring his judgment and then actively deceiving himself about Mary Crawford’s character and their situation Edmund has begun to make a habit of the sort of behavior and attitudes that make wrong action easier for him. For Butler and Austen, since conscience or moral judgment ought to be the faculty that guides us, we must make some effort to keep things that way. Lapses like Edmund’s are reinforced by the deceptively pleasant results – Edmund wants to do what Mary tells him, since he wants her to like him, and this appears to be the result of his capitulation about “Lover’s Vows” – but what has really happened is that Edmund has intentionally suppressed his moral judgment, and made it harder for himself to act rightly. The play and Edmund’s interest in Mary should be as worrisome to the reader as they are to Austen, since they are an illustration of the threat that self-deceit poses to the successful attention to one’s moral judgment that she and Butler take to be the key to morally upright behavior.

My second task, and the subject of Chapter Four, is to survey some of the most relevant work done by Austen scholars and philosophers on the subject of Austen’s ethics. I will regard their arguments as constituting objections to mine, and I will attempt to answer them as such. Since Joyce Kerr Tarpley’s recent book *Constancy and the Ethics of Jane Austen’s ‘Mansfield Park’* shares my focus on just one of Austen’s novels, I will begin there. Next will follow my assessment of recent books from Anne Crippen Ruderman and from Sarah Emsley, each of whom offer arguments concerning the ethic traceable in all of Austen’s writings. D.D. Devlin explores Austen’s philosophy of education rather than her ethics, and deals at length with Gilbert Ryle’s article on Austen and the British moralists, so I will consider these two together. Aside from highlighting weaknesses in all of these authors I intend to show that elements of all of their readings of Austen agree with mine in part, and so that all of them ought to have considered Butler to a greater extent than they do.

As a final consideration, I would like to stress that all of my argument that follows is restricted to *Mansfield Park*. There might well be passages in others of Austen’s works that would set up obstacles for the argument that Austen’s ethics as a whole most closely resembles

Butler's. I only intend to argue that the ethic of *Mansfield Park* does so. That the most explicitly moral of Austen's novels has such an affinity with Butler's moral psychology is certainly striking in terms of its implications for her general moral outlook, but I happily allow that Austen's views might well have changed throughout her authorial career. Furthermore, I do not mean to suggest that this sort of reading of *Mansfield Park* is the only one possible. That is, readings that focus on the political context of the novel or that are primarily concerned with formal elements of the novel such as narrative voice and irony are not necessarily in conflict with the moral-context-sensitive reading I offer below. It is certainly unclear to me what implications regarding Austen's politics or her style my arguments could have, if any. As such, there are a number of interpretive debates that I intentionally avoid, and that, I believe, have no bearing on my argument just as mine has no bearing on theirs. These preliminaries aside, I would like to turn now to the first part of my reading of *Mansfield Park*.

CHAPTER TWO

JUDGMENT, PRINCIPLE, AND CONSCIENCE: PART ONE OF A BUTLERIAN READING OF MANSFIELD PARK

In this chapter I will present and defend the first part of a reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* which takes the novel's themes and characters to be in part an exploration of some of the key elements of Bishop Joseph Butler's moral psychology. To build the foundation of this reading I will briefly argue that Austen could likely have been not only aware of Butler's views but also influenced by them. At least, I will suggest, there is no reason to think it impossible that Butler's ideas would be familiar to an author like Jane Austen, regardless of the author's ability to identify those ideas as Butler's. This chapter's portion of my reading of *Mansfield Park*, however, centers on two arguments of interpretation. First I will argue that in the heroine, Fanny Price, we can plausibly discern a moral agent of the type Butler envisions. Fanny is characterized by her willingness and her successful ability to engage in critical reflection about herself and others, a capacity and activity that features prominently in Butler's notion of the natural organization of the individual mind and of what living virtuously requires. That Fanny's is a happy ending can be taken to express Austen's endorsement of the Butlerian moral psychology that her heroine exemplifies. My second argument takes a perspective which regards the greater Mansfield household as representing a single moral agent, which suffers and acts wrongly due to the fact that its various parts fail to relate to each other in the ways that Butler argues are both natural and necessary for virtue. With Fanny Price embodying the role of the conscience of Mansfield Park, I will argue that the change for the better (for Fanny herself and for the entire household) that takes place when Fanny is at last given the consideration she has always deserved also indicates Austen's (at least implicit) agreement with Butler's conclusions about the proper arrangement of an individual agent's moral psychology.

To articulate these two arguments I will consider the use of the terms 'judgment' and 'conscience' by Butler and by Austen, and will argue that the authors have strikingly similar concepts in mind in using these terms and some of their synonyms. A small number of Austen critics have previously noticed the resemblance between Austen and Butler, and my goal here is

to correct and build upon the work that they have begun. This task will not be a small one, however, since those critics who observed a parallel between Austen's and Butler's thought either only have done so in passing or seriously undermine their own argument by basing it on a mistaken or confused reading of Butler.

Notice that I am not arguing that my reading of *Mansfield Park* is or ought to be read exclusive of or in preference to other common readings. I strongly believe that the reading I will present below is compatible with many extant readings of *Mansfield Park*. Ultimately the claim I am defending here is that many of the events and characters in *Mansfield Park*, the most overtly moral of Austen's novels, can be made sense of in a new and enriched way when read alongside Butler's moral philosophy.

Section 1: Butler and the Moral and Intellectual Climate of Austen's Time

Born to an Anglican Rector in 1775, Jane Austen grew up among clergy. Two of her brothers would become clergymen, as well as four of her cousins, and much of her family's social circle was comprised of clergy of varying intellectual and moral descriptions. During her early childhood her father, the Revd. George Austen, boarded and gave primary instruction to a number of boys from local or distant acquaintances. Though Jane spent a year away from home at a boarding school the majority of her education took place at home, where she had free and constant access to her father's extensive library. She would not have been educated alongside her father's paying pupils, however it seems highly probable that she would be aware of the topics and authors they studied and that she herself may have read some of those works. Her father's library consisted of over 500 volumes on a wide variety of subjects.¹ According to family letters, Jane read a great deal of history, and her "favorite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse" (LeFaye 57). Though these favorites are named, it is reasonable to suppose that Butler could have had an influence nearly as great as Johnson or Cowper on Jane Austen by means of his broad and deep influence on the clergy.

It is clear from the academic success of his students that George Austen was a competent scholar and teacher. Some of his students joined his own sons in going up to Oxford to complete their education. Although examinations at Oxford and Cambridge were essentially formalities and little study took place among a large number of undergraduates, for diligent students such as

Jane's brothers there was a great deal to be read.² To prepare for exams, students read Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* and familiarized themselves with Euclidian geometry (Collins 43). When preparing for ordination, Butler's *Analogy of Religion* was added to the list of works to consult (43). It is worth emphasizing that Austen described herself as writing "about ordination" in *Mansfield Park*.³ That she regarded ordination as an important subject of the novel, that she was intimately acquainted with men who were going through the process or had already done so, and that Butler's works were a major portion of the would-be clergyman's reading list combine to make strong circumstantial evidence for the possibility that Austen could have imbibed some of Butler's views about the moral life and the moral agent. Thus Jane Austen, the sister of two studious clergymen (she was especially close to her brother Henry, who closely studied the Greek testament in anticipation of being questioned on it a full 20 years after his graduation (Collins 38)), could hardly have helped being familiar with aspects of Butler's thought, whether she could attribute any of it to him or not. At the very least, Butler's influence on the moral and intellectual climate within which Austen was writing makes it probable that one or more of her novels could be informed by his arguments.

Some critics suggest that Austen did in fact read Butler's Sermons. Frank Bradbrook, in charting the many possible prose, poetry, and moralistic influences on Austen, notes that "the problems of human nature with which Bishop Butler deals...are some of the main themes in Jane Austen's novels".⁴ It is probably not possible to establish beyond a doubt that Austen read Butler or was familiar with Butler's views as his, and I will not try to do so. However, it is striking that Bradbrook's observation of the resemblance between the two writers was made in 1966 and has yet to be successfully built upon. D. D. Devlin noted the similarity between Austen's and Butler's views on education, but did not discuss the moral views of either author's works.⁵ Philip Drew, as I will discuss in detail below, tries to build a case for the resemblance between Austen and Butler but fails due to problems with his philosophical interpretation of Butler.⁶ In what follows I hope to begin to build a strong case for the truth of Bradbrook's claim for the influence of Butler on Austen's moral thought, at least insofar as *Mansfield Park* is concerned, and to at least suggest compelling reasons for bringing Butler's thought under the consideration of Austen scholars and critics.

The features of Butler's theory of moral psychology that stand out the most as likely candidates for Jane Austen's consideration include his discussion of the virtues and the special

status of conscience in his idea of the internal psychological structure of the moral agent. Butler believed that virtuous behavior was the product of the various principles of the mind relating to each other in the proper ways.⁷ His *Fifteen Sermons Preached as Rolls Chapel*, (first published in 1726), and the second appendix to *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, entitled “Of the Nature of Virtue” (published in 1736) contain his discussions of what virtue requires, how agents can be virtuous, and of the structure of our God-given human nature that enables us to cultivate or corrupt our ability to be virtuous.⁸

The human mind, Butler believed, consists of particular mental parts that can interact in a variety of ways. Human action results from an individual, or agent, being motivated by any single part or combination of these parts, which Butler called “principles of the mind”, and these parts can interact or themselves function in proper or improper ways. The sorts of things Butler regarded as principles includes anything from appetites like hunger, thirst or a desire for sleep, to higher motivating considerations like compassion or self-interest. Anything that can motivate a person to act – any desire, goal, etc. – is a principle of the mind. In fact, Butler notes, human beings are not unique in having such principles of the mind, and it happens that “mankind has various instincts and principles of action, as brute creatures have” (Pref.18). What serves to distinguish us from other animals, however, are the “several [principles] which brutes have not; particularly reflection or conscience, an approbation of some principles or actions and disapprobation of others” (Pref.19). We have the capacity to reflect upon “actions and characters, and [of] making them an object to our thoughts”, which the animals do not (Diss.1). The two principles of the human mind that involve this sort of reflective capacity are the principle of conscience and that of self-love, and so these two principles will turn out, for Butler, to have the most important role to play in directing and motivating virtuous human behavior.

According to Butler it is not only natural that we have the various principles of action that we do, but, by the design of God, the principles of the mind naturally stand in certain relations to each other. To fail to consider the hierarchy the principles of the mind ought properly to stand in is to fail to have a complete account of human nature. Butler writes that:

Appetites, passions, affections, and the principle of reflection, considered merely as the several parts of our nature, do not at all give us an idea of the system or constitution of this nature: because the constitution is formed by somewhat not yet taken into

consideration, namely by the relations, which these several parts have to each other; the chief of which is the authority of reflection or conscience (Pref.14).

On Butler's view, then, the human mind is naturally composed of a variety of parts that can motivate us to action in their different ways, and these parts are similarly naturally meant to stand in certain hierarchical relations to each other. It is human nature to have the motivational parts that we have and to have them arranged in a certain way, and it is furthermore by the providential design of God that "this our nature, i.e constitution[,] is adapted to virtue" (Pref.14). That is, when an individual has all the mental parts she was meant to have or ought naturally to have, and when those parts are organized in the way they naturally ought to be, then that individual will behave virtuously, which is in turn as God intended us all to behave.

When one motivational principle other than conscience dominates excessively within an individual the result is morally wrong behavior by the agent. This might take the form of self-love or some particular appetite being the motivational principle that is successful in bringing the agent to act more often than is warranted by the place of that principle in the natural hierarchy of principles. I might act upon my desire to eat cupcakes more often than is warranted by overriding self-love, for example, in ignoring the fact that eating so many cupcakes is not in my long-term interest of staying healthy. A desire for cupcakes is not the sort of motivational principle that has authority of any kind, and so acting according to that desire rather than self-love or conscience I am treating it as if it has an authority that it does not, which is in turn a violation of the intended organization of my hierarchical moral psychology. If I allow my desire for cupcakes to successfully get me to eat more cupcakes than I should on a regular basis, then that principle (the desire for cupcakes) is dominating my motivational and action-generating system excessively. I've thereby disrupted the natural hierarchy of principles of the mind, and I am clearly acting wrongly. The same is true whenever a motivational principle is inordinately allowed to prompt an agent to act, even if its doing so is not systematic. It is important, additionally, that we not confuse the authority of a principle with how strongly it feels as if a principle is prompting one to act, nor with the distinctly moral authority of conscience over other of our motivational principles. Affections such as a desire for a cupcake or a fancy new car are indeed motivational principles of the mind, but they do not, on Butler's view, have any authority to be the guide of one's behavior. Only principles with a reflective aspect, or which take into account the agent's interests, ought to be the driving force of action for the simple reason that being ruled by urges

for cupcakes and cars will likely leave me with many of my basic needs unmet and my future survival unprovided-for. At this point then, self-love and conscience are the only candidate principles for effectively governing an agent's actions, since only those principles incorporate judgments about situations and interests (practical and moral). Although my desire for another cupcake is very strong indeed, and the consideration of self-love has hardly any felt force at all (Butler speaks of it as having a 'cool' tone, in contrast to the heated strength of the various passions and appetites), it is self-love that ought to be the motivational principle that directs my action here, because the natural hierarchy of our motivational principles is arranged on the basis of authority, not felt strength. Some principles are naturally subordinate to the authority of others, and this means that no matter the felt power of a principle it must not be allowed to cause the agent to act against or without the endorsement of the higher principles. Most often this takes the form of a principle with a stronger felt motivational power, but lower authority, being allowed to influence an agent's behavior over a "cooler" or less forceful principle that nevertheless is naturally meant to have motivational precedence over the initial, urging principle. When the motivational principle or propensity at the root of a given action is treated as having authority it lacks, or when a motivational principle falls short of its proper role, the action-producing system of the individual is thus not functioning correctly. Our ability to act virtuously is compromised by an inversion or other sort of disruption in the organization of motivational preference given to a particular principle. God designed us in order that virtuous behavior is natural to us, and thus vicious behavior is clearly, for Butler, the result of the natural, authority-based, hierarchy among the principles of the mind being violated.

The hierarchy of principles that Butler defends places particular appetites such as those for food and comfort at the bottom, benevolence somewhere in the middle, and the two uniquely reflective principles of self-love and conscience at the top.⁹ Self-love and conscience have the exclusive governing authority (and conscience has moral authority as well) and so they ought to be successful in directing the agent's behavior not just more often than the lower principles, but *always* rather than any other principle. They might not always have the strongest motivational pull or the warmest motivational tone, but because of the reflective element of self-love and conscience they have the highest authority of all the principles of the mind and therefore the strongest claim to being the principles that actually bring the agent to act. The superiority of self-love and conscience is somewhat intuitive. It is fairly easy to see how acting contrary to self-

love, which is simply one's general and necessary self-interest, is to defy one's nature.¹⁰ Having that second or third cupcake despite the protestations of self-love that I'm not actually hungry, and that many cupcakes isn't good for me, amounts to ignoring a part of my motivational structure that is meant to keep me alive and well. Thus it makes a certain sense that the edicts of the principle of self-love give an agent reasons to act in a certain way that are by nature weightier than those of a simple appetite which is not oriented towards the general and long-term good of the agent. After all, a particular appetite is little more than a motivational push in the direction of some object or other end, whereas self-love is a reflective capacity which weighs the worth of such urges against the agent's interests. For a fleeting urge to be followed over the verdict of self-love, or, more generally, for a propensity lower on the hierarchy to be treated as having a higher place, is clearly both to behave in an unnatural way and in a way that will be detrimental to the agent.

Conscience is, like self-love, a reflective capacity that assesses the rightness of the lower propensities. However, while self-love involves an active calculation regarding outcomes of actions on the part of the agent and the bearing of those outcomes on the agent's interests, the pronouncements of conscience are more immediate in virtue of their object being the moral worth of actions (and intentions) in themselves, regardless of the anticipated consequences of those actions (McNaughton 212). The judgments offered by self-love can be proven wrong or mistaken once events unfold, but those of a properly functioning conscience will invariably stand.¹¹ It is this immediacy of conscience that can give it a slightly higher position in the hierarchy than self-love. In the event that self-love and conscience appear to point an agent toward opposing (or at least incompatible) actions, the agent ought to follow the direction of conscience because its pronouncement will hold fast no matter how things turn out.¹² Butler maintains that the rightness of an action is not a matter of the consequences of that action, and so there is no consequence or outcome of an action endorsed by conscience that could make the action the wrong one to choose. Actions are simply right in themselves or wrong in themselves, so when I judge via conscience, for example, that to steal from my neighbor is wrong, that judgment stands even if the object I might have stolen was (unbeknownst to me) stolen from me in the first place. Such is not true of self-love, the judgments of which may or may not be borne out by the effect a chosen action turns out to have on the protection or promotion of our interests. I might judge via self-love that eating the sandwich on the table to quiet my growling stomach is

in my interest, and that I should therefore eat the sandwich. It might turn out, however, that the sandwich has an ingredient that happened to go bad, and I end up ill for the rest of the afternoon. Therefore, allowing self-love to trump conscience makes an agent more liable to act wrongly because of the possibility of events not working out as the calculations of self-love anticipated (McNaughton 213). Thus conscience is the rightful final arbiter, and the supreme principle by which we ought to act. Butler notes that conscience,

“compared with the rest [of our principles] as they all stand together in the nature of man, plainly bears upon it marks of authority over all the rest, and claims the absolute direction of them all, to allow or forbid their gratification: a disapprobation of reflection being in itself a principle manifestly superior to a mere propension. And the conclusion is, that to allow no more to this superior principle or part of our nature, than to other parts; to let it govern and guide only occasionally in common with the rest, as its turn happens to come, from the temper and circumstances one happens to be in; this is not to act conformably to the constitution of man: neither can any human creature be said to act conformably to his constitution of nature, unless he allows to that superior principle the absolute authority which is due to it (Pref.24).

Conscience ought to hold the highest place – its dictates given the most consideration – and insofar as it does the agent will act naturally and rightly.

In anticipation of my reading of *Mansfield Park* I would like to emphasize the critical capacity of the higher principles of conscience and self-love. Both, for Butler, are faculties that have a power of judgment regarding the selection of actions from which the agent can choose. Butler opens the Preface to his Sermons with the observation that “though ‘tis scarce possible to avoid judging...yet ‘tis certain that many persons, from different causes, never exercise their judgment, upon what comes before them” (Pref.1). Failing or refusing to exercise one’s powers of judgment is a serious moral failing, on Butler’s view, because it is in our nature to use these powers. They are, again, God-given for the purpose of living virtuously, and so Butler concludes from this that we have a moral obligation to employ our powers of judgment constantly and to “enforce upon ourselves [their] authority” (Pref.25). Because human beings can reflect on their own motivations, desires, and goals, and because they can reason about the consequences of their actions or the moral worth of their actions, they ought to do so (S.1.7).

Conscience, in particular, is a faculty for making judgments about the moral worth of actions and agents. It is by means of this faculty that agents approve of or disapprove of certain actions as such.¹³ While Butler, in the Sermons themselves, allows that self-love and conscience are both reflective principles, in the Preface to the collection he describes conscience as the principle of reflection in a human being. In speaking thusly, Butler is insisting on the primacy of conscience and emphasizing that conscience is the faculty that enables us to act virtuously, not self-love. We are, he reminds us, God's creatures, and God intended us to act and live virtuously. Conscience, this faculty of considering and assessing the moral worth of actions, is therefore our defining feature and exercising it is an obligation to God and to ourselves (Diss.II.10). Later he claims that "you cannot form a notion of this faculty, conscience, without taking in judgment, direction, superintendency" (S.2.14). The authority of conscience and the centrality of judgment or reflection to its proper functioning indicate that Butler believed the practice of exercising one's powers of judgment to be of utmost importance to living a virtuous life. After all, the faculty of conscience has been placed in us by God, Butler believes, "to be our proper governor; to direct and regulate all under principles, passions, and motives of action" (S.2.15), and "it therefore belongs to our condition of being, it is our duty, to walk in [the path conscience reveals] and follow this guide" (S.3.5).

Section 2: Mansfield Park – the Beginnings of a Butlerian Reading¹⁴

With the above account of Butler's use of the terms 'principle', 'conscience', and 'judgment', we are ready to consider Austen's use of those terms. In this section I will offer interpretations of various events in *Mansfield Park* and readings of particular passages which I take to be evidence that Jane Austen was working with concepts that deeply resemble those Butler employed. I hope to show that in the heroine, Fanny Price, we have a near embodiment of a Butlerian ideal agent as an individual, and that the course of the novel demonstrates the dire situation that will surely befall a mind, represented by the entire Mansfield household, that is corrupted so as to demote conscience, represented by Fanny Price, to an unnatural and neglected state.

Austen begins the novel with the event of Fanny Price, only 11 years old, being sent away from her parents and siblings in Portsmouth to live with her wealthy uncle Sir Thomas

Bertram, a baronet, at Mansfield Park. Quiet, debilitatingly shy, and of deep feelings, Fanny cannot quite be comfortable with her bossy, critical aunt Norris, the obviously indolent Lady Bertram, her stern uncle, and her fine older cousins. Gradually she becomes close to Edmund, the second eldest, and he becomes her advocate, protector, and instructor. Despite Edmund's kindness, the rest of the family makes Fanny's place clear: she is a poor relation, not a Miss Bertram, and Fanny grows up in a context of somewhat genteel neglect and mortification. Her opinion is never sought, much less heeded or considered. Her interactions with her cousins consist mainly of being their messenger, running errands for them, or playing the piano when they wish to dance. When Mary and Henry Crawford, siblings with large incomes and worldly acquaintance, arrive in the neighborhood Fanny falls even further from notice as Edmund becomes enamored of Mary and devotes more of his time to her.

Though the narrative is not entirely from Fanny's perspective, the reader becomes closely acquainted with her thoughts and feelings about the course of events that unfolds. When Henry Crawford flirts unashamedly with her cousin Maria, who is engaged to be married, Fanny reacts with strong disapproval to his character and with dismay at her cousin's receiving Henry's attentions. As her cousins and the Crawfords decide to put on a play for their own amusement, Fanny can scarcely believe their choice of play. *Lover's Vows* is their choice, and Fanny reads through the play "with an eagerness which was suspended only by intervals of astonishment, that it could be chosen in the present instance, that it could be proposed and accepted in a private theatre! Agatha and Amelia appeared to her in their different ways so totally improper for home representation—the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty" (MP 161). Her objections remain largely unheeded, and the play goes forward, only to be put to a stop by the unexpected return of Sir Thomas from his estate in Antigua. Fanny also consistently maintains a disapproval of Mary Crawford's manners, professed beliefs, and judgment. When speaking freely of her own uncle, Admiral Crawford, Mary says, "Certainly, my home at my uncle's brought me acquainted with a circle of admirals. Of Rears and Vices I saw enough. Now do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat" (MP 71). In conversation with Edmund, Fanny comments, "she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished" (MP 74).

Fanny's "delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling" (MP 94), and her active and accurate power of moral judgment are further illustrated throughout the visit that the family pays to the

estate of Maria's future husband, Mr. Rushworth. The Crawfords join them, and the rivalry between the Miss Bertrams for the attention (and presumed affection) of Henry Crawford escalates. When Mary wryly comments that "every generation has its improvements" (*MP* 101) upon being told that the Rushworth chapel is no longer used, Fanny feels angry, particularly on behalf of Edmund, who is to be ordained. Moments later, when this knowledge is imparted to Mary, Fanny feels only pity for Mary's embarrassment, while the narrator suggests that the situation would be amusing to most disinterested observers. The group then breaks up, each pair or trio walking around the grounds. Edmund and Mary forget about Fanny, who sits and waits for them to return for her. Meanwhile she witnesses Maria and Henry subtly ridding themselves of the company of Mr. Rushworth, and, "feeling all this to be wrong, could not help making an effort to prevent it" (116). However, the pair go on, and "Fanny was again left to her solitude, and with no increase of pleasant feelings, for she was sorry for almost all that she had seen and heard, astonished at Miss Bertram, and angry with Mr. Crawford" (116). Austen writes that "Fanny was the only one of the party who found anything to dislike; but since the day at Sotherton, she could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure; and had her confidence in her own judgment been equal to her exercise of it in every other respect, had she been sure that she was seeing clearly, and judging candidly, she would probably have made some important communications to her usual confidant. As it was, however, she only hazarded a hint, and the hint was lost" (136).

The essential feature of Fanny Price that no other character seems to possess is the ability and willingness to engage in critical reflection about her own actions and the actions of others, and to always arrive at the right judgments of those actions. This is precisely the power and activity that Butler, as I described above, attributes to conscience. In an essay entitled "The Vocabulary of Mansfield Park" David Lodge picks out 'judgment' as a key-term of the novel. He suggests that with this novel Austen "school[s] her readers in a vocabulary of discrimination which embraces the finest shades of social and moral value, and which asserts the prime importance, in the presented world of the novel, of exercising the faculty of judgment".¹⁵ The primary meaning of 'judgment' for Austen, Lodge claims, is "the ability to distinguish between the right and wrong course of action in any given situation" (Lodge 105), and in Mansfield Park we see that judgment is something not to be exercised on a moment-to-moment basis but "all the time, in readiness for personal decision" (Lodge 106). This conception of the role and nature of

judgment resonates strongly with Butler's definition of conscience as "a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve, and disapprove their own actions" (Butler S.1.8) and his description of our obligation to employ the faculty of conscience: "the very constitution of our nature requires, that we bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty [of reflection]...enforce upon ourselves its authority, and make it the business of our lives to conform ourselves to it" (Butler Pref.25). Lodge notes that Fanny possesses judgment to a "pre-eminent degree", especially in comparison to the other characters in the novel, whose powers of judgment are often flawed, or, in the case of Mrs. Norris, non-existent (Lodge 104). Sarah Emsley also discusses Fanny's ability and tendency to engage in reflection and contemplation and to exercise a power of judgment that no other of the characters in *Mansfield Park* seems to share.¹⁶ Consider the following scene, the likes of which we never find featuring any other character in the novel.

To this nest of comforts [the East Room, a room unwanted by anyone else and which therefore becomes, de facto, a room for Fanny's private use] Fanny now walked down to try its influence on an agitated, doubting spirit...she had begun to feel undecided as to what she ought to do; and as she walked round the room her doubts were increasing. Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked [as to fill an empty role in the staging of "Lovers' Vows"], so strongly wished for? What might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance, had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature – selfishness – and a fear of exposing herself? And would Edmund's judgment, would his persuasion of Sir Thomas' disapprobation of the whole, be enough to justify her in a determined denial in spite of all the rest? It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples, and as she looked around her, the claims of her cousins to be obliged, were strengthened by the sight of present upon present that she had received from them...she grew bewildered as to the amount of the debt which all these kind remembrances produced. A tap at the door roused her in the midst of this attempt to find her way to her duty...(*MP* 179-180).

It is Edmund who has interrupted Fanny's anxious reflections, and their conversation only adds to Fanny's anxiety since it includes Edmund's informing her that he has decided to act with the others. The scene goes on to describe Fanny's further deliberations about the right course of action for her in light of Edmund's decision. What we have, then, is a long scene devoted to

portraying the value that Fanny places on exercising her faculty of judgment and the efforts she makes in exercising it. This is not the only scene in which Fanny is thusly occupied, but we find no similar scenes featuring another character engaging in such strenuous self-assessment, despite the narrative perspective shifting to allow the reader to ‘see inside the head’ of some of the other characters. Fanny’s resolution to insist on not acting in the play is endorsed by the narrator, in part by Edmund confessing to his father that “Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout” the acting affair (*MP* 219). It seems clear, therefore, that Butler and Austen share the conviction that exercising one’s powers of critical reflection is essential to moral behavior and is of constant, pressing importance.

The question of the accuracy of Fanny’s judgment is a common enough theme for critics of *Mansfield Park*. I fall in the category of readers who believe that Fanny, though an imperfect human being, does indeed always judge rightly when it comes to her moral assessments of the characters and actions of every character in the novel, including herself. To defend this view, I will now examine a number of scenes which might be raised as counterexamples to my claim that Fanny judges rightly throughout the novel and that she is therefore a literary embodiment of the ideal Butlerian agent.

When Henry Crawford proposes to Fanny, the narration of her state of mind suggests that she has undergone some change of heart concerning his quality, and that she may have revised her initial judgments of him. He is, in her view,

no longer the Mr. Crawford who, as the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram, had been her abhorrence, whom she had hated to see or to speak to, *in whom she could believe no good quality to exist*, and whose power, even of being agreeable, she had barely acknowledged. He was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested, love; whose feelings were apparently all that was honorable and upright...and to complete the whole, he was now the Mr. Crawford who had procured [her brother] William’s promotion! (*MP* 378, italics mine).

The italicized line is the first challenge to my claim that Fanny always judges rightly, since the extreme judgment it reveals might strike one as hardly being the sort of judgment a thoroughly fair and reflective person would make. However, up until the time Henry takes advantage of his connections with the navy to secure a promotion for Fanny’s brother, it is just the sort of judgment that seems to be warranted. Henry Crawford has only been disrespectful (of Edmund’s

judgment that putting on the chosen play while Sir Thomas is absent is deeply wrong), deceitful (in his attentions to Maria and Julia), selfish (in insisting on the play and in continuing his attentions to Maria to amuse himself), and has generally thought and behaved in terms of achieving whatever it is that will most satisfy his immediate desires. Fanny's judgment that no good quality could exist in Henry might be strong, but neither she, nor the reader, has any evidence to the contrary from the events preceding Henry's taking up William's cause.

Henry does in fact take up William's cause, helping him secure a promotion by speaking to his own uncle, the Admiral Crawford, and relying on the Admiral's network of influence. Fanny takes this action on Henry's part to warrant a revision of her previous judgment of his character, but her revision is only that of what level of civility and gratitude she ought to express in her manner towards him.¹⁷ By the end of the interview, Fanny appears to have confirmed her judgment of Henry as "selfish and ungenerous", with a "want of delicacy and regard for others", and having "always known no principle to supply as a duty what the heart was deficient in" (*MP* 379). The reader has more information about Henry's motivations for helping William, and might be able to see his efforts for the manipulative actions that they are while Fanny cannot, due to her joy for her brother's advancement and gratitude towards Henry for helping to realize William's promotion. Thus, even though the consequences of Henry's desire and effort to help William earn a promotion are surely good for William, I believe Austen intends her reader to be skeptical about the moral worth of those actions as such and of the character who performs them. That Fanny's revision of her judgment of Henry is as brief and as minor as it is, and that the scene of Henry's proposal begins and ends with the sorts of negative descriptions of his character that I have cited confirms this. Austen thus expresses a moral position that again strongly resembles Butler's, for Butler is at pains to stress that the moral worth of an action – the set of criteria upon which conscience makes its judgments – has nothing to do with the consequences of that action. He claims that conscience approves or disapproves of actions "in themselves", "abstracted from all regard to what is, in fact and event, the consequence of it" (Butler *S.2.8*, *Diss.II.2*). But, of course, what we intend to accomplish when we act, or the consequences we intend to realize by acting are included under the concept of 'an action in itself' (Butler *Diss.II*). Thus, Fanny's judgment of disapproval of Henry Crawford stands in part because of the knowledge the reader has of his primary intention in appealing to his uncle on behalf of William Price. He was not acting purely out of concern or compassion for William but because of the

second of his “twofold motives”, namely that of creating a sense of gratitude and obligation in Fanny that would be strong enough to erase all possibility of her refusing his proposal of marriage (*MP* 347).

A second scene that might be cited as evidence against my contention that Fanny Price judges rightly throughout the novel comes during her enforced visit to Portsmouth and her family. Sir Thomas intends the visit to teach Fanny to look more favorably on Henry’s proposal by reminding her of the hardships that might well await her should she refuse him and receive no other offer. Fanny in turn hopes that she will find her parents to be loving and welcoming, and that she will learn to think less frequently of Edmund. She finds, however, that

she could think of nothing but Mansfield, its beloved inmates, its happy ways. Every thing where she now was was in full contrast to it. The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony – and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquility of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of every thing opposite to them here (*MP* 453).

Overwhelmed by the noise, the disorder, and the physical proximity she must bear to it all, Fanny seems to be exaggerating the positive qualities of Mansfield. Does her glowing and undeserved praise of Mansfield constitute an inaccurate moral judgment? I think not, for two reasons. First, Fanny’s reflection does not seem to be a moral judgment, or a judgment of conscience. Rather, she is primarily comparing the comfort of living in the two homes. She is right that Mansfield is better-run than her Portsmouth home, and its days are more characterized by regularity and quiet. That Fanny longs for these features of Mansfield indicates what sort of household she enjoys and finds most comfortable, and that is not really a moral judgment.¹⁸ The second way Fanny’s reflection might appear to contain an incorrect moral judgment is that she dwells on the “beloved inmates” of Mansfield. Fanny of course does love her aunt, Lady Bertram, and her love for Edmund is her great secret. It seems more likely that she is thinking of these two Mansfield inmates in particular than that she suddenly longs for the company of her cousin Tom or of Mrs. Norris. There are beloved people at Mansfield for Fanny to miss, but that she does not allow the remembrance of Mrs. Norris or perhaps Sir Thomas to temper her daydreams of Mansfield shows that she is being dishonest in her idealization of it. However, this idealization by omission of certain members of the household does not, again, strike me as an incorrect moral judgment. After all, Fanny does not consider Mrs. Norris (for example) at all,

rather than to idealize their relationship or Mrs. Norris' nature. She is not making an incorrect judgment about Mrs. Norris' character because she is not making any judgment about it at all. It is also true that at Mansfield it is perfectly possible for Fanny to go a considerable amount of time without encountering its evils. This is one of its advantages in being so much larger of a house than her parents' home. She can, to a large extent, avoid Mrs. Norris or Sir Thomas at Mansfield and can genuinely enjoy her leisure to read and work in her East Room. The noise and aggravation of Portsmouth, however, cannot be similarly escaped. If nothing else, perhaps the inmates of Mansfield are made more beloved by the ease with which they can be avoided. At least, it seems clear to me that while Fanny may be glossing over the finer, less redeeming, points of life at Mansfield, her musings are not of a kind that can qualify as a moral judgment, or a judgment of conscience, at all.

Finally, there is the question of Fanny's jealousy of Mary Crawford tainting her judgments of Mary's character and actions. As Edmund relates to Fanny his final conversation with Mary, Fanny calls it "cruel!...quite cruel! [of her] at such a moment to give way to gaiety and to speak with lightness, and to you! – Absolute cruelty" (*MP* 527). Edmund objects that Mary's "is not a cruel nature", but I think this comment of his is more an indictment of the flaws remaining in his own powers of judgment than it is of Fanny's exclamation. Some critics have suggested that this outburst of Fanny's is a symptom of her own felt mistreatment by Mary, and is a case of her emotions clouding her judgment (*MP* lxxix). Emotional she may be in this scene, but it is not clear that we ought, therefore, to dismiss her judgment here. A few lines later, Edmund states his belief that Mary would "never give unnecessary pain to anyone" but notes that he might be deceiving himself as regards the forbearance she might have shown him in particular, given the attachment between them (*MP* 528). The juxtaposition of the idea of Mary never causing unnecessary pain to anyone and Edmund's ability to deceive himself is striking, especially to a reader who recalls Mary's lack of any serious objection against Henry Crawford trying to make Fanny in love with him just for fun (see *MP* 296). Admittedly this might not be cruelty, though it is certainly wrong, but that Edmund claims against Mary's potential for cruelty and then immediately calls attention to his own potential status as an unreliable narrator leaves the question of Mary's character on the table. If 'cruel' is too strong a word to apply to Mary Crawford, it is only slightly so, for a character who condones Henry's behavior towards Fanny and Maria, and who can almost happily look forward to the possible death of Edmund's brother

purely out of her own material interest surely deserves a strongly disapproving judgment. Regardless of her jealousy, a strongly disapproving judgment of Mary Crawford's character is precisely what Fanny arrives at.

In *Fanny Price*, then, Austen endows the story with a character who judges well and rightly on a consistent basis. When Maria leaves her husband and runs off with Henry Crawford, Fanny's early reproach and censure of them both is vindicated. The same is true when Mary reveals her true colors to Edmund by speaking of the affair as wrong only in that it was not kept secret, and when she writes to Fanny expressing a certain optimism towards the declining health of the elder Bertram son, looking towards Edmund's inheriting Mansfield as making him a more acceptable suitor for herself. Every other character in the novel is taken in by various of the others. Even Sir Thomas finds by the novel's end that he did not know the natures of his own children. Again, what Fanny has, that the others do not, is a properly functioning and properly regarded conscience. The word 'conscience' appears ten times in the novel, mostly in the context of being positively applied to Fanny, as when her conscience prevents her from speaking more positively of Mary Crawford than she really feels (see *MP* 183). The other main appearance of the term comes whenever a character's sense of moral rightness is being appealed to, as when Sir Thomas appeals to Lady Bertram's conscience in order to gain her approval of his plan to send Fanny to Portsmouth (see *MP* 428), or when Edmund worries that the only way he can make himself an acceptable potential suitor to Mary Crawford is to make "sacrifices or situation and employment on his side as conscience must forbid" (*MP* 297). Fanny is also described as having "all the heroism of principle, and was determined to do her duty" (*MP* 307), and as "well principled and religious" (*MP* 341). While Edmund is described as having "upright principles" (*MP* 511), the majority of the 24 instances of 'principles' are again positive ascriptions to Fanny. Its second most frequent use is for noting the lack of principle in the other main characters, as when Fanny admits to her uncle that she has no reason to think badly of Mr. Crawford's temper, but "longed to add, 'of his principles I have'" (*MP* 366). The problem with Henry Crawford is not that he lacks principles, however. Rather, it is that those of his motivational principles which ought to be subordinate, like vanity and a desire to always be amused or entertained, ultimately override cool self-love and conscience to determine his behavior. I have shown above that, for Butler, we ought not to regard 'principle' or 'being principled' (the latter a phrase that Butler would clearly never use) as a matter of living

according to sets of moral rules for behavior and so it might be objected that appeal to a character's principledness as found in these passages of *Mansfield Park* will not lend support to an argument for Austen's being influenced by Butler. However, I will argue below that even these ascriptions of principle to Fanny support a reading of her character as a decidedly Butlerian agent. Such is the case because of a subtle but important difference between Austen's use of 'principle' and 'being principled'. Austen uses 'principle' like Butler does, namely to refer to the main motivational elements of someone's character, but she uses 'principled' in a colloquial way that Butler avoids. In the context of Butler's moral psychology it makes little sense to talk in a common way about a 'person of principle', for example, because principles are simply the motivational aspects of the human mind that we all have. He uses 'principle' in a particular technical way that prohibits talk of 'being principled' or of 'having good or bad principles'. Austen is not similarly restrained, since she is not primarily concerned to present a theory of moral motivation in her novel. While Butler would not speak so, Austen can call her characters 'principled' or as 'lacking principle', by which she means that they either follow conscience (the correct motivational principle), or they follow some other, wrong principle instead. Thus, even though Austen is comfortable using terms or phrases that Butler is not, she nevertheless has concepts like his in mind when she widens her vocabulary. Austen can remain true to Butler's moral psychology, and does not stray into talk of rules for action, while describing Henry Crawford, for example, as having and acting upon the wrong principles.

Section 3: Drew on Butler's and Austen's Use of 'Principle', and 'Conscience'

In an article in *Nineteenth Century Fiction* Philip Drew offers a substantial argument that Jane Austen most resembled Butler in her moral views.¹⁹ While there is good reason to think that this conclusion is true, Drew's interpretation of Butler differs vastly and in an important respect from the interpretation largely accepted in the philosophical literature in an important way which serves to diminish the force of his argument. Because Drew misunderstands how Butler uses the term 'principle', he arrives at a picture of Butler's ethical view in which our internal moral lives are comprised of constant struggle to steer a middle course between opposing morally problematic motivations. This serious misinterpretation of Butler's general moral psychology causes Drew to attribute to Butler a view of the nature of conscience that is not clearly

recognizable as Butler's. Drew's misreading of Butler primarily involves confusion about Butler's use of the term 'principle', which in turn leads him to misrepresent Butler's understanding of the nature of conscience. Together, these misreadings raise serious problems for Drew's argument. I will argue that not only does Drew err in his reading of Butler, but that he is similarly mistaken in his reading of Austen, and will do so by demonstrating that neither author expresses a commitment to the particular deontological view Drew describes. Ironically, perhaps, the passages from *Mansfield Park* that Drew considers give us little evidence to read Austen as he does, but do provide strong reasons for thinking that Austen was committed to moral views that are strikingly in line with Butler's thought.

Drew frequently appeals to the principled-ness of Austen's heroes and heroines to reinforce her allegiance with Butler. He notes that they "determine [their] conduct on [particular] principles" to which they are for the most part unswerving in their commitment (Drew 133). He notes that Fanny "as ever takes her stand on principle"(139), and has "all the heroism of principle, and [is] determined to do her duty" (142). The essential characteristic of Austen's moral exemplars, according to Drew, is their firmness in their principles. Unsurprisingly, her villains are the reverse: they have either a weak commitment to or a total want of principle. To cite these features of Austen's writings as evidence for her similarity to Butler suggests that Drew reads Butler as concerned with principles in the sense of moral maxims by which we structure our thoughts and behavior. He in fact describes these principles as "internal convictions" (Drew 145). It is worth noting that the term 'principle', particularly in this sense, does not even warrant an entry in the index of any of four scholarly works on Butler nor the index of the David E. White edition of Butler's collected works.²⁰

Recall that when Butler speaks of principles, he does so as 'principles of action'. In his book on Butler's philosophical thought Terence Penelhum writes that

the term 'principle' is [Butler's] commonest general name for all the motives he discusses, and there does not seem to be any implied contrast between 'principle' and 'instinct', since animals...have both and not just one. The term 'principle', then, appears to be used indifferently for any conscious inner source of human action.²¹

So, as I have stated above, 'principles' is better understood for Butler as motivational principles, which come with various levels of strength and authority, than it is as the maxims or rules of conduct that Drew seems to have in mind.

Drew's failure to realize that when Butler is talking about principles he is talking about any sort of motive for action that an agent could have leads him into further confusion about Butler's view of the supremacy of conscience. He rightly notes that Butler rejects the notion that the naturalness of virtue consists in "acting as any of the several parts, without distinction, of a man's nature happened to most incline him" (Butler, in Drew 143). However, Drew does not realize that the 'several parts' Butler is referring to are any of the various motivations for performing actions that we have – desires, appetites, or the like. Rather, he seems to read 'several parts' as referring to the rules of conduct that an agent has accepted, which might get in the way of "allowances [that] must be made for special circumstances" (Drew 143). Accordingly, Drew concludes that on Butler's view we still have to worry about whether the pronouncements of conscience are always guiding us rightly. Drew hasn't identified any reason to obey the judgments of conscience rather than any of our other desires, and he even claims for Butler that we can rely on self-love and benevolence to guide our behavior (143). Without taking into account the features of conscience that endow it with a naturally greater moral authority than other principles of motivation (its accuracy regardless of the consequences of an act, for one), Drew ends up worrying, for Butler, that when we obey the judgment of conscience we still have no guarantee that in doing so we are acting rightly. Drew resolves this perceived problem for Butler by proposing that we are only right to follow conscience insofar as we have carefully considered our own motives to do so and insofar as we have compared the edict of conscience with established moral norms.

We might summarize Drew's interpretation of Butler in this way. An agent accepts or structures her life according to many different principles or maxims, but Butler gives conscience primacy among all of them. (Drew gives no reason why Butler should grant conscience this primacy, so it looks like he must view it as an arbitrary move on Butler's part.) But it is wrong, according to Butler, to just follow our strongest inclination. In other words, while virtue is natural to us, its naturalness is not a matter of simply obeying our strongest impulse. Conscience, as one of the many moral principles we accept, can have a strength of motivational force that outweighs our other desires – sometimes our strongest inclination is to do what conscience suggests. However, on Drew's reading, there is a risk of acting wrongly in following conscience, even when we are not self-deceived about its judgments. After all, Drew relates for Butler, there is nothing unique and natural to conscience that gives us a reason to grant more weight to its

pronouncements than to any of the other moral principles (read ‘rules’) by which we live. This means that when we follow our conscience we have no guarantee that in doing so we are acting virtuously; we have to take further steps of judgment to be sure that we are justified in following the dictates of our conscience. We must be rightly judging and scrupulous (i.e. attend to “normal restraints of rational morality” (Drew 143)) in order to avoid the self-indulgence or self-righteousness of blindly following conscience and thereby simplifying moral situations. Conscience can only be properly applied to for input when we have already assessed all the features of the action in question and struck the right balance between our various moral principles of conduct and motivating emotions or desires, and even then it might advise us wrongly.

This interpretation of Butler has the effect of ascribing to him a moral psychology that would strike anyone familiar with the philosophical scholarship on Butler as almost wholly inaccurate. Drew attributes to Butler the view that our moral psychology is characterized by a constant struggle to identify and maintain the mean between various opposing extremes of tendencies of character, a struggle in which the pronouncements of conscience could, without careful regulation, be a “license to dispense with the normal restraints of rational morality” (143). Drew seems to be worried that Butler’s claims regarding the authority of conscience can be instantiated in an individual in a way that generates behavior that is characterized by a “selfish or short-sighted disregard of everything but one’s own immediate impulses” (143), including the ‘impulse’ of conscience. It might be that Drew is assuming that conscience is fallible when he states that we must learn “to distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will” (Drew 144).²² At the very least, Drew thinks that there is occasion for worry that the supremacy of conscience could “be made the occasion for a false simplifying of moral issues” (145), the idea being that following one’s conscience, which is just one principle among many (to which Butler happens to grant supremacy), could amount to “a blithe conviction that ‘we always know when we are acting wrong’” (143).

Given his confusion about Butler’s use of ‘principle’ and his apparent ignorance of Butler’s arguments concerning the nature of the supremacy of conscience it is not surprising that Drew ends up with the reading of Butler that he offers. But when we plug Butler’s definition of ‘principle’ and the God-giveness of the authority of conscience back into the picture, any reason to accept Drew’s reading disappears. It is commonly accepted that Butler distinguishes

between the strength of a motivating principle and the authority of that principle. While my desire to chop down my neighbor's overgrown tree might be very strong, Butler claims that such a desire does not have the natural authority to override the disapproval my conscience registers of that action. The greater a motivational principle's authority, the better reason I have to follow the direction of that principle.²³ This is so because principles have the level of authority that they do because God intended them that way as part of the process of designing human beings. God organized the principles in a particular way because that organization would most likely lead to virtuous behavior. Since conscience has the highest authority, this means that the approval of a particular action by conscience is the strongest reason I could ever have to perform that action and conversely, its disapproval of an action is the strongest reason I could ever have to refrain from performing that action. Given that, for Butler, God endowed us with the faculty of conscience for the purpose of discerning how we ought to act, and that conscience, along with self-love, are motivational principles that are naturally (i.e. by God's intention in creating us) superior to all the others, it is unclear how the vision of constant struggle to maintain the mean that Drew presents could possibly describe our moral psychology in a way Butler would accept. What Butler does accept is a hierarchical model of human nature, which places conscience and self-love above benevolence and the rest of the particular appetites and passions on the basis of their natural authority, and in which particular passions yield to the judgments of higher principles, provided everything in our motivational apparatus is functioning in the way God intended. It is worth noting that on Drew's reading, Butler's contention that virtue consists in following human nature is at best wholly ungrounded, and at worst nearly unintelligible.

A crucial question remains, however, namely that of what Jane Austen had in mind when she used the term 'principle'. If her use is as Drew reads it, she may not resemble Butler as strongly as I mean to argue. Of course, Austen is writing novels, not philosophical treatises, and so it would be wrong to expect her to use a term with the strictness and consistency philosophers often strive to achieve. As long as some passages in which 'principle' appears are open to an interpretation which mirrors the concepts that underlie Butler's use of 'conscience' or 'judgment' my reading of Austen is *prima facie* as plausible as Drew's. I believe that just such a reading of passages of *Mansfield Park* is possible. In fact it seems plain to me that, in many of the passages he cites, Drew is as mistaken in his reading of Austen as he is in Butler, and that the reading that we ought to prefer is one which reinforces the idea that Austen was influenced by the version of

Butler's moral psychology that is accepted by philosophical scholars rather than Drew's. Accordingly, if my reading of Austen is in some points preferable to Drew's, and my reading of Butler is wholly preferable, then my argument accomplishes what Drew's fails to do, namely to offer convincing reasons for thinking that the picture of moral agency and the individual's moral psychology that we find in *Mansfield Park* strongly resembles and could well be influenced by Butler.

Isobel Armstrong, another critic of *Mansfield Park*, remarks on the frequent appearance of 'principle' in the novel, and claims (a bit exaggeratedly, perhaps) that "this word is always associated with Fanny".²⁴ More accurate, I think, is her observation that use of the word 'principle' "is reserved for the integrity of moral judgments" (Armstrong 94). Allen Dunn identifies "self-control, concern for justice, and self-knowledge" with the "principle of right which Fanny often invokes in the course of her ethical deliberations."²⁵ It is clear that an interesting relationship obtains between 'principle' and 'judgment' as they feature in the novel, and it will be worthwhile to consider just what is going on in the scenes where the fact that Fanny is acting on principle is brought to the reader's attention. One important demonstration of Fanny's firmness of principle takes place surrounding the immediate aftermath of her rejection of Henry Crawford's proposal. Drew understands Fanny's resistance to accept his proposal of marriage (and Sir Thomas's encouragement of that match) as a matter of principle (see Drew 139), by which he seems to mean that Fanny is behaving in certain ways with the motivation of adhering to a moral rule of conduct that she accepts. This is the passage he cites as evidence:

[Fanny] trusted, in the first place, that she had done right, that her judgment had not misled her; for the purity of her intentions she could answer; and she was willing to hope, secondly, that her uncle's displeasure was abating, and would abate further as he considered the matter with more impartiality, and felt, as a good man must feel, how wretched and how unpardonable, how hopeless and how wicked, it was to marry without affection (*MP* 374).

It seems to me that there is nothing in this passage to suggest that Fanny is reflecting favorably on her decision to follow a moral maxim here, but much to suggest that both conscience and self-love endorse her refusal to accept Crawford or to bend to her uncle's will. Conscience would affirm that "she had done right", or that at the very least she had not done something wrong in maintaining her refusal of Crawford despite her uncle's wish that she accept him, and self-love

would generate her judgment of the consequences of her refusal, as far as her self-interest is concerned. This latter feature is reinforced by her stated conviction that she could “never make [Crawford] happy, and that [she] should be miserable [her]self” if they were to marry (*MP* 369). Furthermore, I am not sure just what moral rule Drew thinks Fanny is appealing to in order to justify her refusal. It is clear that she is violating an accepted moral norm in not obeying the wishes of Sir Thomas, her guardian, and it is just this sort of moral maxim that Drew seems to think Fanny is preoccupied with following. Rather, her decision to refuse Crawford, and to be firm in this refusal is clearly a matter of her reflection, via self-love, on the likely consequences of accepting him and her confirmation, via conscience, that to refuse Henry, which requires disobeying her uncle and so violating an established moral maxim, is not a morally problematic action.

While he is aware that Austen uses ‘principle’ in a variety of ways, Drew seems reluctant to offer any comment on just what these uses are. A second passage that he considers comes towards the end of the novel, as Sir Thomas is trying to make sense of his daughters’ behavior:

Something must have been wanting within, or time would have worn away much of [the failures of their education]. He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice (*MP* 535-536).

Drew takes ‘principle’ in this passage to refer to the extraordinary and vague category of “almost everything we learn to be of value in the course of the novel” (Drew 141). It seems clear to me, however, that ‘principle’, is used here to refer to both an active faculty of judgment and of a corresponding regulation of the motivational principles upon which one acts, and is, again, just what Butler means by conscience and has in mind in organizing our principles of action in the hierarchy he presents.

It can be truly said of Fanny that she is “firm as a rock in her own principles” (*MP* in Drew 141), but it is also true that Austen never spells out any particular principles, in the sense of moral maxims, to which Fanny supposedly adheres. Surely, if Austen meant to attribute to Fanny a character which rigidly conforms to a system of moral rules, we would hear Fanny express some of those rules and appeal to them, even in her own mind, in order to justify her actions throughout the novel. Since this does not happen, I conclude that we have good reason to think that Austen meant something different than Drew’s notion of maxims or rules when she

made Fanny a ‘principled’ character. Fanny does not act ‘on principle’ in the sense that her actions embody particular established moral rules, but she does grant authority to her faculty of judging the rightness of an action, and takes those judgments as providing the strongest possible reason to perform the action it endorses or refrain from performing the action it condemns. As I mentioned above, a number of scenes in the novel show Fanny engaging in critical reflection regarding her own actions or the actions of others. Concerning the likely prospect of Edmund marrying Mary Crawford Fanny reflects that:

She would endeavor to be rational, and to deserve the right of judging Miss Crawford’s character and the privilege of true solicitude for [Edmund] by a sound intellect and an honest heart. She...was determined to do her duty (*MP* 307).

Here we have another example of Fanny recognizing and acting upon the importance of constantly holding her own conduct up to the light of moral assessment. She deliberates about the rightness of thinking of people (Mary and Edmund, here) in certain ways, and having been informed by her conscience of the right course of action, Fanny then regards its approval of a certain attitude as the strongest reason she could have to adopt and cultivate that attitude. Her decision-making and action-initiating system thus functions precisely as Butler argues we all ought, morally and naturally, to function. As the staging of *Lover’s Vows* grows more serious and elaborate, Fanny engages in rigorous introspection about why she resists acting and whether she is right to do so and soon countenances Edmund’s decision to act in her moral calculations.²⁶ This activity must be what Austen refers to as ‘active principle’, for this is precisely the faculty Sir Thomas’ daughters lack, and is the activity of which they are incapable or in which they are at least unwilling to engage. Julia, for instance, is described as having a “want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education” (*MP* in Drew 140).

I conclude that we have good reason to think that Austen did, at least in some instances, use the term ‘principle’ in a way that is best understood as referring to the feature of our moral psychology that Butler refers to with ‘conscience’. Drew’s reading of ‘principle’ as a moral maxim does not make the best sense of the passages he considers, especially as those passages stand in the larger context of the novel. Thus, the door is open for rejecting Drew’s argument for the resemblance between Austen and Butler and for preferring that which I have been articulating here.

Section 4: Conclusions about Fanny as an Ideal Butlerian Agent

It seems clear that Fanny Price is a character whose judgments of conscience regarding her own actions and the actions and motives of other characters stand through the duration of the novel. She routinely exercises her faculty of conscience or moral judgment, and she arrives at correct judgments when she does so. Therefore, a reading of Fanny Price as a literary personification of Butler's ideal moral agent comes easily. Butler's reflection might apply as easily to Fanny when he notes of conscience that "had it strength, as it has right; had it power, as it had manifest authority; it would absolutely govern the world" (Butler *S.2.14*).²⁷ Her natural and immediate responses to the events of the novel and the characters she encounters are ultimately proven (to the other characters and to any doubtful reader) to be in line with virtue. When Henry asks Fanny's advice about the management of his estate, she replies:

"I advise! You know very well what is right."

"Yes. When you give me your opinion, I always know what is right. Your judgment is my rule of right."

"Oh, no! do not say so. We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be (*MP* 478).

Here we have a testament to the superiority and authority of conscience from the very character who individually embodies its proper authority. Austen, then, is expressing a sentiment that is remarkably similar to Butler's claim that "[man] hath the rule of right within: what is wanting is only that he honestly attend to it" (Butler *S.3.3*). The follies of the Crawfords, of Edmund, and of Maria stem from their inattention to or wholesale suppression of the dictates of conscience, as Sir Thomas laments. Accordingly, it is clear that Austen shares Butler's view that the deposing of conscience from its position of highest authority is unnatural and will have dire consequences, whether she would have recognized his influence or not. My evidence for believing that Austen shared Butler's view that conscience has a specifically natural right to govern our behavior comes from Fanny and Edmund's comments regarding the origin of some of Mary's behavior. Her tendency to speak disrespectfully of her uncle and her deeply flawed judgment of her brother's behavior are considered by them to be "the effect of education" (*MP* 312). That is, Mary's natural sensibility has been silenced or at least minimized by learning from the example of her morally questionable uncle and London society manners generally.²⁸ In not receiving the sort of education that Mary, or even her Bertram cousins, had received, Austen ensures that

Fanny's good nature, and so the general human individual's good nature, has at least not been spoiled. Her habits of reading, and the guidance from Edmund that she has received have perhaps helped to protect and reinforce her nature as well. When not artificially made otherwise, through an activity or neglect, an individual's moral psychology turns out like something Fanny's (which nevertheless needs to be made into a steady habit through discipline and practice), and conscience thus sustains its essential right to govern the agent's behavior. Fanny's moral psychology is organized according to the moral authority of all its component motivational principles, and she actively preserves that organization by exercising her faculty of judgment as it feature in both conscience and self-love. She grants primacy to conscience, however, and it is thus not surprising that Fanny is the only character who does nothing morally wrong during the novel.²⁹ She is an ideal Butlerian moral agent.

Section 5: The Greater Mansfield Household as a Single Agent

Not only does Austen give us a study of a single Butlerian moral agent in the character of Fanny, but her study of the entire Bertram household can be read as an exploration of the effect of conscience not being given its due consideration and place.³⁰ Each resident of the Mansfield economy can be seen as a number of those motivational tendencies Butler lists among our principles or appetites, and the organization of their household as the hierarchy imposed on those propensities. Self-love, represented by the Bertram children other than Edmund, is largely unchecked, and is even strongly encouraged by Mrs. Norris, who might be read as embodying the many affections or appetites that aid self-love in motivating an agent to act. Lady Bertram, indolent and wealthy, might be seen as simply representing the appetites generally, since her concerns never reach the complexity we might expect of self-love or of the vanity of her children. Sir Thomas, as the head of the household, is the force that organizes these principles. He is more indulgent towards some characters over the others, and so implicitly endorses the motives that the former represent. As the head of the household, Sir Thomas is Mansfield Park, and he might therefore be seen as the agent in whom all the principles of the mind are organized, who must decide which motivational principles to suppress or uphold, and who must assess the weightiness of the reasons for action provided by all those principles.³¹ Together with Mrs. Norris, Sir Thomas enforces what he sees as Fanny's properly inferior place. So if we consider

the entire household as a single agent, we get a picture like this: conscience, represented by Fanny, is ignored as unworthy of real consideration by the ultimate practical authority, Sir Thomas, and self-love is thus enabled to function as the practically motivationally effective principle of action for the household, which is shown through Maria's freedom to always do whatever she pleases. Of course, this structure, especially Maria's freedom to act as she desires and her encouragement to do so from Mrs. Norris, drives the action of the novel and is the culprit of the ensuing troubles endured at Mansfield Park.

At the very least, it is plausible to regard the greater household of Mansfield Park as an agent in an imbalanced state, and driven by the wrong motives. The household is, in a sense, an agent that is internally disorganized, and, as the course of the novel demonstrates, things will therefore go wrongly with it. I suggest that the events that take place within the household and the impact those events have can be read as an investigation, by Jane Austen, of what happens when conscience is not obeyed or considered as it ought naturally to be. The negative events that befall the Mansfield household are the result of naturally inferior principles being allowed to override conscience. Balance (and so goodness) is only restored when conscience gains the recognition that has always been its due. While Fanny is banished to her Portsmouth home by Sir Thomas, life at Mansfield falls into chaos: Tom, the eldest son, falls deathly ill, Henry and Maria's affair takes place and is exposed, and Julia elopes with the singularly unimpressive Mr. Yates. Sir Thomas finally recognizes that Fanny's judgment of Henry's character has been right, and also recognizes that she is the closest in spirit to a daughter that he has ever had. Fanny is summoned "home" to Mansfield Park, where she is welcomed as a supremely valuable companion and consolation to all. We might say that the conscience of Mansfield Park has returned from exile and taken her rightful place in the household. At this point, Tom begins to regain his health and has a change of character for the better, and Maria's whereabouts are determined and her future settled. The strongest voice of encouragement for self-love, Mrs. Norris, is sent to keep house with Maria, and thus the two characters who gave self-love much of its inordinate power over conscience are removed. This of course is done on Sir Thomas' orders, who, in depriving Mrs. Norris of her powers of influence, restores the motives associated with self-love to their semi-subordinate position to conscience. Austen gives us a happy ending in which the future for Mansfield Park looks bright because the proper balance of influence and consideration of motivational principles has been reached.

It is also worth noting how reading *Mansfield Park* alongside Butler's moral psychology makes sense of what might be regarded as an arbitrary and unsatisfactory resolution to the story. Numerous critics have been concerned with trying to understand why Austen chose to settle the fates of her characters in the way she did.³² The Crawfords, despite their flaws, have a certain appeal, and the average reader of *Mansfield Park* could be forgiven for wishing that Austen had let Henry continue in his moral development and win Fanny after all. As the novel stands we might wonder why Austen would force Fanny to return to a household that so little regarded her, and whose occupants did not value her as she deserves (in the case of Sir Thomas), or as she desires (in the case of Edmund). One might think that all the novel needs, strictly speaking, for a happy ending, is for Fanny to escape from Mansfield to a place where her worth is recognized and where she "feels the equal of those who surround her" (*MP* 426).³³ Even very near the end of the novel, Austen gives the impression that Henry Crawford could provide Fanny with just such a refuge. On this view, the sudden crumbling of Henry's character and the resulting homecoming of a vindicated Fanny Price smacks of arbitrary moral absolutism and stubbornness on the part of the author. However, I suggest that we can plausibly read *Mansfield Park* in part as a study of the need to preserve the natural structure of one's motivational apparatus in order to be virtuous, and that it is through describing the circumstances of the collapse and rebuilding of the Mansfield economy that Austen undertakes this study. If I am right, then the only resolution to the novel that could make sense for the novel is precisely the ending we find. Butler and Jane Austen agree that no agent functions properly (or perhaps at all) without conscience, and so it cannot be that Fanny leaves Mansfield Park behind permanently. Conscience might be suppressed and ignored, with only the dimmest hope of regaining its proper authority, but neither can it be entirely banished nor remove itself from any connection to the other principles of an individual's nature.³⁴ So, if we take into account the strong presence of Butlerian themes of the authority of conscience and a proper hierarchy of principles, then the resolution of Fanny Price's story that Austen gives us is precisely the ending that the novel required.

I have argued in this chapter that it is reasonable to suppose that Jane Austen could have been directly familiar with the moral thought of Bishop Butler, but that it was at least very likely that she was influenced by his ideas on moral psychology due to their general prominence in England at the time Austen was writing. In *Mansfield Park*, the novel in which Austen most straightforwardly investigates themes of morality, we find characters, events and a similarity of

language which suggest that she endorsed a picture of moral psychology remarkably similar to that which we find in Butler. The conclusion of *Mansfield Park*, in which Fanny is granted a position of respect and consideration in the greater Mansfield household, is an ending in which conscience is thusly treated as the most authoritative principle of an individual's moral psychology. Since Fanny's disposition to exercise her faculty of judgment is natural to her character, and because the characters in whom this capacity is corrupted or absent are said to be the way they are due to "education" or learning bad habits (by having them unchecked or actively encouraged), we can conclude that Austen regarded the superiority of conscience to be part of the natural arrangement of individual agents' moral psychologies, just as Butler did. Finally, by putting the occupants of Mansfield Park through the trials they face, and because Fanny's assumption of a role of influence is the turning point of the household's fortunes, it is clear that Austen meant to express a conviction, shared by Butler, that it is to the extent that agents can preserve the natural superiority of conscience in themselves that they will act rightly or wrongly and bear the resulting consequences. As I mentioned in the introduction, I do not believe that this reading is exclusively the best. It is compatible with many of the extant readings of the novel, but I believe that a reading of *Mansfield Park* with Butler in mind enriches our understanding of the moral position and action of the novel itself and perhaps of the thoughts of the author as she crafted it.

¹ Le Faye, Deirdre. *Jane Austen: A Family Record*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. P. 57

² Collins, Irene. *Jane Austen and the Clergy*. London: Hambledon Press, 1994. P. 38

³ Le Faye, 202. Cited from Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*. John Wiltshire, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. P. xvii

⁴ Bradbrook, Frank. *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966. P 22.

⁵ See Devlin, D.D. *Jane Austen and Education*. London: Macmillan Press, 1975.

⁶ Drew, Philip. "Jane Austen and Bishop Butler." *Nineteenth Century Fiction*. Vol. 35, No.2. 1980.

⁷ Broad, C.D. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959. P. 55

⁸ All references for Butler come from: White, David E., Ed. *The Works of Bishop Butler*. New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006. I will use the following abbreviations: "Pref" – Preface to "Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel"; "S.x.x" – Sermon.Sermon number, paragraph number; Diss – the dissertation "On the Nature of Virtue".

⁹ McNaughton, David. "British Moralists of the Eighteenth Century" in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*. The Routledge History of Philosophy. Vol. 4. Ed. S. Brown. 1996. P. 211

¹⁰ See Butler in White: Preface, S.2, and S.1 note 3 p. 54: "one man rushes upon certain ruin for the gratification of a present desire: nobody will call the principle of this action self-love".

¹¹ The possibility of the corruption of conscience is a topic, both as it is found in Butler and as I believe it is found in Austen, that deserves more consideration. I will return to the question of the fallibility of conscience or the possible means of corrupting it in the next chapter.

¹² Butler thinks that self-love will never, in fact conflict with benevolence, the slightly inferior principle of motivation concerned with the good of others. (see S.1) This *might* leave open the possibility of conflict with conscience, for benevolence is a principle that is not as strongly aligned to right action as conscience is.

¹³ See Butler S.1 and "Of the Nature of Virtue".

¹⁴ All subsequent references from: Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. John Wiltshire, ed. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Hereafter "MP".

¹⁵ Lodge, David. "The Vocabulary of 'Mansfield Park'" in *Language of Fiction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966. P.99

¹⁶ See Emsley, Sarah. *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Esp p. 107-128. Emsley discusses the function of the East Room as the safe retreat in which Fanny can reflect and judge, and notes the suggestiveness of the image of Fanny retreating to a physically higher and isolated place to engage in the contemplation and reflection needed for judgment. John Wiltshire makes a similar observation in his introduction to the most recent scholarly edition of *Mansfield Park*. (see p. lxxix, lxxxix)

¹⁷ See MP 378: "he approached her now with rights that deserved different treatment. She must be courteous, and she must be compassionate".

¹⁸ That the 'propriety' of Mansfield is remarked upon might at first seem to make Fanny's reflection one of a moral, or at least normative, nature. However I think it more reasonable to read 'propriety' as referring to the decorum and manners of the members of the respective households, and although manners and moral are undoubtedly related, for Austen, in this passage it is the outward effects and manifestation of manners, not their moral grounding, that is being emphasized.

¹⁹ See Drew.

²⁰ See the critical works on Butler by Carlsson, Cunliffe, Duncan-Jones, and Penelhum, as well as *The Works of Butler*, David E. White, ed.

²¹ Penelhum, Terence. *The Arguments of the Philosophers: Butler*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. P. 26.

²² I will return to the question of Butler's position on the (in)fallibility of conscience in the following chapter.

²³ McNaughton, David. P. 211

²⁴ Armstrong, Isobel. *Mansfield Park: A Reading*. Penguin Books, New York: 1988. P. 94

²⁵ Dunn, Allen. "The Ethics of Mansfield Park: MacIntyre, Said, and Social Context." *Soundings*. Vol 78 no.3-4. P. 489.

²⁶ See *MP* 183-184 where Fanny reflects: "Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong?"

²⁷ Of course, the epithet must be meant somewhat humorously when applied to Fanny, as hardly anyone would consider a lack of strength to be the only thing keeping her from world domination.

²⁸ Self-deceit and the means of the corruption of conscience are topics which I will address at length in the next chapter.

²⁹ This is not to be confused with the controversial (and probably false) claim that Fanny is perfect. Rather, I have argued above that while she may romanticize, feel jealousy, and exhibit other emotions or attitudes that may be unjustified, she neither errs in her moral judgments nor acts in a way that is clearly morally wrong.

³⁰ I find this sort of reading plausible given that the novel is titled after the house in which much of the action is set. Austen has intentionally set the stage for the Bertram home to be a character itself by titling the novel *Mansfield Park* rather than 'Fanny and Edmund' or 'That Crawford Cad'.

³¹ I offer the identification of certain characters with certain principles not as a case of hard and fast equivalence but as a suggestion of the type of role that person plays in the household, and how they cause disruption for the success of that household by relating to each other wrongly.

³² A number of critics have remarked on the strangeness of the final chapter of *Mansfield Park*, both in terms of its structure and in how the plot is resolved. See, e.g., Joyce Kerr Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen's 'Mansfield Park'*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010. Tarpley's discussion of the end of the novel includes references to Lionel Trilling's explanation for the discomfort that many readers feel with the final chapter.

³³ It is worth noting that Fanny promptly takes on a more natural role of conscience in the Price home in Portsmouth, especially in regards to her sister Susan. See esp. *MP* 457-461.

³⁴ In *S.7* Butler speaks of the wicked 'laying conscience to sleep' or 'suspending or drowning' their faculty of judgment. The metaphor grows thick here, but since Butler does not say that the wicked excise

their consciences I believe that we can conclude that he thinks it impossible to do so. See Butler *S.7.10*, *S.7.16*.

CHAPTER THREE

SELF-DECEIT, EDUCATION, AND THE SUPPRESSION OF CONSCIENCE: PART TWO OF A BUTLERIAN READING OF *MANSFIELD PARK*

In this chapter I will consider Butler's view on the possibility of conscience generating incorrect judgments of the rightness of acts due to its being corrupted through either some intentional or accidental activity by the agent, and how the thread of *Mansfield Park* concerning Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford bears out Austen's implicit agreement with Butler on that subject. The perils of incorrect judgment, which Butler thinks are ultimately due to either self-deceit or improper moral education, are of concern to both authors – Butler perhaps out of interest, as a member of the clergy, in the future of our souls, and Austen through her interest in vividly representing certain elements of human nature. I will begin by attempting to answer the interpretive question of just how Butler believes that human beings come to act wrongly without any feelings of guilt for wrong-doing, whether conscience can be corrupted in itself, and the role of the phenomenon of self-deceit in guiltless wrong-doing. With this in place I will then discuss passages in *Mansfield Park* which concern self-deceit and the effect of mishandled educations to further support my claim that the novel strongly coincides with Butler's thought.

Section 1: The Question of the Infallibility of Conscience

G.E.M Anscombe, in her paper "Modern Moral Philosophy", accuses Butler of failing to recognize the surely commonplace phenomenon of an individual's conscience genuinely, but mistakenly, condoning truly vile actions.¹ In reply on Butler's behalf, B. Szabados argues that Butler's view on conscience could comfortably accommodate the fact that our faculty of assessing the rightness or wrongness of a given action could be corrupted by something like self-deception, and that this corruption would explain its issuing incorrect judgments.² Butler's comments throughout the sermons and the Dissertation on virtue seem to go some way towards fueling this debate rather than deciding it. However, I believe that the bulk of the evidence points to Butler holding the view that it is impossible for conscience to issue incorrect judgments about

the rightness or wrongness of an action. Moral agents might, due to exposure to bad role models or a corrupting education, learn to suppress their conscience or be self-deceived about its dictates, but conscience itself, as a power endowed in us by a beneficent creator, must be infallible.

In Sermon 10, “Upon Self-Deceit”, Butler discusses a “deep and calm source of delusion...which undermines the whole principle of good...and corrupts conscience” (*S.10.16*). He is speaking of the phenomenon by which we all, to a greater or lesser degree, fail to recognize our moral failings as such due to the power of a partiality towards oneself. Butler decries the wickedness stemming from self-deceit as more lamentable than that which arises from the “common vicious passions” (*S.10.16*) because self-deceit “darkens that light, that candle of the Lord within, which is to direct our steps, and corrupts [the faculty that is] the guide of life” (*S.10.16*). The stated view here appears to be that conscience, the faculty by which we judge the rightness of actions, can indeed become diseased and its effectiveness as a moral guide be thereby diminished. Brian Hebblethwaite believes that this statement is an instance of Butler speaking loosely, and that he is inadvertently contradicting his own considered view.³ Despite the uncharitableness of charging an author with getting his own view wrong, Hebblethwaite’s explanation of the anomalous conclusion of Sermon 10 seems to be the right one.

The number of passages in which Butler implies or explicitly states that conscience is infallible in its judgments regarding the rightness of an action significantly outweighs contrary passages. In Sermon 2, “Upon Human Nature, Natural Supremacy of Conscience”, Butler describes the function and authority of conscience at length, and the picture of conscience that emerges is one of a faculty “placed within to be our proper governor; to direct and regulate all under principles, passions, and motives of action. This is its right and office: thus sacred is its authority. And how often soever men violate and rebelliously refuse to submit to it...this makes no alteration as to the natural right and office of conscience” (Butler *S.2.15*). It hardly seems likely that a human faculty given to us all by a creator for the specific purpose of guiding our behavior could be so easily or frequently corrupted in the way Butler speaks of in Sermon 10. That our tendency to act contrarily to the edicts of conscience does nothing to change the role and right of superiority of that faculty also suggests that the processes and issuances of conscience are not generally affected by other aspects of our natures. The authority and function of conscience is unaffected by the degree or frequency with which we obey it, so in a parallel

way the contents of the judgments of conscience must be independent from our actions, the other component parts of our natures, or potential external influences like formal education or the examples of people we regard as role models.

The immediacy of the judgments of conscience is a second reason to conclude that conscience is an independently-functioning and so incorruptible faculty. Here I am interested in the fact that conscience produces its judgments without the agent needing to initiate or prompt it to do so. Of course, the judgments of conscience are also immediate in that they do not depend upon the consequences of the action in question, but that sort of immediacy is not my concern here. Again in Sermon 2, Butler describes conscience as “without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself...and which, if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own” (S.2.8). This passage suggests that conscience works at certain times and in a certain way by its own nature, and that it is overridden only in by means of the agent preventing or interrupting the judgments of conscience or ignore its arriving at a particular conclusion rather than it being fiddled with internally, so to speak, so that it issues different (and incorrect) judgments altogether. Butler reinforces this reading in Sermon 7, “Upon the Character of Balaam”. He reflects that “if there be any such thing in mankind as putting half-deceits upon themselves; which there plainly is, either by avoiding reflection, or (if they do reflect) by...equivocation, subterfuges, and palliating matters to themselves; by these means conscience may be laid asleep, and they may go on in a course of wickedness with less disturbance” (S.7.10). It is wrong to suppose that the judgments of conscience might be corrupted so as to approve of that which is wrong in itself, whether we will this to be the case or if we were to suppose it could happen unintentionally. The edicts of conscience can only be cast aside, suppressed, or otherwise “laid asleep”. When we act wrongly while feeling no guilt or regret, our ease of mind is not the result of having a conscience that has been made to endorse vicious actions, but is rather the consequence of having succeeded in suppressing the conclusions at which conscience arrives and in denying conscience its rightful authority in governing our actions.

Finally, the uniformity of the judgments of conscience also counts in favor of its infallibility. In the “Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue” Butler claims that the pronouncements of conscience are universally consistent among every human being. He writes,

Nor is it at all doubtful in the general, what course of action this faculty, or practical discerning power within us, approves, and what is disapproves. For, as much as it has been disputed wherein virtue consists, or whatever ground for doubt there may be about particulars, yet, in general, there is in reality a universally acknowledged standard of it. It is that, which all ages and all countries have made profession of in public; it is that which...all civil constitutions, over the face of the earth, make it their business and endeavor to enforce the practice of upon mankind; namely, justice, veracity, and regard to common good (Butler Diss II.1).

Surely, Butler believes, a God-given faculty of moral judgment that immediately issues approval or disapproval and does so in a way common to all people could not be the kind of thing that could ever be corrupted in itself. Its judgments might be suppressed, ignored, or all but silenced altogether by various familiar means of rationalization, but conscience is nevertheless infallible in its judgments of the moral status of an action.

Unfortunately, accepting the claim that the passage in Sermon 10, where we find Butler admitting the possibility of corrupting the nature of conscience, is an instance of Butler misrepresenting his view by speaking loosely has the effect of attributing to him a potentially implausible view. As Hebblethwaite notes, “our post-Freudian and sociologically aware generation is bound to be highly suspicious...of what Butler says about the uniformity and infallibility of conscience” (Hebblethwaite 202). Terence Penelhum agrees, insisting that, “[Butler’s] confidence about what conscience dictates is something no wide-awake reader in our day and age can share” (Penelhum 77). I believe these might both be hasty dismissals. While I do not intend to stridently defend Butler’s contention that conscience is both infallible and in itself incorruptible as certainly true, I will suggest two lines of thought that can go some way towards making it more plausible or palatable.

Section 2: Making the Infallibility of Conscience Plausible

Anscombe believes that it is possible for an agent’s conscience to “tell him to do the vilest things” (Anscombe in Hebblethwaite 197), and, as noted above, takes Butler’s failure to recognize this phenomenon to be a serious one that threatens the viability of his view. Let’s consider just what would have to happen for this sort of event to occur within the picture of conscience that Butler has given us. It is important to note that the issue here seems to be the

possibility of conscience actively approving of an action that most or all of us would agree is vicious, perhaps disturbingly so. In doing so, conscience must either judge that the action is morally required or morally permissible. This is not to be confused with the possibility of conscience failing to disapprove of an action, and perhaps issuing no judgment at all. In fact, the latter scenario seems impossible, especially since Butler takes conscience to be a practical faculty. It is easy to see that the value of a faculty which occasionally offers no advice on how to act is considerably less than one that always does. Since Butler believes that the judgments of conscience are immediate partly in that agents do not have to initiate the processes of conscience, and since he believes that conscience is a faculty given to us by God specifically for the purpose of guiding our actions, it is reasonable to suppose that he rejects the possibility of conscience effectively withholding judgment on an action. Thus, conscience always returns a judgment on the moral worth of an action, either of 'impermissible', 'permissible', or 'required'. Of course, the category of 'required' could be a subset of the 'permissible' actions, since it is necessarily the case that a morally required action must also be morally permissible. This appears to open up the possibility that conscience only has two outputs – 'impermissible' and 'permissible' – and that there is accordingly some vagueness about whether an action is the solely permissible action (i.e. 'required') or one among many. However, the introduction of such vagueness would again diminish the value of conscience as a practical faculty, and so we ought, on Butler's behalf, to accept the three-output picture of conscience in which it can distinguish between permissible and required actions.

The question then becomes, is Anscombe concerned with cases in which conscience issues the 'permissible' judgment on a vicious action, or the case in which conscience issues 'required'? Obviously, having one's conscience recommend a vicious action as required is worse, in some respect, than it simply judging the action to be permissible. However, even though conscience might be able to distinguish between the sets of required and permissible actions, it is still the case that 'required' is a subset of 'permissible', and so we can, for our purposes here, treat them as a single category. It might be worse for conscience to judge a vicious action to be required, but it still would be worrisome enough if conscience determined a vicious action to be permissible that we can conclude that the objection Anscombe is raising includes both situations in which conscience fails to correctly judge an action as vicious.

I will turn now to what I believe are two general lines of argument that are open to Butler to support his claim that conscience is infallible. First, he can attempt to respond to Anscombe's worry by explaining how it is that agents act wrongly with an "easy", but infallible conscience. There seem to me to be three ways in which Butler could do this. He could argue that agents can 1) lack information about the action, 2) rationalize about the action, 3) suffer some sort of psychosis or serious psychological defect which disqualifies them from moral agency and so puts them outside the purview of his discussions of conscience. Secondly, Butler can borrow a page out of Descartes' *Meditations* and point to his assurance of the existence and goodness of God (a belief which is more secure than Descartes' given the sort of work Butler is doing) as a solid foundation for his claim that our faculty of conscience is neither fallible nor corruptible in itself. Since this latter move might be the least satisfactory to scholars wishing to defend Butler's view today I will consider it first.

Option 1: Appeal to the Existence and Goodness of God

The other avenue which Butler has open to him for defending the infallibility of conscience resembles Descartes defense of our reliance on clear and distinct ideas as true. Descartes, of course, worried that we could only be certain of a single fact – the fact that I exist at the time that I am thinking. It seemed to him that neither the senses nor pure reason could be trusted to provide us with knowledge, since both can be deceived in fairly straightforward ways. Experiencing the fallibility of the senses is common enough, between mirages (like a wet patch on the road), or simple optical illusions (such as when a stick half submerged in water appears broken or bent). However, the means by which reason could be deceived eventually lead Descartes to his argument for a subset of reason's products, clear and distinct ideas, to be in fact trustworthy after all. In the *Meditations* Descartes' thought ran like this: initially, he considered it possible that even facts I think I know to be true through reason alone might be false due to the interference of a malicious demon with my rational process. Maybe, even, the being that created humankind is that sort of malicious being, and intentionally made us all with faulty powers of reasoning. This being might have made it the case that I come to believe that two plus two equals four along with every other rational human being, when in fact it equals five. What gets us out of this mess, however, is the fact that God, who created us, is not a malicious being. We can be

confident of his goodness, and so we can be confident that any faculty he gave particularly to human beings, such as reason, is in fact a trustworthy faculty.⁴ Descartes restricts the category of reliable, or ‘likely-to-have-gotten-to-the-truth’ products of reason to those facts which we perceive clearly and distinctly with the mind (both ‘clear’ and ‘distinct’ are technical terms for Descartes). The conclusion I wish to highlight here is that the existence and goodness of God ensures the proper functioning (the ‘truth-apprehending’ ability, perhaps) of an essential, defining human faculty.

Butler could, I think, make a similar argument regarding the infallibility of conscience. We know that God is good, we know that a benevolent being would not give us such an important, action-guiding faculty as conscience which is faulty or liable to error, and so we therefore know that our conscience can be relied upon to provide us with its proper product, namely a correct judgment about the moral worth of an action. Of course, if Butler were to use this line of argument as his only argument for the infallibility of conscience, he might well face a serious uphill battle to defend it since he would ultimately have to prove that God existed as the benevolent creator he envisions. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that Butler was writing, in part, sermons for delivery to an audience for whom he could safely assume that the existence and goodness of God were foregone conclusions. When we read his sermons as philosophical treatises, we run the risk of failing to remember the context in which he shared the thoughts expressed in those sermons with others, and thus may fail to understand just why certain conclusions were beyond doubt, or why Butler avoids presenting and defending certain sub-arguments which the skeptical philosopher might consider of more immediate necessity than does the average intelligent Anglican congregation. There is simply no reason, given the context of his writing, for Butler to think that he must offer arguments for the existence and goodness of God before he can get to the more important matter of arguing that conscience is infallible. He is defending this argument to an audience which might doubt the prudence of attending to conscience and acting as we know we ought, morally, to act, but this audience does not doubt that human beings were created by God with certain capacities, including that of moral judgment. Thus, there is no need for Butler to persuade them of such a human origin and faculty, and we would be wrong to require him to do so before we will consider his arguments concerning conscience.

Option 2: Methods of Explaining Guilt-free Wrong-doing

Nevertheless, I do not think that Butler, or anyone wishing to defend his view, need rely on the above line of argument. There is a second option, of a more modern philosophical nature, which we might choose for supporting Butler's claim that conscience is infallible and incorruptible. If Butler can successfully argue that the phenomena of agents acting wrongly but feeling no guilt for their action might be due to something other than a corrupted or mistaken conscience, then he can successfully answer Anscombe's objection that guilt-free wrong action is a counter example to his claim that conscience is infallible. I will now turn to three methods by which Butler might make such an argument.

Method 1: Appeal to Lack of Information (An Epistemic Restriction on Conscience)

Before considering the strongest version of Anscombe's challenge to Butler (where an agent's conscience approves of a "vile" action), let's consider something more commonplace. Recall that conscience, on Butler's view, issues its judgment on an action immediately. We do not have to activate its process, nor do we have formative control over the contents of its judgments; conscience is not a feature of our natures that we must activate, and its processes are not directly under our control. Nevertheless, surely the ability of an individual's conscience to assess an action is limited by the amount of information the individual has about that action. After all, my conscience is precisely that, mine. My conscience was given to me by God, but that does not mean that it possesses God's knowledge of the world. There might well be features of an action that are, at the time of action, inaccessible to an agent which would, if accessible, be relevant in establishing the rightness or wrongness of that act. The infallibility of conscience then clearly carries an epistemic qualification. Insofar as an agent's understanding of the context of their action and the implications of their action on that situation are both complete and accurate, the judgment that the agent's conscience issues regarding the action in question is infallible.

Consider this case: an average teenager goes out to buy coffee. He has no reason to think that buying coffee could be wrong, and so his conscience never registers disapproval of the action. Later afterwards (maybe the next day, maybe the next year) he learns about the various and common features of the coffee trade that make un-researched coffee purchases wrong, such as exploitation of coffee growers and harvesters or problematic pesticide use in coffee cultivation. This person's conscience might retroactively change its judgment about that original

purchase, but this does not seem to make their conscience fallible per se. We might say that an individual's conscience is infallible relative to that person's epistemic access to the facts regarding the context and implications of performing an action at the moment of deciding whether to perform it. All my conscience has to work with in issuing a judgment about an action is the set of facts I know or believe to be true of the situation I am in and the effects of the action I am considering performing, and to count conscience as fallible due to its failure to countenance facts to which it has no access is surely unreasonable. Thus, due to the natural epistemic limitation of conscience, an agent might act wrongly with the approval of a conscience that is neither corrupted nor fallible.

Method 2: Appeal to Rationalization

As I will discuss in greater detail below, Butler is interested in the ability we all have to deceive ourselves and the effect this can have on our moral judgments and actions. One thing human beings do is alter our understanding of a situation in order to make something that we want to do appear to be the thing that we ought to do. We choose to emphasize some facts about a person or situation and ignore others. Through these sorts of processes of rationalization an agent can convince themselves that an action that they formerly regarded as wrong but desirable to perform is in fact a perfectly justified action. There are at least two steps in the process of arriving at guilt-free wrong action through rationalization. First, the agent must willfully and perhaps knowingly choose to override the judgment of 'wrong' issued by her conscience on the action she wishes to perform. The judgment is automatically made by conscience, and the agent's recognition of the judgment (however fleeting), combined with a desire to act differently, is what makes rationalization a possibility in the first place. Accordingly, the second step for the agent is to begin to re-describe the situation in a way that conscience would approve of the action that the agent desires to perform. It is only by gerrymandering the explanation of the situation that the agent gets the output from conscience that she wants, and insofar as the gerrymandered explanation is dishonest or inaccurate her action may in fact remain wrong.

Notice that once she has gone through the process of rationalization, we can expect the agent to believe that she is acting rightly and feel no guilt for performing an action that is in fact wrong. If she has truly been successful in manipulating her understanding of the situation at hand, then in fact she must now regard her action as right, for it was only in light of her original

description of the situation that conscience judged that action to be wrong. Simply put, if one changes the description of the situation, conscience might well change its judgment of the action under consideration. Thus, if an agent successfully changes how she understands her situation through rationalization, then it is possible for conscience to approve of an action in the newly-described situation that it would have disapproved of in the agent's original description of the situation. Just as in the case of the coffee-buying teenager, the crucial point in the process of conscience issuing its judgment is the very beginning – the accuracy of conscience's judgment of an action depends on the information it has at the outset about the action and its context. Unlike the coffee-buying teenager, however, the agent who rationalizes intentionally manipulates the input that conscience receives in order to make its judgment. For the coffee-buying teenager, it was a non-culpable lack of information that gave conscience the wrong input and enabled it to approve of a wrong action, while the agent who rationalizes feeds conscience a particular description of a situation in order to force it to approve of the action that the agent wishes to perform. This being done, however, the agent can act as she wished and believe herself to be acting rightly since conscience did in fact issue a judgment of approval for that action.

Interestingly, Butler supposes that as agents engage in rationalization more often, it becomes easier to do but ultimately less necessary.⁵ We get better at explaining situations to ourselves in ways that make the action we want to perform the right one, and gradually the initial judgment of conscience is overridden more quickly and more forcefully. Repeatedly overriding the judgment of conscience thus has the effect of suppressing its judgment from the agent's awareness altogether. She passes over its verdict of 'wrong' regarding her preferred course of action so quickly and so effectively that it ceases to register within her conscious deliberative process at all. Conscience is thus suppressed to a state of effective silence in that agent, and she might well act wrongly with great frequency (and be blameworthy for those actions) without any suspicion of so doing (which would have come from her recognition of conscience's judgment), and thus without any feelings of guilt .

Method 3: Appeal to Psychosis and Psychological Defect (Sociopaths and Suppressed Conscience)

There is a third possible explanation of a scenario in which an agent's conscience approves of an action that the rest of us would agree to be truly awful. Suppose an agent performs an

action, with full knowledge of the relevant facts about the action (including an accurate and honest understanding of the context and implications of the action), the agent's conscience approves of that action, and the action is agreed to be heinous by everyone else.

There are three options for us concerning such persons. First, we might suppose that Anscombe is wrong to describe even the case of the sociopath as one in which an agent's conscience approves of a wrong action. Rather, we ought to describe it as one in which the disapproval of the agent's conscience is so faintly expressed, due to the agent's habitual suppression of it, that its judgment does not register within the agent's awareness. We might argue on Butler's behalf that it is not that people act wrongly with the approval of their conscience, but that they cannot hear its objections to the wrong actions they perform and so feel no guilt for those actions. As I mention above, suppressing conscience has the effect of making it appear to the agent that conscience raises no objections to actions that are in fact wrong. The practical effect is of course that an agent who has successfully suppressed their conscience can act wrongly but feel no guilt for wrongdoing since the faculty that alerts them to the wrongness of actions has been effectively silenced. Conscience still issues correct judgments about actions, and is thus infallible, but the agent is simply unaware of those judgments. Of course, this route of explanation might be said to fail to acknowledge that Anscombe really is worried that someone's conscience can actively approve of wrong actions and its incorrect judgment can register with the agent.

However, the only way such an action (the wanton murder of a young child, maybe) seems to be intelligible is if we fill in the details of the story in a way that actually serves to undermine the performer's status as a moral agent in the first place. Only someone with a serious psychological or rational defect could commit truly vile actions with their conscience registering approval of those actions. We commonly regard people of this sort as sociopaths, as deranged or ill to such an extent that they fail to count as a moral agent. This is because we have a second option for handling such cases, which is to admit that the agent has all the relevant information about their actions, acknowledge that this person's conscience approves of their heinous actions, and conclude that this person is not a moral agent. There is a worry here that if a functioning conscience is the hallmark of moral agency, then it is trivially true that moral agents have the correctly-functioning consciences by stipulation. I do not think, however, that acknowledging that someone who seems genuinely to judge incorrectly about the moral worth of an action is not

a moral agent leads us into this problem. Sociopaths are simply outside of the purview of Butler's discussion of the infallibility of conscience. When someone performs a truly horrible action with no feeling of guilt, surely there is more wrong with that person than a faulty conscience. To focus on the incorrect judgment of the sociopath's conscience is to fail to consider all the other things that go or have gone wrong in the sociopath's rational and other psychological faculties. It is to miss the diseased forest for focusing on a single diseased tree. If we keep in mind that psychopathy or sociopathy is a function of a number of factors, then we will not be tempted to level the triviality charge against the idea that conscience is incorruptible, and that a faulty conscience would be an indication of less than full moral agency. It might be true that some persons truthfully state that their conscience condoned a vicious action, and it might be true that such a statement is one (of many) indicators of disorders like sociopathy which discount a person as a moral agent. Yet it seems possible that at the same time, since an apparently corrupted or faulty conscience is perhaps not a sufficient condition for sociopathy, Butler can maintain as a substantive claim the notion that conscience is infallible in moral agents. Accordingly, the phenomenon of sociopathy still seems to present no substantial challenge to Butler's claim that conscience is infallible. Sociopaths and similar non-moral agents by definition do not have moral lives, and in his capacity as clergyman Butler is concerned with the role of conscience in the moral lives of his congregation. That some people fail to have moral lives has no bearing on the plausibility of Butler's contention that conscience is infallible in its judgments for those of us who are moral beings.

Our third option for explaining how it is possible for agents to act wrongly with the approval of their conscience, while still presenting no challenge to Butler's position on the infallibility of conscience, is to regard the phenomena of sociopaths as extreme cases of the sort of scenario I discussed above of the coffee-buying teenager. Like the teenager, sociopaths seem to lack certain information about what they are doing, but they also seem to be incapable of wholly understanding the context and implications of their actions. In fact, it might be this inability to have certain information about the implications of their actions – such as a real understanding of what it means for someone else to experience pain – that enables us to diagnose them as sociopaths. Also like the coffee-buying teenager, we regard sociopaths as non-culpable for their failure to consider the information that they did not have access to. That is, it usually is not regarded as a sociopath's fault that they have the psychological disorders that they do.

However, the cases come apart regarding the ability of sociopaths to acquire the information they lacked. While the coffee-buying teenager can become informed about his action and revise his judgment accordingly, sociopaths cannot. Their psychological disorder or disorders prevent them from ever apprehending or appreciating certain facts about their actions. Thus, while sociopaths are not to blame for failing to recognize certain facts about their actions, they are not moral agents like the coffee-buying teenager. This is precisely because the conscience of a sociopath will never have all the relevant information about an action in order to judge the permissibility of that action. Even if we tried to provide the sociopath with the information she lacked, her disorder would prevent it from registering within her deliberative processes in the way that learning about the coffee trade registered with the teenager. Because the avenues of input are faulty, the question of the fallibility or corruptibility of conscience in a sociopath is void. The teenager can become informed about the implications and context of his actions (and we might think he has an obligation to do so). The “rationalizer” can choose to attend to and accept the judgment of conscience that is based on an honest and accurate portrayal of her situation instead of opting to re-describe it in a way that forces conscience to approve of the action she wishes to perform. This might be a very difficult thing to do, if the habit of self-deception is well-entrenched, but since conscience cannot be removed or destroyed from our psychology, its judgments are there to be attended to if we so choose. Getting out of the habit of self-deceit might well take even more effort than getting into that habit and quieting conscience in the first place, but I do not think we have any reason to regard such as an impossibility. The sociopath is in neither position, and can never make a moral decision due to their psychological disorder, but this is not due to the fallibility or corruptibility of their conscience. Rather, the various other problems with the sociopath’s rational processes, which are the processes that feed conscience the information it will have to work with in issuing its judgment, prevent the sociopath from being able to make moral judgments at all. Thus, that a sociopath performs heinous acts without feelings of guilt is no counterexample to Butler’s contention that in moral agents conscience is an infallible faculty.

It would be wrong to dismiss Butler’s moral psychology *in toto* on the grounds that there is no plausible way to maintain that conscience is infallible. I have suggested two options Butler has for defending just that view. We might choose to acknowledge that assumptions about the existence and goodness of God are wholly appropriate for the genre in which Butler was working

and that these assumptions give his claim for the infallibility of conscience a stable foundation. Or we might maintain that Butler can offer plausible explanations of guilt-free wrong-doing which do not involve a corrupted or fallible conscience. These explanations can appeal to the claim that conscience is infallible relative to the information the agent has about the situation, which can be intentionally “massaged” by the agent through rationalization to cause conscience to endorse the action the agent wanted to perform, and that this is the only scenario in which a conscience can approve of an action that is in fact wrong. Or we might argue that a truly flawed conscience (one that, even with all the relevant information about the context and implications of an action, approves of wrong actions) is something only possessed by sociopaths and is part of what makes them non-moral agents, and so is no counter-example to Butler’s view that in people who are moral beings and can live moral lives conscience is infallible. Whichever avenue of argument we choose, I think it is clear that Butler’s view on the infallibility of conscience can at least get off the ground. It is of course possible that none of the options will ultimately succeed in proving that Butler’s view is true, but each line ought to be explored before we abandon Butler completely and dismiss his view as wildly implausible.

Let me conclude. Despite some misleading passages, the bulk of the evidence suggests that Butler believed conscience was infallible. This view might not be as implausible as it initially seems, especially since it might be made less counter-intuitive with a relatively minor epistemic qualification, or might be easily defensible if you share his assumptions about the existence and nature of God as his church-going audience would have. Accordingly, there are three possible explanations, on Butler’s view, for a moral agent acting wrongly. First, the agent might willfully ignore the judgment of their conscience against an action despite her recognition of that judgment, and perform the act. It is likely that in this scenario the agent will feel some guilt, of varying magnitude, for acting against the judgment of her conscience. Second, the agent might lack some amount of information about the action under consideration, and perform that action with the belief that it is morally permissible. Her conscience could approve of the action at the time of acting (and so the agent will feel no guilt for wrong-doing) despite the fact that with all the relevant information about the action conscience would change its judgment from one of approval to one of disapproval. Finally, the agent might have made such a habit of willfully ignoring conscience and rationalizing her performance of wrong actions that she effectively no longer “hears” what conscience advises. She has, one way or another, successfully suppressed

the voice of conscience so that its judgments do not even register or play a role in her decision-making process. The scenario in which conscience has been suppressed through practiced rationalization is the most philosophically interesting of the three for Butler and, I will argue, for Austen, and it is here that the human power for self-deceit looms large. It is through self-deceit that agents are able to quiet conscience to various degrees, and are thus able to act wrongly without feeling any hint of guilt for knowingly acting against the judgment of conscience.

Section 3: Self-deceit

Butler believes that self-deceit is a common enough phenomenon, and that most of us engage in it to some degree.⁶ We can deceive ourselves about two different things: the moral quality of our character as a whole, and the rightness or permissibility of particular actions that we perform. Agents deceive themselves about the whole of their character by refusing to examine it at all, since they sometimes find that “the survey of themselves, their own heart and temper, their own life and behavior, doth not afford them satisfaction...therefore they turn away, will not go over particulars, or look deeper, lest they should find more amiss” (*S.10.11*) This refusal to examine one’s own character can lead to a dangerous self-partiality, which can cause an agent to excuse their own thoughts and actions while condemning the same thoughts and actions in others. An agent who is not in the habit of examining her own character will assume that it is blemish-free and have no evidence to the contrary. Thus, “when [she] hear[s] the vice and folly of what is in truth [her] own course of life, exposed in the justest and strongest manner, [she] will often assent to it, and even carry the matter further; persuading [herself], one does not know how, but some way or other persuading [herself]...that it hath no relation to [her]” (*S.10.11*). That is, an agent who refuses to consider the moral worth of her own character might be the loudest voice condemning actions that she herself has performed. She is ignorant of her own faults, but still has the capacity to recognize them as such in others. Though Butler claims to be unable to identify the means by which agents persuade themselves of their innocence against charges of vice, in this passage the claim must be a rhetorical flourish, for in Sermon 7 he notes that “if there be any such thing in mankind as putting half-deceits upon themselves; which there plainly is, [it is accomplished through] either avoiding reflection, or (if they do reflect) by religious equivocation, subterfuges, and palliating matters to themselves” (*S.7.10*). That is, we

rationalize, we make sure to explain situations to ourselves in certain ways, or we just refuse to critically reflect upon our characters or our actions at all in order to preserve our good opinion of our own moral character. This practice of self-deceit, then, is the tool for quieting the judgments of conscience or of suppressing it altogether and for clearing the path for wrong action that carries no guilt or apparent disturbance of conscience.

While it is the case that human beings have the ability to engage in self-deceit as naturally as they have abilities of reasoning and sight, Butler suspects that engaging self-deceit for the purpose of preserving our good opinion of ourselves and for excusing individual actions is something we must practice if we are to truly suppress conscience.⁷ That is, an agent's first efforts at self-deceit are likely to be of a kind where he is still aware that conscience has advised against the action he has chosen, and he will have to rationalize and re-describe the situation to himself more vigorously than an agent who has been doing such things for years. The suppression of conscience requires making self-deceit a habit – rationalizing and explaining things away often enough until it comes so easily that conscience has no chance to be heard. We learn to more effectively suppress conscience as we get better at deceiving ourselves. That we have to apply ourselves to suppressing conscience is in fact what makes self-deceit so dangerous and vicious. It is one thing to be caught up in the grips of a perfectly natural, albeit vicious passion, but it is entirely another to cultivate the habit of self-deceit and work to suppress the judgments of our God-given faculty of conscience. Surely we can agree with Butler that there seems to be something worse about making the effort to train oneself to be comfortable with performing actions we know to be wrong than there is in what we might call a “sin of passion”, such as lying to a neighbor to cover up the fact that it was you who ran over and crushed their garbage can. As Butler notes to conclude his sermon on self-deceit, “if people will be wicked, they had better of the two be so from the common vicious passions without such refinements, than from this deep and calm source of delusion...which undermines the whole principle of good” (S.10.16).

Section 4: Education, Self-Deceit, and the Infallibility of Conscience in *Mansfield Park*

Like Butler, Jane Austen recognized that suppressing our own judgment about what is right is something that we learn to do, and that engaging in self-deception in order to do so can open the door to the most pernicious kind of vice. The subjects of good and bad educations and of the effects of one's education (whether in the schoolroom, the university, or simply the influence of home) on one's moral life, and of the dangers of self-deceit feature prominently in *Mansfield Park*, especially where Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford are concerned.⁸ In the following section I will discuss the relationship between vice, self-deceit, and education as Austen presents it in *Mansfield Park*, and how it might differ in one respect from Butler's view. I will then examine at some length the case of Edmund Bertram, whose experiences over the course of the novel constitute Austen's exploration of the practice of self-deceit and its effects on one's conscience.

Section 5: Education and Vice in *Mansfield Park*

Austen directly ties vicious thought and action to education or habituation when Fanny remarks to Edmund that Mary's manner of speaking – lightly of her uncle's vices, disrespectfully of her uncle, and disparagingly of Edmund's wish to be a clergyman – betrays a tainted mind which is undoubtedly “the effect of education” (*MP* 312). Sir Thomas identifies an incomplete education as the source of his daughters' respective elopement and adultery, and Fanny is confident that wider and carefully chosen reading is the key to improving her sister Susan's (not unpromising) judgment and behavior.⁹ With the characters of Susan Price and Mary Crawford, we have evidence that Austen believed, like Butler, that human beings are not born with an irredeemably evil character but that they may fall into patterns of vicious behavior by failing to make the effort necessary to maintain the hierarchy of motivational principles intended by God or by actively making a habit of acting wrongly (by imitating poor role models, for example). Fanny's revelation about Susan's disposition is not that Susan can be “provoked into disrespect and impatience against her better knowledge – but that so much better knowledge, so many good notions, should have been hers at all; and that, brought up in the midst of negligence and error,

she should have formed such proper opinions of what ought to be” (*MP* 460). It seems plausible to me to read this passage as a testament to the naturalness of sound judgment, which nevertheless is under substantial threat from the influential, habit-forming power of situation and the examples of others. Susan’s nature is good, her judgment tends rightly, and so far it has largely retained its rightful place as the guide of Susan’s life, despite having only poor role models in both her parents and having almost no education beyond minimal reading and writing.

Mary Crawford is thus in part a possible representation of what Susan could become, were Fanny to decide not to recommend an improving course of reading for her, or act as an example to Susan in her own behavior. Repeatedly in the novel, Edmund asserts that Mary’s nature is “sweet and faultless” (*MP* 312), and “perfectly feminine” (*MP* 75). The source of her wrong judgments (such as her identification of detection and folly as the only problematic aspect of her brother’s seduction of Maria) is described as the influence or examples of behavior exhibited by Mary’s aunt, who “entirely brought [her] up” (*MP* 75), as “the influence of her former companions” (*MP* 312) in London, and as something simply that “the world does” (*MP* 526) to people. What the world has “done” to Mary Crawford, or what her miseducation at the hands of her aunt and uncle has brought about, is to encourage a “perversion of mind” (*MP* 527), to give her a “blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind” (*MP* 528), and to make it her habit to suppress her natural principle. Mary speaks and acts “as she had been used to hearing others speak, as she imagined everybody else would speak” (*MP* 527), and she cannot imagine holding the sorts of moral convictions that Edmund professes since, through habit and example, her “mind itself was tainted” (*MP* 312). There is a clear parallel here between Austen’s and Butler’s thought concerning the immediacy and naturalness of correct moral judgment, with the recognition that there are many opportunities for us to learn to override, ignore, and ultimately suppress that judgment due to unfortunate life circumstances or to poor role models.

However, Edmund’s regret at finding that Mary’s faults are “faults of principle...of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind” (*MP* 528) suggests a point on which Austen and Butler might not agree. I went to some effort above to show that Butler could plausibly believe that conscience could not be corrupted in itself, but that it could only be suppressed to near silence. When Edmund laments Mary’s corrupted mind and spoiled nature, Austen appears to be supposing that our moral faculties can indeed be damaged and made to condone wrong actions and flawed characters in ways that Butler rejects. It looks like Mary Crawford is an example of

someone in whom conscience no longer works correctly, and whose nature, from a practical point of view, might as well never have been good. However, I think that a close reading of the scene of confrontation between Mary and Edmund reveals a possibility that Austen would have been more sympathetic to Butler's view that conscience is infallible and incorruptible. At their final meeting, Edmund admonishes Mary for her lack of moral discomfort with the adultery of her brother, and tells her that he "would infinitely prefer an increase in the pain of parting, for the sake of carrying with me the right of tenderness and esteem" (*MP* 530) than to see her now, as he must, as someone who was neither morally admirable nor perhaps even morally respectable. The scene continues with Edmund's narration of their encounter:

She was astonished, exceedingly astonished – more than astonished. I saw her change countenance. She turned extremely red. I imagined I saw a mixture of many feelings – a great, though short struggle – half a wish of yielding to truths, half a sense of shame – but habit, habit carried it. She would have laughed if she could... She tried to speak carelessly, but she was not so careless as she wanted to appear (*MP* 530).

Even Mary Crawford, whose life has been characterized by poor role models, insufficient or non-existent moral education, and active cultivation of incorrect judgment and action, even she recognizes some truth in what Edmund has said. If her mind or conscience had been corrupted in itself she would not experience any struggle with shame, however brief, and would successfully laugh off Edmund's admonitions with the carelessness that Edmund tells us she cannot quite manage. In this scene I believe that we see that Austen shared Butler's contention that even in those who have cultivated habits which enable them to suppress their conscience, that faculty itself cannot be corrupted. That Mary struggles to continue her suppression of conscience or moral judgment here indicates Austen's acceptance of the notion that vice must be learned and practiced in order for the natural and immediate issuances of correct judgment to be overridden or quieted. Mary has not succeeded in corrupting her mind (Edmund, a notoriously unreliable narrator throughout the novel, must be speaking hyperbolically when he makes such claims¹⁰) because it is not possible to do any such thing. What she has done is make a concerted effort to suppress the judgments of conscience, with a significant degree of success. Her moment of struggle reveals that the narrator believes her conscience is not corrupted in itself, only that it has not been given the attention that it deserves and that Mary has been unused to hearing it at all for some time. We can hope, therefore, that Mary will choose to acknowledge and follow the

recommendations of her conscience in the future. It is there, functioning correctly, if she will only attend to it with the dedication she formerly put into suppressing it.

Section 6: Edmund Bertram and Self-deceit

Edmund Bertram is a fascinating, if frustrating character. In this section I will further examine Edmund's relationship with Mary Crawford in order to draw yet another parallel between Butler's and Austen's thought. If any character and any storyline in *Mansfield Park* can tell us about the human capacity for self-deceit and the dangers it can pose to even a reasonably established good moral character, it is that of Edmund. Henry and Mary Crawford are Austen's examples of established suppression of conscience through self-deceit, but with Edmund she explores how someone whose natural good judgment has largely been given its proper consideration can begin to employ self-deceit to start quieting their conscience and good judgment.

We might, with some fairness, have expected Edmund rather than Fanny to be the conscience of the *Mansfield* household. He plans to become a clergyman after all, and so it would make sense that he would have the strongest conscience of the family and that he would be the moral exemplar of the novel.¹¹ Edmund himself describes the role of the clergy in society as that of having "charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally [and as having] guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence" (*MP* 107-8). Further evidence for Edmund having sound moral judgment (which we can read as Edmund attending to his conscience and engaging in reflection about his actions and character) is the narrator's observation that it was Edmund who oversaw Fanny's moral education through recommending certain reading, "encourag[ing] her taste, and correct[ing] her judgment" (*MP* 25) and thus "forming her mind" (*MP* 76). Of course, Fanny turns out to be the conscience of her household, and to have the most reliable moral judgment, but that Edmund made some contribution towards her becoming such must indicate that Edmund himself has sound judgment and holds conscience in its proper position at the at the outset of the novel. In fact, that Edmund starts out as Fanny's near equal in terms of judgment and conscience makes his story an interesting study of how a good moral character can begin to go wrong due to self-deceit.

Edmund seems to be a very promising young man at the beginning of the novel. He insists on Fanny's need for a horse (ensuring that she has a means of exercise) despite his Aunt Norris' ridiculous and mean-spirited objections, he treats all his family members with the same respect, and he pays particular attention to Fanny in some effort to balance or outweigh the neglect they often show her. However, we get an indication that even Edmund has something to learn of the world, or perhaps even that his capacity for self-deceit is alive and well, in his response to Fanny's report that she will be sent to live with her Aunt Norris. Edmund tells Fanny that were it not for her own dislike of the plan he would "call it an excellent one" (*MP* 29). He proclaims that Mrs. Norris is "acting like a sensible woman in wishing for [Fanny to live with her]" (*MP* 29) and that she is treating Fanny in a much better way than she had before. The reader cannot help but share Fanny's surprise at Edmund's rosy picture of the situation, since all the evidence thus far points to Mrs. Norris being a selfish, manipulative woman who will go to great lengths to get what she wants with the appearance of doing good for others. In fact she has taken pains to ensure that Fanny cannot come live with her, since she is quite unwilling to support Fanny financially.¹² There seems to be no reason for Edmund choosing to think that Mrs. Norris has suddenly become kind-hearted, but one reason this episode is important in the novel is that it shows that Edmund's judgment is sometimes the victim of his easily explaining situations and characters to himself in a way that does not correspond to the truth of the matter. He already has some ability for deceiving himself about the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others, and so of giving his conscience mistaken information to work with in producing its judgments.

When the Crawfords arrive in the neighborhood, Edmund is thus in danger. He was "disposed to admire" (*MP* 67) Mary Crawford, but is made uneasy by what he sees as her lack of propriety in some instances. Her casual expression of a poor opinion of her own uncle, who has raised her, and her surprisingly tasteless joke do not escape his notice. Nevertheless, he is quickly coaxed out of his disapproving sternness by Mary's own liveliness and charm. Thus, "without knowing what he was about Edmund was beginning...to be a good deal in love" (*MP* 76). As the Bertrams and the Crawfords continue to socialize, Fanny is "surprised that [Edmund] could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed, and of which she was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in [Miss Crawford's] company; but so it was" (*MP* 77).

Interestingly, and in line with Butler's thought, Edmund clearly endures a gradual slide from being fully cognizant of Mary's faults to being sure that they hardly exist. In the first scene where he considers her character, he remarks first on her faults before noting that she nevertheless has many good qualities. In the next, it is only after he has indulged in an "ecstasy of admiration of all her many virtues, from her obliging manners down to her light and graceful tread" that he experiences an "instant's reflection" that it is a pity that she should have been brought up to think and act as she sometimes does (*MP* 131). The move from having a balanced picture of Mary's character to deceiving himself as to the number and significance of her good qualities is clear. But maybe this shift in Edmund's view of Mary is not so objectionable. After all, he's in love, and Mary has not done or said anything that seems truly morally suspect. She has expressed questionable opinions, shown a tendency to speak disrespectfully of others, and acknowledges herself to be selfish, but these are comparatively minor character flaws. It is not all that difficult to believe that Mary could deserve Edmund's regard, and that there is no harm in his having a not entirely objective perspective on her good and bad qualities. This assessment would be perfectly reasonable were it not for the effects of Edmund's self-deceived view of Mary on his ability to make judgments in more serious matters, such as his participation in the objectionable performance of "Lover's Vows" by his friends and family.

The main reason Edmund gives for acting in the play despite his own initial objection to the whole endeavor is that if he does not play the part he was asked, then Mary will be forced to act some suggestive scenes opposite a complete stranger. He says that "she has a right to be felt for", and that "it would be ungenerous, it would be really wrong to expose her" to such a situation (*MP* 181). He fails to appreciate the obvious fact that Mary could choose not to act herself, and that her choosing to act shows that she does not share Edmund's well-founded objections to acting at all while Sir Thomas is away, nor to the particular play as one which can only exacerbate the precarious emotional situation of Julia, Maria, Mr. Rushworth, and Mr. Crawford. What Edmund focuses on, in overriding his own judgment that to perform the play is wrong, is that Mary "never appeared more amiable than in her behavior to [Fanny] last night [when she supported Fanny in her refusal to act]. It gave her a very strong claim on [his] good will" (*MP* 181). Ann Crippen Ruderman, in her interpretation of Austen's moral views, notes that Edmund frequently invents motives for Mary in just this way. She highlights the "ingenuity of love", which enables Edmund to "dwell on or invent warm and obliging motives for Mary to

explain actions or opinions in her that seem objectionable”.¹³ The narration often suggests that Edmund is wrong to credit Mary with the admirable affections he appeals to in order to excuse her behavior and speech, and when he does so, he has only “satisfactions very sweet, if not very sound” (*MP* in Ruderman 92). Thus, it is Edmund’s ability to deceive himself about Mary’s moral character that enables him to similarly deceive himself about whether he ought to act in the play.

What makes Edmund’s increasing attraction to Mary Crawford unsettling, then, is that it is much more than an infatuation with a worldly woman, since in order for Edmund to love Mary (or at least hold her in the regard that he does), he must engage in some perversely impressive acts of self-deception regarding her faults. Of course, as Butler has pointed out, any cultivation of this skill puts Edmund’s ability to attend to the judgments of his conscience on any subject at risk. Making a habit of self-deception is a method for suppressing the judgments of conscience. This in turn puts him at risk of beginning to think and act wrongly for the worst reason – rather than simply falling prey to bad inclinations, Edmund is actively dirtying his own soul by making such self-deceptive thought and action (and so the suppression of his better judgment) his habitual behavior. The moral worth of his character, and so the future of his soul, is potentially at stake in the results of his attraction to and eventual courtship of Mary. Accordingly, while Fanny’s reflections are laden with some emotion, she is not wrong to wonder that “after all his objections [to the play] – objections so just and so public!...Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! It was all Miss Crawford’s doing. She had seen her influence in every speech” (*MP* 183-184).

Edmund’s journey of two steps forward, one step back along the path of self-deception continues when his father returns unexpectedly and interrupts the proceedings of the play. The judgment Edmund had suppressed resurfaces, and he feels the wrongness of choosing to act in the play himself and so implicitly condoning the entire activity.¹⁴ Still, Edmund sees only Mary’s strikingly perceptive descriptions of the characters of others, her delicacy, her talents, and her importance to her friends even after he sees the wrongness of the play.¹⁵ At last it seems that he is nearly completely “deceived in her; he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had ever been but he saw them no longer” (*MP* 307). Edmund has engaged in some fairly rigorous rationalizing about what he sees now as Mary’s “little errors”, insisting on the purity of her nature despite the “tinge of wrong” he occasionally observes in her conversation and

professed opinions (*MP* 312). With his “objections [to Mary’s character], the scruples of his integrity...all done away – nobody could tell how” (*MP* 423), it takes a drastic event for Edmund to attend to his own better judgment about Mary again. When Henry Crawford and his sister’s affair takes place, one result is that Edmund must give up any hope of marrying Mary Crawford. He goes to see her in London one last time, expecting Mary to share his shame and shock, but finds that she sees nothing wrong with the affair and regrets only the folly in Maria and Henry being detected by Maria’s husband. Edmund’s conscience is not so deeply suppressed that he can ignore this, and he realizes that it was not Mary that he loved but a “creature of [his] own imagination” (*MP* 530). He ends the interview, breaking their acquaintance, and despite “sometimes – for a moment – regret[ing] that [he] did not go back” he “know[s] that [he] was right” (*MP* 531). With that knowledge, Edmund’s better judgment, his conscience, has gone some way to reclaiming its proper place. He attends to its judgment, and knows now that he has been deceived about Mary’s character, at least.¹⁶

Sarah Emsley notes another instance of Edmund’s inappropriate regard for Mary confusing his ability judge correctly.¹⁷ When Henry Crawford has made an offer of marriage to Fanny, she looks to Edmund as someone who will support her in her refusal. She is disappointed, however, and Edmund proclaims that it is not Henry’s character that stands in the way of his marriage to Fanny, but only the fact that Fanny does not, presently, love him. It is likely that his regard for Mary is coloring his opinion of her brother, and so he both has a faulty memory regarding Henry’s behavior and his own judgment of it, as well as a professed “blindness to...differences [in his and Fanny’s opinions] in the past as well as in the present” (Emsley 112). Fanny is surprised that Edmund seems to no longer share her objections to Henry’s character and behavior, and regrets that she and Edmund “think too differently for [her] to find any relief in talking [to Edmund] of what [she] feels” (*MP* in Emsley 112). Edmund’s reply to this shows that he has lost some power of accurately perceiving Fanny’s feelings – he insists that “on a comparison of our opinions, they would be found as much alike as they have used to be” (*MP* in Emsley 112). This assertion is almost laughable. What we might be seeing here is an effort on Edmund’s part to again explain away a situation that would make his suppression of judgment regarding the character of both Crawfords more difficult. Or perhaps it is simply that Edmund’s mistaken view of Mary’s character influences his assessment of her brother. Notice again that this mistaken assessment is dangerous, though not perhaps for Edmund in this case. Edmund’s

judgment about Henry Crawford's character causes him to encourage Fanny to marry Henry, just as Edmund encouraged her to look forward to living with Mrs. Norris. Neither of these scenarios appear to most readers to be in Fanny's best interest. Because of his mistaken judgment, Edmund does not support Fanny's refusal of Henry, and he is therefore incapable of pleading her case to Sir Thomas. We might think that as her friend, at least, Edmund has a moral obligation to support Fanny in resisting pressure from Sir Thomas to marry Henry. That Edmund fails to act on this obligation is due to mistaken opinions based in self-deception regarding the qualities of Henry and his sister.

Through Edmund, then, Austen has explored the startling power of self-deception about one subject to hinder an individual's ability to arrive at correct judgments in other aspects of his life. The first act of self-deception – attributing motives to someone that they do not have, or explaining away minor indiscretions – may be innocent enough, but the course of the novel suggests that it can open the door to more serious consequences for one's conscience. As he becomes better at redescribing Mary's actions and opinions, Edmund's judgment about how to behave becomes more confused, and he increasingly acts and thinks wrongly himself. It is worth noting that it is this sort of moral failure, rather than succumbing to temptation (as Henry Crawford does), that Austen dwells upon. Mary's efforts to suppress her conscience and judge wrongly and Edmund's beginning down that same path each warrant much more dialogue and space in the novel than does an act of adultery, which we might at first consider the more grievous crime. I believe that we can conclude from her focus on the conscience-suppressing power of self-deception that Austen found its effects on moral behavior to be of a more troubling magnitude than occasionally giving in to bad inclinations. For Austen, then, self-deception is as dangerous a human power as it is for Butler, and it seems clear that she shares both his view that self-deception is a method for suppressing conscience and that the vicious behavior that results from so doing is more damning to one's soul than is an act of succumbing to temptation.

Section 7: Concluding Remarks

To expand upon my conclusion in the previous chapter: we can now fully see how *Mansfield Park* is a novel that endorses and illustrates Butler's moral philosophy. It is, in part, a story about the means and effects of suppressing conscience. Even critics who do not have

Butler's moral theory in mind when they approach the novel describe Fanny Price as "a lonely conscience – ignored, despised, bullied, at times besieged by the forces of worldly persuasion, yet finally recognized as the true preserver" of the moral interests of her household.¹⁸ Austen explores different types of educations to consider the role that habit formation plays in reinforcing or "besieging" the proper place of conscience and moral judgment as the guide of our lives. She recognizes education – formal and informal – as a primary means of enabling an individual to suppress the judgments of their conscience, but maintains a commitment, like Butler, to the view that suppressing conscience is not something to which we easily naturally tend. Mary Crawford is just one of the many characters who has become adept at suppressing conscience, but that there is someone like Susan Price in the novel, whose good sense is only just holding up against the influences of her family and living conditions, is evidence that Mary and all the others need not have turned out the way that they did. The Crawfords and the Bertram children – even including Edmund – had to learn to suppress the judgments of their consciences. They made a habit of explaining away the objections of conscience, as we see Edmund doing with his better judgment about performing the objectionable play, and they made a habit of ignoring the conscience of the household – Fanny Price. Thus they all go wrong to some extent, both individually and (for the Bertrams) as a familial whole.

¹ Anscombe, G.E.M. "Modern Moral Philosophy." *The Collected Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe*. Vol. 3. *Ethics, Politics, and Religion*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981.

² Szabados, B. "Butler on Corrupt Conscience." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 14. (1976): 462-469.

³ Hebblethwaite, Brian. "Butler on Conscience and Virtue." *Joseph Butler's Moral & Religious Thought*. Ed. Christopher Cunliffe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁴ Descartes runs into some notorious trouble in making this argument, but we need not examine it here.

⁵ See Butler, "The Martyrdom of King Charles I".

⁶ See Butler S.10.

⁷ See Butler, "The Martyrdom of King Charles I".

⁸ D.D. Devlin calls *Mansfield Park* "Jane Austen's most profound discussion of education" among an entire oeuvre concerned with the subject, and notes that "it is not the heroine who has to learn to see clearly but Edmund and his father". See *Jane Austen and Education*. MacMillan, 1975. Devlin also

professes to be “certain” (49) that Austen read Butler’s dissertation *Of the Nature of Virtue*, and names Butler as partner of Samuel Johnson “leaning over [Austen’s] shoulder as she writes” (56).

⁹ See *MP* 535-536, 460.

¹⁰ Edmund is unreliable, but not wholly untrustworthy. Given that this scene comes after Edmund has had his revelation about Mary’s character, I think we can depend on his description of Mary briefly struggling with the truth of what he has said to her.

¹¹ Interestingly, it is in the context of discussing Edmund’s ordination that Denis Donoghue mentions Bishop Butler. Donoghue goes on to spend more time suggesting similarities between Shaftesbury or Hutcheson and Mansfield Park, but he makes a few passing references to Butler as well.

¹² See *MP* 31-2.

¹³ Anne Crippen Ruderman. *The Pleasures of Virtue*. London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995. P. 92.

¹⁴ See *MP* 219.

¹⁵ See *MP* 232-233.

¹⁶ It may not be that Edmund knows he has deceived himself, but that recognition is less important, from a perspective like Butler’s, than is the fact that the judgments of Edmund’s conscience are no longer being suppressed as they were.

¹⁷ Sarah Emsley. *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

¹⁸ Tony Tanner. “Jane Austen and ‘The Quiet Thing’.” *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, Ed. B.C. Southam, Bristol: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968. P. 149.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIVE READINGS OF AUSTEN'S ETHICS: THE PROBLEMATIC AND THE PROMISING

This chapter will be devoted to considering five prominent or recent figures in the discussion about Jane Austen's moral views. Joyce Kerr Tarpley, Anne Crippen Ruderman, Sarah Emsley, D.D. Devlin, and Gilbert Ryle all offer readings of one or all of Austen's novels which make a case for identifying certain individual ethical writers or schools of moral thought as that to which Jane Austen belonged. Despite varying degrees of success regarding their larger projects, these authors all provide interpretations of passages from Austen's works which capture important features of her moral commitments and view of human nature. Unfortunately, in some cases the misreading of a given philosopher or a failure to support their claims about Austen's novels leaves us with more to reject than to accept as informative. Accordingly, I will address each author in turn (Devlin and Ryle together, since Devlin discusses Ryle at length), setting out their view as I understand it, raising objections to it, and suggesting ways in which my reading of *Mansfield Park*, at least, is preferable to or more plausible than the reading put forward by the author in question. Interestingly, the points many of the authors seem to get right about Austen's ethic are comfortably compatible with the reading I offered in the previous two chapters.

Section 1: Tarpley on *Mansfield Park*

In one of the most recent studies of *Mansfield Park*, Joyce Kerr Tarpley presents a strongly Christian (probably Catholic) reading of Jane Austen's ethical commitments and moral psychology. Tarpley focuses on constancy, which she takes to be the keystone feature of Austen's ethics.¹ While I agree with Tarpley that it is important to keep Austen's religious and cultural context in mind when dealing with any of her novels, Tarpley offers almost no textual support for her claims regarding the strength and particular nature of Austen's Christianity. Just what Tarpley takes constancy to be is unclear, but it is nevertheless worthwhile to consider her arguments, since it is within them that valuable insights about *Mansfield Park* can be found.

Tarpley identifies constancy as the “unifying principle” of Austen’s ethics (vii), as her “cardinal virtue” (3), and the development of constancy to be “the most important good” (60) that Austen takes to be the proper end of education. Unfortunately, the concept remains somewhat obscure, since Tarpley variously describes constancy as a virtue, as something that regulates the virtues, as a framework through which we perceive the world and are able to have knowledge about it, and as a particular set of characteristic commitments of a Christian worldview. Most frequently she refers to constancy as grounding or regulating the practice of virtue, however, so I will begin there.

When Tarpley describes constancy as that which “regulates and unifies the virtues and fosters integrity in the practice of virtue” (17), she seems to be describing a faculty of the mind, which is not itself a virtue, that more or less manages an agent’s moral life. Constancy is the foundation of morals, which either itself adjudicates between virtues in cases of conflict or enables the agent to do so, and which moderates and motivates action (217). Importantly for Tarpley, however, constancy grounds only a particular kind of ethic: “the essentially Christian ethic” (4). She claims that Fanny Price practices such an ethic, and that Austen therefore endorses it as well. Here Tarpley’s concept of constancy begins to slip from our grasp, however, since she also claims that Christian presuppositions about the world (the Christian context Tarpley takes Austen to have inhabited) are the primary ethical foundation of constancy (3). If Tarpley is committed to this latter scenario, in which a Christian worldview undergirds constancy (which in turn regulates the moral life of the agent), then we must look to *Mansfield Park* to determine whether Fanny Price in fact espouses the Christian worldview as Tarpley describes it.

One aspect of the Christian mind, as Tarpley defines it, is its “eternal perspective” (10). She claims that Fanny’s mind has this perspective, which includes the belief that agents will be called to account for the rights and wrongs committed throughout their life. However, as Tarpley seems to admit, Austen has given her readers no reason to ascribe this belief to Fanny (10). Fanny never says anything that indicates that her acceptance of the eternal perspective is a guiding force in her moral deliberations, and neither the other characters nor the narrator relate anything to suggest that she might. Nor is there reason to think that Fanny has the Christian “awareness of evil, conception of truth, acceptance of authority...[or] sacramental cast” that Tarpley includes as defining features of the Christian mind (10). While it may be true, there is

simply no evidence in *Mansfield Park* that Austen conceived of the role of constancy as “ultimately... direct[ing] the mind to seek that which alone may completely satisfy longing: God” (248).

The most significant problem for Tarpley, if she believes that these Christian commitments are the necessary foundation for constancy, is that there is essentially no textual support for the claim that any of Austen’s characters (in *Mansfield Park*) are committed to the particulars she identifies. There no doubt is some evidence that Austen’s characters take themselves to live in a ‘Christian country’ and that they are themselves Christians, and there is no reason to think that any of Austen’s characters are atheists. Not even Mary Crawford, the great disparager of the clergy, goes so far as to question the truth of the most broadly Christian commitments. She suggests that “the obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time” (*MP* 101) are the objectionable features of religion, but the solution is to allow everyone to “choose their own time and manner of devotion” (*MP* 101), and not, clearly, to dismiss the whole affair as based in falsehoods. Nevertheless, if Tarpley cannot argue conclusively that Fanny Price endorses the distinct Christian worldview Tarpley describes, then she cannot argue that Austen endorsed it, nor that Austen was therefore concerned with constancy as it arises from the Catholic worldview Tarpley has in mind. But maybe we ought to look instead to passages where Tarpley seems to be working with a different conception of constancy.

Rather than being a product of, or supported by the Christian worldview, constancy might in fact “*provide* an overarching Christian context within which the world may be understood” (244, emphasis added). This version of constancy envisions it as applying the Christian worldview to daily life so as to make sense of otherwise confusing experiences. Tarpley supposes at one point that Fanny practices constancy “out of a need to struggle and endure” (215), and that constancy, by directing her memory to her Christian commitments, enables her to sacrifice and suffer with the knowledge that doing so will bring her closer to achieving the proper goal of her life: communion with God (49). Constancy plays a small, but clearly critical role here in that it is a “habit of mind that seeks unity and integrity [of experience] by relying on a stable context and its law to guide deliberation, choice, and action” (62). If Tarpley means this to be constancy, then it is simply a mechanism by which an agent is reminded (or reminds herself) of her bigger picture of the world which is then applied to for the purpose of making both events in it and the agent’s obligations for action intelligible.

While Tarpley would clearly not endorse such a move, we might, given the lack of evidence in *Mansfield Park*, set aside the Christian aspect of this version of constancy and conceive of it as a filter for experience, or a schema of sorts that “promotes a tendency to generalize and to integrate information so that it becomes knowledge” (176). In this vein, Tarpley describes constancy as a force, but we might better regard it as a faculty of the mind. At any rate, when Tarpley describes constancy as “an integrating force, taking what the mind perceives as fragmentation, disorder, or loss and using a stable context to unify it and redeem it” (127) it is hard to see how this is not a very different faculty from that which she first describes as regulating the virtues.

In yet other passages, Tarpley appears to suggest that constancy is a character trait like any other which requires regulation and which can at times lead to morally problematic behavior. She calls constancy an “intellectual and moral virtue” since it is relevant to both rational activity and emotional activity (9). As such, whether a given instance of constancy is in fact an instance of virtuous action depend, Tarpley maintains, on just what it is that an agent is being constant about (22). Tarpley points to Henry Crawford’s behavior as an example of this vicious constancy, noting that his “perseverance in [his design to make Fanny love him] is a kind of constancy, but it is the wrong kind because it proceeds from a vicious intention” (22). A number of questions arise here, none of which Tarpley answers: how does constancy proceed from a vicious intention when it also, given what she says elsewhere, regulates intention and action? If instances of constancy can be vicious, then isn’t it incorrect to speak of constancy as not only a virtue but the cardinal virtue?

In her clearest statement of what she understands constancy to be, Tarpley gives it a number of important roles or functions. She claims that constancy is “a special virtue” since it “grounds all the other virtues and all human pursuits by providing four important goods of the soul” (55). These goods are the provision a) of “a stable context for the understanding of what occurs in the world outside of the consciousness”, by which Tarpley means the Christian worldview, with its metaphysical and moral commitments, b) of “a hierarchy of law”, c) of a “foundation for the development of principles to guide deliberation and choice, and d) of a “proper end for the ranking and choosing of goods”, by which Tarpley seems to mean the goal of eternal communion with God (55). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how a virtue can provide or generate such a context, and so it seems more likely that Tarpley means it to be a trait of the

mind that is a tendency to recall the stable context, hierarchy of law, and proper ends to which the agent is committed. Strictly speaking it is the agent's metaphysical and moral commitments that do the work of regulating behavior, and constancy is simply the means by which the agent is reminded of those commitments, since it is the agent's Christian beliefs that provide the content of moral judgment. Without the Christian underpinning, Tarpley seems to mean, constancy has no message to relay to the agent regarding how she ought to act or think, since it is God's laws, and not constancy, that make clear what is right and wrong. Accordingly it must be Tarpley's view that it is Austen's Christian commitments, not constancy, that comprise the "unifying principle" of her ethics as we find it in *Mansfield Park* (vii). However, as I state above there is no textual support from the novel for the claim that either Austen or her heroine maintained the commitments regarding truth or authority that Tarpley identifies as hallmarks of the Christian mind (perhaps Tarpley should say Catholic mind?), nor that they had the eternal perspective or regarded life with a sacramental cast. Again, none of this is to say that Austen's characters lack all or any Christian commitments. Even the major skeptic of *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford, appears to accept some form of Christianity. The problem for Tarpley is that no passage from the novel even hints at what the particular commitments of that Christianity might be. Accordingly, if constancy is important because it reminds the agent of her Christianity, and if, as it seems to me, Tarpley has failed to argue conclusively for Austen's endorsement of *this kind of* Christianity, then Tarpley's project of describing the crucial role of constancy in *Mansfield Park* and Austen's general ethical view falls flat.

Despite the ultimate failure of her project, Tarpley's discussions of the controversial ending of *Mansfield Park* and on the organization of the Bertram household include some valuable insights. She notes that there is, for each character, "a proper place" in the estate, and that the key to the successful running of the state is each character's "fulfilling of his proper role" (62). Additionally, she acknowledges that Fanny Price is the means by which the "disordered estate" is restored to its "proper balance" (67). While Tarpley maintains that Fanny employs constancy to achieve this, it rather seems to be the case that substituting conscience, as understood by Bishop Butler, for constancy preserves this insight without the liabilities that come with Tarpley's conception of constancy. Tarpley is absolutely correct to read *Mansfield Park* as largely an investigation of the means of maintaining an inappropriate hierarchy in the Bertram Household, of the effects of that improper organization, and of the method for correcting it.

However, reading Fanny Price as the Butlerian conscience of the household works more naturally with the text than does Tarpley's attempt to ascribe to her particular Christian metaphysical and moral commitments.

Tarpley briefly discusses conscience (a concept she explicates in Thomistic terms) in the context of her examination of the resolution of *Mansfield Park*. She notes that Fanny's conscience is what would have brought her to accept Henry Crawford's proposal of marriage, given that he had avoided the temptation of Maria and that Edmund had married Mary. That is, if Edmund married, and if Henry had not had his affair with Maria, Fanny's conscience would have prompted her to give up her love for Edmund and accept her increasing regard for Henry. Tarpley goes to some length to demonstrate how, despite the appeal of this ending to many readers, it is in fact impossible for Fanny and Henry to have married given his character and the improbability of his being permanently improved. Two aspects of Tarpley's claims here are striking. First, she insists that conscience is directed by constancy in that only due to Fanny's beliefs about what constitutes a sinful thought or sin of the heart, as expressed to her through constancy, could her conscience be opposed to her continuing to love Edmund in the way she does after he is married. This system seems to be far more complicated than it needs to be, and it is unclear just why Tarpley believes that agents need constancy to relay the proscriptions of their own moral commitments to their conscience before they can judge how to act. Clearly, I believe, constancy is an unnecessary middleman in this picture. In fact, why think that conscience and one's moral commitments are separated in the first place? We can have a much more simplified picture of how agents go about deciding how to act if conscience is the seat of moral commitments, and applies them to situations itself. Butler gives us just this sort of picture, and so it seems to me that we have another incentive to consider how his moral psychology fits with what we find in *Mansfield Park*.

The second curiosity of Tarpley's discussion is the effort she puts into making sense of Fanny's return to Mansfield and her marriage to Edmund from a perspective which considers only Fanny's personal interests. When Jane Austen wrote a novel that was about a particular character, she titled it as such. *Emma* has the title it has because the story is about the development and experiences of a particular young woman. The title of Fanny's story should clue the reader in to its subject as well: *Mansfield Park*. I contend that the story is about the household, which is an allegory for the individual moral psychology, and that the resolution

Austen gives us is exactly what is called for if we read *Mansfield Park* that way. There is no need to tie oneself into explanatory knots trying to make it clear that there is more to gain for Fanny by moving back to the neighborhood of those who neglected and suppressed her than there is by her marrying Henry and putting Mansfield as far away as she can. We don't have to do this because the story is less about saving Fanny than it is about saving Mansfield Park. As Tarpley rightly notes, Fanny's return to the neighborhood and her attaining there of a position of respect and authority is the key to restoring harmony, peace, and success to Mansfield. For Tarpley, this is because of Fanny's development and practice of constancy, but again, I will attempt to show that identifying Fanny with conscience, or moral judgment, makes similar sense of the resolution while being a more plausible reading of Austen's ethics than Tarpley's.

Section 2: Ruderman on Austen as Classical Aristotelian

In *The Pleasures of Virtue* Anne Crippen Ruderman argues that Austen is properly read as more classical than modern in her ethical perspective.² Ruderman appears to identify political thought with moral thought, since the subtitle of her book implies that her concern is with Austen's political views but the content of her argument addresses the relationship between virtue and happiness for the individual rather than issues of state, society, or systems of government. Regardless, Ruderman offers insightful readings of Austen's novels which are worth considering. It is when she attempts to pinpoint and trace the origin of Austen's moral commitments that Ruderman's discussion falters. Here I will consider her claims regarding Austen's view of virtue, happiness, and compassion. As with Tarpley, I believe that what Ruderman gets right in her reading of Austen's moral commitments is better tied to Butler's thought than directly to her chosen candidate (here Aristotle), and that doing so would enable us to avoid the philosophical contortions that Ruderman is forced into.

Ruderman's primary concern is to demonstrate that Austen expresses in her novels a belief that there is a kind of relationship between virtue and happiness that resonates more strongly with classical (i.e. Aristotelian) thought than with modern thought, of which Rousseau and Kant are two of her chosen representatives (8-9). It is of utmost importance, then, for her to explain how Aristotle understood that relationship. Her articulations of Aristotle's position on the relationship between happiness and virtue, however, are imprecise to the point of constituting

greatly different claims, the philosophical defenses of which would differ, and which may not be properly attributable to Aristotle. At the outset of her project, Ruderman states Aristotle's position to be that a) "virtue leads to happiness" (2). Of course, this needs further explication, and she rephrases the idea to be that happiness is b) "the end of virtue" (8). If we read her literally here, Ruderman is saying that for Aristotle, the single goal and end product of living virtuously is happiness. This claim flirts with a serious misreading of Aristotle, namely that we ought to live morally virtuous lives because doing so will give us pleasure or discreet pleasurable experiences. Ruderman may have recognized her near-error, because throughout the rest of her argument she also characterizes him as holding that c) "happiness can come from virtue" (112, italics added), or that d) "virtue contributes to an individual's happiness" (115). There are a number of questions that Ruderman does not answer: is virtue necessary for happiness, or merely sufficient? Is it either at all? Passages (c) and (d) suggest that Ruderman believes the connection between virtue and happiness to be tenuous at best for Aristotle (and presumably thus for Austen as well), while (a) and (b) imply a necessary connection between the two, but just what is necessarily connected remains unsettled, as she also supposes that "virtue is *necessary* in order to be capable of real happiness" (122, italics added).

Suppose Ruderman meant to hold to claims like (a) and (b), which suggest a strong causal relationship between virtue and happiness. Before we can assess the aptness of this characterization of Aristotle's view, it is worthwhile to consider just how each understands the terms involved. While Ruderman does not explicitly endorse a definition or understanding of 'virtue' which is exclusively moral, such is indisputably her use of the term throughout her discussion. Ruderman is concerned with virtue as the practice of performing morally permissible (or perhaps morally required) actions. It is the relationship between doing the right thing and being happy that she means to examine. Of course, it is both commonly accepted and crucial to understanding Aristotle that 'virtue', as he uses it, has a much wider scope than that which Ruderman assumes. I will not be so uncharitable as to suppose that Ruderman failed to appreciate that Aristotle did not write in English, but she certainly fails to offer an argument for reading Aristotle's 'arête' as 'moral virtue' rather than the philosophically preferred reading of it as 'excellence'. Thus, when most philosophers use the term 'virtue' in connection with Aristotle, general excellence of activity (moral or otherwise) is usually what they have in mind. Ruderman seems, at least, to have assumed that 'virtue', when it appears in the context of discussion of

Aristotle, carries with it the same morality-focused connotations that the term has in other English uses. This disconnect between her use of the term, and hence her subject matter, and Aristotle's is significantly problematic for her argument that Aristotle, and accordingly Austen, believed that specifically morally upright behavior leads to (or has as its end) happiness.

This brings us to 'happiness'. While Ruderman is careful to qualify happiness as consisting of "the truest pleasures" rather than "immediate pleasure" (8), her use of the term throughout the book clearly suggest that she understands 'happiness' to be particular state of mind of enjoyment or pleasant feelings. As in the case of 'arête' or 'virtue, the translation of 'happiness from the Greek 'eudaimonia' must be approached with caution. Philosophically preferred translations of 'eudaimonia' include 'well-being' or 'flourishing', with an emphasis on the fact that Aristotle is concerned with human activity rather than a state of mind or feeling. Flourishing or living well is a matter of sustained activity, not simply being in a particular state, and for the most part Ruderman seems to fail to recognize this. Interestingly, the passage in which Ruderman expresses a concept of 'happiness' which comes closest to that often identified with Aristotle's eudaimonia is also a passage which reveals a hugely significant difference between Austen and Aristotle. Ruderman writes that Austen's characters who are virtuous are made "more completely happy. Nonetheless, Austen seems ultimately to think that the perfection or completeness aimed at by virtue is not available in this life...[which] show[s] that a religious belief underlies" Austen's ethics (122). It is remarkable, and a significant challenge to Ruderman's attempt to identify the moral theories of Austen and Aristotle, that in nearly the only passage where Ruderman's concept of happiness sounds less like that of a state of enjoyment and more like the life-long activity of flourishing, excellence, or well-being encompassed by Aristotle's eudaimonia she also acknowledges that the grounding of Austen's ethics includes religious commitments (and the related metaphysical commitments) that were simply not available to Aristotle. Austen seems to think more along the lines that the perfection aimed at by virtue is only possible in a Christian afterlife (see *MP* 547: "the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be"), the achievement of which is the purpose of living virtuously, but clearly Aristotle would not accept this, although he would surely agree that perfection is not achievable in this life. In other words, even if we acknowledge that there are some similarities between Aristotle's and Austen's thought about the moral virtues – especially regarding moderation or the mean – their answers to the question of 'why be moral?' would

appeal to vastly different worldviews since Austen is, as discussed above, a Christian of some kind and Aristotle is not. Their ideas on the ultimate foundation of our moral nature and the goal of the moral life are simply worlds apart, which seems to me to seriously undermine any argument that Austen's moral thought is a direct descendant of Aristotle's and is not mediated by any Christian thinker or school of thought. Thus, just when Ruderman seems about to draw her strongest connection between Austen and Aristotle by means of their concept of happiness she then highlights the gulf between them in terms of their differing views on the foundation of morality and the purpose or goal of living morally.

Ruderman's argument for the resemblance between Austen and Aristotle fails for the simple reason that her use of the terms 'virtue' and 'happiness', and the passages in Austen that she thus picks out as relevant, fail to align with the concepts signified by those terms as used in English translations of Aristotle. If we even suppose that she were to be successful in arguing that morally permissible or required acts are pleasant or enjoyable (a claim with which Aristotle would indeed agree), or lead to pleasure or enjoyment, since this is not what Aristotle means by virtue being a part of happiness, Ruderman would not by that argument have shown that Jane Austen's moral theory resembles Aristotle's (much less that Austen resembles Aristotle more than any other moral thinker). This means that regardless of whether Ruderman meant there to be a strong or weak relationship between happiness and virtue (i.e., no matter which of (a), (b), (c), or (d) above she would choose), with her different use of the crucial terms she cannot succeed in showing that Austen and Aristotle shared a view concerning the connection between happiness and virtue.

Ruderman devotes some time to arguing that Austen was not a Kantian, in part to add to her claim that being virtuous is good for an individual or will make them happy. One of her strategies for this argument is to explore Austen's "indications that unselfishness does not require self-forgetting" (115). Ruderman's idea seems to be that for Kant, morally praiseworthy actions require acting from duty alone, rather than inclination, which in turn requires total selflessness or the subjugation of one's own interests to the interests of others, and that since Austen rejects this kind of self-abnegation, she is not Kantian. While Ruderman is right that Kant is concerned with the motive, rather than the consequences of an action, in determining its moral worth, and that he rejects one's desires or inclinations as comprising moral motives, Kant's moral theory does not require the neglect of self that she supposes. The only moral motive, or

rather, the only motivation for action that is a candidate for moral praiseworthiness, is the motive of duty or obligation. If I am an honest shopkeeper because I want to gain the trust, loyalty, and therefore business of my neighbors, my honesty is not morally worthy. If, rather, I am honest because I recognize that I have a moral obligation to be honest in my business, or that it is my duty to those who visit my shop, then my practice of honesty is morally worthy indeed.³ At first glance this seems to suggest just what Ruderman thinks – that my obligations to others are more important than my own good or interest. However, Kant recognizes various categories of duties or obligations, including both a crucial category of duties to oneself, and duties which take into account one's inclination (which he calls "imperfect duties", since they can admit of exception⁴). On Kant's view, therefore, we have duties to ourselves along with our duties to others, and the two categories include both perfect duties (those to which no exception can be made due to desire or inclination) and imperfect duties. The following are examples of each of the four kinds of duties: to refrain from committing suicide is a perfect duty toward oneself, to refrain from making promises you have no intention of keeping is a perfect duty toward others, to develop one's talents is an imperfect duty toward oneself, and to contribute to the happiness of others an imperfect duty toward others.⁵ What is crucial to recognize here is that Kant is capable of incorporating instances of acting for oneself rather than for others into his positive account of morally praiseworthy action. He is fully aware that there are times when I have a duty to myself (perfect or imperfect) which will have a greater force of obligation than a given duty to others (where that duty is likely an imperfect duty). Kant posits no requirement of total subjugation of one's needs, inclinations, or interests for moral worth. Accordingly, Ruderman has not highlighted a difference between Austen and Kant by noting that Austen believes that sometimes self comes before others.

Despite the ultimate failure of her project, Ruderman highlights some interesting passages in Austen's novels and offers plausible readings of the moral commitments underlying them. She is right to conclude that Austen endorses both the claim that morally upright behavior does not require total selflessness (115), and that there are certain limits on compassion (31). Ruderman also takes Austen to believe that proper pride is good and right (see esp. 99-101, 107-108, 122), which she regards as showing how Austen "differs from the Christian moralists of her time, however much she admired them" (122). Since Samuel Johnson is Ruderman's chosen moralist to contrast with Austen on this point, it is easy to see how she reaches her conclusion given

Johnson's conviction that "all pride is abject and mean" (122). After all, Austen's admiration of Johnson and his influence on her thought are widely recognized, and their disagreement on the status of pride, at least, is telling of substantive differences. However, assuming Ruderman has interpreted Austen correctly (which I believe she has), there are further moralists we ought to consider before cutting Austen off from them altogether. If Ruderman had looked to Butler I think she would have found a moralist who expresses very similar, if not the same, position on self-concern or pride and on the limits of compassion as we find in Austen.

Ruderman has interpreted Austen as holding that sometimes one's own needs or interests come before those of others, which we might understand as the placement of a limitation on our moral obligation to exercise benevolence and compassion, and do good for others. The sort of self-regard that complements this limitation, she believes, is dismissed as un-Christian, by Johnson at least. Butler, however, makes it clear that he rejects any claims that self-concern is necessarily related to vice, and recognizes that agents can be excessively compassionate. In contrast to Shaftesbury, Butler denies that benevolence, or compassion, is the whole of virtue⁶ and in fact encourages an increase in concern for one's own good rather than the suppression of it⁷.

Recall that Butler believes that an individual's moral psychology is comprised of various motivational principles and passions, organized hierarchically, which interact in order to bring it about that the individual acts upon one of those sets of passions or principles. Benevolence is the motivational principle of reason to which compassion happens to correspond, but compassion itself is more like the other affective passions that it is like a rational principle, since it is something we feel rather than a commitment we maintain (*S.5.3*). As such, compassion is subject to excess and deficiency, just like any other passion such as hunger or anger (*S.6.9*). This means, of course, that there are instances in which it is possible to feel too much concern for others, just as it is possible to fail to feel enough concern. When we fail to properly moderate our feelings of compassion, and err towards excess, we are liable to experience "much more uneasiness than belongs to [our] share", which might have the effect of making it more difficult or even impossible to help the very person or group of people we are concerned about (*S. 6.9*). Extremely potent feelings of compassion might also inhibit our practices of justice, since we might thereby fail to implement any punishment that might be due to criminals, which may itself constitute a failure to attend to the needs of the victim (*S.8.13*). Thus, we ought to regulate our feelings of

compassion through reason, and so practice benevolence and concern for others in its “due degree” (S.1.6).

Butler makes a point of adding to this restriction on compassion a call for an increase in most individuals’ regard for themselves. He notes that the “care of our selves” (S.12.15), or being “taken up with [one’s] own concerns” (S.12.19) and attending to “our own life and health and private good” (S.1.5) are in fact neglected, not something the commonly ‘self-interested man’ is in fact pre-occupied with.⁸ This is clear when we consider that the self-interested individual is more often concerned with her immediate enjoyment than she is with the “care of our own interests, as well as of our conduct” with which each person is uniquely endowed (S.12.17). The idea seems to be this: I cannot experience the pain of someone else’s hunger, only my own, and similarly nobody but me is able to feel my “particular affections, passions, [and] appetites” (S.12.15). Accordingly, while I ought to do what I reasonably can to address the needs and suffering of others, since only my experiences of suffering are accessible to me, it is natural and right that those are (other things being equal) of more concern to me than the suffering of others. Butler is thus clearly in agreement with the view Ruderman attributes to Austen: sometimes one’s own needs are more important than or outweigh one’s obligations to do good for another.

What about Ruderman’s reading of Austen on pride? The question of whether pride is a vice features less in *Mansfield Park*, which is my primary concern here, than in others of Austen’s novels, but since it is the subject of pride that Ruderman takes to separate Austen from the Christian moralists, I must consider whether and how Butler regards the trait, emotion, or practice of pride. While Butler is undoubtedly concerned about the vice of having too high an opinion of ourselves (or any unjustified opinion of ourselves), he nevertheless has no objection to an individual having a “desire of and delight in the esteem of another” (S.11.11). He has almost nothing to say about pride per se, but does believe that when an agent is driven by self-love to pursue an object that is against her long-term or “real interest” (S.11.18) her action is unnatural. She has failed to do what was best for her, and so she has not, we might say for Butler, treated herself with the respect and concern that she ought. The idea that we each owe a certain level of respect to ourselves (which might make certain beliefs or behaviors beneath us), and that we ought similarly be concerned for our well-being, seems to be what Ruderman has in mind when she describes the actions of some of Austen’s characters as expressing their “proper pride”

(122). There is simply no evidence that Butler dismisses pride as a vice in the sweeping manner Johnson does, and he certainly seems to share the view that it is right and important that we each consider our own real interest, which thus puts an obligation of esteem of and concern for oneself on us all, and that we are acting rightly when we act upon our conclusions regarding our real interests. While I acknowledge that there is not enough evidence to make a convincing case for resemblance between Austen and Butler on the subject of pride, the evidence for Ruderman's conclusion against such a resemblance is similarly lacking. Since Butler has not decried all pride as vicious, Ruderman is at least wrong to conclude that the door is shut on agreement between Austen and all the Christian moralists on the subject of pride, or more generally.

It is also worth noting that Butler anticipates the virtuous agent experiencing a certain pleasure or even "delight" in doing good or acting rightly, and in having brought it about that one does so habitually (S.1.8). Ruderman's relies on her reading of Austen as committed to just this idea to ally her with Aristotle and distance her from any more modern thinker – this is the foundation of Ruderman's project. However, the fact that Butler believes the practice of virtue to be potentially pleasant, combined with the mistaken representation of Aristotle's view that Ruderman endorses and the greater probability of Austen being directly familiar with Butler's works rather than Aristotle's, gives us strong reasons for keeping Butler on the table as a candidate for influencing Austen's moral thought as she wrote *Mansfield Park* and possibly her other works.⁹ At least, tracing the origin of Austen's moral views to Butler rather than to Aristotle seems more plausible. While Ruderman makes serious mistakes in her interpretations of both Aristotle and Kant, she successfully identifies particular moral commitments in Austen's novels. Given her misreadings of the philosophers, Ruderman cannot successfully argue that Austen's moral positions are reflective of Aristotle rather than any of her more contemporary thinkers. What Ruderman gets right, however, are many of her conclusions regarding Austen's ethics. Those moral commitments she reads Austen as endorsing range from potentially compatible with Butler's professed views, to nearly identical to Butler's. Accordingly it seems safe to conclude that we ought to prefer a reading of Austen which ties her to Butler to a reading like Ruderman's that looks back to the ancients.

Section 3: Emsley's Austen as Christian Virtue Theorist

Sarah Emsley's book *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues* draws on Ruderman's arguments for allying Austen with Aristotle when it comes to her moral commitments.¹⁰ While Emsley's representation of Aristotle's views is nuanced and accurate enough to be more familiar to philosophers than Ruderman's, she seems to me to be wrong in sharing Ruderman's misguided insistence on looking directly to Aristotle (and Aquinas, for Emsley) rather than to a more contemporary moralist as the origin or best articulation of Austen's ethics. Emsley argues that Austen's virtue ethic is one that combines the classical and theological virtues, but does not seem comfortable with the idea that Austen found precisely this blend in writers like Samuel Johnson, Shaftesbury, or Butler, and implies (with little supporting argumentation) that Austen did the hard work of reconciling Aristotelian virtue with Christianity herself while simultaneously allowing that Austen may not have read either Aristotle or Aquinas. Since the project of synthesizing and amending the two authors would be extraordinarily difficult without having read those authors, and since the project of developing a classically-inspired Anglican ethic had been taken up by a number of respected thinkers in the decades before Austen's birth, those writers and their moral theories are surely better candidates for having an influence on Austen than are the works of Aristotle or Aquinas. I largely agree with Emsley's characterization of Austen's moral views, but I am not convinced by her reasons for choosing to attribute them or associate them with thinkers so much more remote from Austen than British moralists like Butler.

Two of the themes in Austen that Emsley focuses on are that of the importance of contemplation, deliberation, or judgment to successfully practicing the virtues, and of the possibility of tension or conflict between the virtues. Emsley stresses that the complicated process of determining how we ought to act, and taking into consideration input from both external authorities and "individual judgment" (2) is the crucial sort of deliberation that Austen's virtuous characters or moral exemplars engage in. Austen, she believes, places some value on tradition and proper authority, but requires "independent critical judgment" to be exercised alongside the received values and norms of one's society (5). While Emsley sometimes refers to this practice of deliberation as comprising the life of the mind, she clearly does not mean that Austen believed the highest good to consist of solitary contemplation of abstract ideas or of the

workings of the natural world.¹¹ Rather, the most important thing a person can do is to engage in critical assessment of one's own past and potential actions, which is an activity of examining one's motives and goals and of considering the unique features of one's context as well as the results of one's independent reflection and deliberation. Assuming that Emsley is right to attribute this latter understanding of "life of the mind" to Austen, and I think that she is right to do so, then Emsley has not recognized that Austen's and Aristotle's concept of the contemplative life are significantly different, since Aristotle would likely identify the life of scholarly inquiry and study of the workings of the world (including the moral world) as comprising the contemplative life. It is not clear that Emsley means the fact that Austen values the "life of the mind" to support an argument for resemblance between to Aristotle, but neither is it clear that Emsley recognizes that the two would differ on their characterizations of the contemplative life, and so it remains unresolved whether Emsley is compromising her argument for resemblance between Austen and Aristotle.

Regardless of the above potential conflict with Aristotle's view, Emsley is right to remark that "for Austen's characters, their virtue is expressed through their deliberation" (18). Characters succeed or fail in living well to the extent that they are self-aware and self-critical, as well as to the extent that they are not slaves to either their passions or the principles or rules of their social context (which might also be their own). Of course, Emsley's characterization of Austen's concept of deliberation as being about one's past and potential actions, as incorporating one's own judgment and the judgments of others, and as relying to some extent on one's goals and desires to ultimately motivate one to act strongly resembles the picture of an individual's moral psychology that we find in Butler.¹² When Emsley notes that, for Austen, the head and the heart must work together when it comes to bringing an agent to act rightly (39), she also captures Butler's belief that the passions are important for motivation, for often the conviction that some action is the right one is not enough on its own to cause the agent to perform that action.

In general terms, the problem with Emsley's discussion of Austen's ethics is that there are a number of points on which Austen and Aristotle would disagree (some of which Emsley recognizes), and where they disagree Austen is expressing views that are compatible with Butler's, but Emsley seems either unaware of this resemblance or unwilling to acknowledge it. Consider the issue of tension (or perhaps conflict between) the virtues. Emsley contends that in Austen we find situations in which characters who embody and act upon more than one of the

classical virtues have to adjudicate between those virtues when the requirements or recommendations of each pull those characters towards incompatible actions (13). She even goes so far as to suppose that Austen's novels show the virtues to be in constant conflict, or in a struggle to overpower each other which the agent must manage (25). Aristotle rejects the possibility of conflict between the virtues, as Emsley recognizes, and we might worry that Butler would tend towards Aristotle's view. However, I think there is a description of Butler's and Austen's views available that preserves Emsley's concern that Austen's characters sometimes experience a tension between two good habits of character but avoids regarding the virtues themselves to be in conflict. To explain this, I will use Emsley's example from her chapter on *Mansfield Park*.

While the rest of the household is involved in rehearsing "Lover's Vows", Fanny is put to work sewing the curtains for the stage and taking care of other tasks the actors don't want to concern themselves with. Fanny is thus contributing to and advancing a project she objects to on a variety of grounds. Emsley suggests that Fanny experiences a tension between the requirements of honesty and of prudence regarding her participation in putting on the play. She notes that "it may appear hypocritical of her to work diligently and conceal her absent, anxious mind; but the alternative is unthinkable: to tell everyone about her anxieties? or to refuse to work, pleading indisposition? How honest does a virtuous person have to be?" (119). The idea is that Fanny has the virtues of prudence and of honesty, and that honesty requires her to relate her disapproval of the play, which would cause conflict and discord in the house, while prudence requires that she not cause conflict and discord at the price of failing to be entirely truthful about her opinion of the project. Prudence requires violating the demands of honesty, and honesty requires violating the demands of prudence. Emsley seems to be suggesting that to be virtuous in this situation, that is, to do the right thing, Fanny must violate or override one of the virtues. I do not think we need to characterize the situation this way, however.

It seems to me that Emsley is mistakenly equating a virtuous desire of Fanny's with the virtue, or character trait, or habit of behavior itself. In this situation it isn't that two dispositions conflict but that two desires conflict. Fanny wants to avoid causing a fuss, which would not, she knows, lead to anyone changing their mind about performing the play and would only cause her friends and cousins to scold her, deride her, and complain about her. She also wants to be honest, and not be thought to be condoning the play so as to clearly put herself outside of the scope of

the blame for what she takes to be a morally suspect activity. What Fanny is choosing between in resolving to sew the curtains quietly and get away when she can are two actions, not two virtues. Virtues, after all, are not actions themselves but rather dispositions to recognize actions as good or right. Of the actions Fanny considers, one is especially prudent, and one is especially honest. Butler would say, however, that such does not make both actions right, or make both actions obligatory. Aristotle would likely say the same. Being honest is not the whole of being virtuous, and neither is being prudent. Like Butler, Austen clearly believes that there is a right thing for Fanny to do in this situation, and that some action is objectively the morally correct one to choose (128). Where Emsley has tripped up is in focusing on single virtues, and which action would thus be required of Fanny if that virtue was the only relevant virtue for the situation. Perhaps a bit ironically, Emsley does not deliberate well about the situation for herself by failing to consider the whole of the situation, recognizing what the agent's desires are, and which habits or virtues are involved in the situation. Because Emsley looks so narrowly at the demands of prudence alone or honesty alone, she fails to consider how the two traits might interact to produce a jointly acceptable action, and accordingly the exclusively right action for Fanny – precisely the action Fanny ultimately performs. That is, Fanny's prudence and her honesty are consulted in her determination to keep her worries about the play to herself, without falsely endorsing it, and to do what is asked of her so as to avoid a family squabble. Her action does not amount to violating a virtue (honesty, in this case) because when the whole situation is considered as one, the mean of honesty just is withholding one's opinion without lying. Similarly, the mean of prudence just is helping when asked but keeping oneself as uninvolved as possible. The virtues are not isolated from each other in the way Emsley supposes when it comes to agents' deliberative processes, or at least there is no reason to think that Austen took them to be so isolated.

If, accordingly, we can describe Fanny's situation as one in which her desires are in tension, rather than one in which her virtues requires her to perform two incompatible actions, then we have resolved any possible disagreement between Austen and either Aristotle or Butler. After all, Butler is interested in precisely the regulatory role of judgment or conscience when it comes to adjudicating between various desires and goals and determining the right way to act on those desires (or not) in a given situation. It seems to me that this description of Fanny's situation as one of conflict between desires is preferable to Emsley's with its conflict of virtue because

mine more fully accommodates the idea, which Emsley seems to accept, that determining how to act is a complex process of assessing desires, goals, and proscriptions from internal and various external sources, as well as one in which our traits of character, virtuous or otherwise, interact to generate possible courses of action for us.

Since my argument is that there is a strong resemblance between the moral perspective of *Mansfield Park* and the works of Bishop Butler, I will focus on Emsley's chapter on the same novel. Her arguments concerning the virtues as represented in Austen's other works would have no effect on the success or failure of my argument, but her reading of *Mansfield Park* is worth attention because it largely coincides with the reading I offered in the previous two chapters. Emsley contends that the focus of the novel is on Fanny Price's "almost infallible" judgment (107) and the challenges she faces in maintaining and acting upon those judgments. While Emsley clearly reads Austen's use of "principle" as suggesting moral rules, a move I argued against in Chapter Two, even in the context of Emsley's discussion that reading seems to be at odds with her concurrent recognition that Austen celebrated Fanny's ability to judge for herself and act according to her determination of what was right rather than to rules or social norms (115). It is unclear to me why Emsley would suppose that when Sir Thomas is lamenting his daughters' dissimilarity to Fanny he would be regretting their inability to follow rules by wishing that they had the sort of "active principle" that he now appreciates in Fanny (*MP* in Emsley 127). Surely Emsley would agree that the difference between the Bertram girls and Fanny is their ability and willingness to engage in critical evaluation of their own actions, not their ability to play by the rules of their society. The Butlerian reading I have been defending simply makes better sense of the virtuous and vicious qualities Austen meant to pick out in her characters.

To support her argument that Aristotle is the source of Austen's ethics, or at least that the resemblance is stronger between Austen and Aristotle than between Austen and some other virtue theorist or moral philosopher, Emsley stresses the importance Austen places on moderation for her virtuous characters. For example, when Sir Thomas, now improved in his own abilities to judge at the end of the novel, regrets that his daughters experienced a deficiency of positive attention from him and an excess of positive attention from their Aunt Norris, Emsley concludes that such reflections make Sir Thomas (and thereby Austen, we may suppose) wholly "classically Aristotelian" (127). Again, the move to identify Austen with Aristotle seems unwarranted when an historically much nearer expression of the value of moderation is available.

Why insist that Austen is a classical Aristotelian because she believes that regulation of behavior, avoiding excesses and deficiencies, is key to a morally upright character when Butler, at least, is so concerned with the role of our faculty of conscience or judgment as the governor of our motivation and action? I do not believe Emsley attempts to answer this question, if she is aware of it as a question at all. She seems to maintain that any talk of moderation, or of regulating one's desires, or of striking an admirable balance between two less admirable (or outright blameworthy) extremes can be due only to a commitment to classical Aristotelian concepts of virtue. However, it seems to me that we have at least a *prima facie* reason to look to those thinkers, like Butler, who are undoubtedly influenced by Aristotle themselves, but whose works are closer contemporaries of Austen's and whose works capture the fusion of Aristotelian concerns with the values and commitments of Christianity that Emsley is at such pains to highlight in Austen's oeuvre.

To Emsley's credit, she mentions Butler as a figure whose thought might be familiar to Austen, and as one who might have influenced her. Each reference is, however, passing at best and Emsley does not follow up on the scale or scope of the resemblance between Austen and Butler. While she acknowledges that "Austen may have absorbed her knowledge of Aristotelian thought by reading...Butler" (20), Emsley misses the possibility that Austen's ethics has more in common with Butler and that focusing on Austen's Aristotelianism might give the reader an incomplete picture of Austen's thought about judgment, motivation, and moral behavior. It seems likely that it is simply due to her own lack of familiarity with Butler and an assumption that as a somewhat obscure British moralist he can be safely glossed over, Emsley perhaps unluckily failed to pursue her own recognition of Butler's potential influence on Austen. At the very close of her argument, Emsley summarizes Austen's "inherited...ethical framework" as a unification of classical and theological virtues (166). That Austen expresses commitments that were first articulated by Aristotle and Aquinas is likely true. But it is also true that a number of Austen's near contemporaries worked out systems which combined classical and Christian ideas in a variety of ways. Emsley may have been more concerned to show that Austen expressed commitment to theological virtues like faith and charity than she was to show that Austen was expressly not influenced by the British Moralists. However, since she goes to such lengths to identify similarities between Austen and Aristotle, and Austen and Aquinas, Emsley's argument has the effect of suggesting that anyone interested in the roots of Austen's ethics need look

nowhere else. Since she does not give any support for that conclusion, then to anyone familiar with the moralists, Emsley's work amounts to an unjustified dismissal or willful ignorance of highly plausible candidates for influences on Austen's views on moral behavior and our nature as moral creatures. It is simply unclear why someone, like Emsley, so interested in showing that Austen's ethics is a blend of classical virtue and medieval Christianity, would intentionally neglect a substantial group of thinkers who had, by and during Austen's time, attempted just that project if part of their project is to show where Austen may have acquired her ideas. Perhaps Emsley is ultimately uninterested in the potential sources of Austen's views. That is no bad thing. My own concern is simply to draw attention to areas of similarity between *Mansfield Park* and Butler. The problem for Emsley is that she seems to want to say that the commitments Austen expresses are more strictly Aristotelian or Thomistic than they would be if she were indebted to Butler or Shaftesbury for her views. It is this inclination that Emsley does not explicitly state or support, and which therefore makes her discussion of Austen's ethics so perplexing.

Emsley seems to suppose that Austen would not have been influenced (directly or indirectly) by these moralists, and would have skipped over them somehow to reach directly to Aristotle and Aquinas. She gives no reasoned argument for ignoring thinkers like Shaftesbury or Butler when looking for influences on Austen or ideas similar to Austen's, and so the door is left open to arguments, like mine, and like Devlin's, which I will consider next, which grant the British moralists more prominence than any classical or medieval thinker.

Section 4: Devlin on Austen, Ryle and the Moralists

D.D. Devlin examines Jane Austen's handling of the subject of education, and along the way makes the earliest connection between her moral thought and that of Bishop Butler.¹³ Austen, he claims, viewed the purpose of education in the same way John Locke did, with the learning of facts, languages, and histories being of less concern than instruction in virtue, the cultivation of wisdom, and generally becoming well-bred (11). Education, for Austen and Locke, therefore not only includes but emphasizes moral education. Devlin offers an in-depth reading of *Mansfield Park*, and brief readings of Austen's other novels, to support his contention that for Austen, the proper content of that complete (i.e. moral) education is a blend of the thoughts of

Samuel Johnson and Bishop Butler. He also addresses, at some length, the problems he sees with Gilbert Ryle's article allying Austen with Shaftesbury, which I will discuss in the next section. Here I will focus on Devlin's reading of *Mansfield Park*.

With refreshing frankness and realism, Devlin reminds his reader that "it is not always easy to trace [Jane Austen's moral] assumptions and attitudes to their source, and it is generally foolish to try to point to this or that writer as the origin of some idea or value which Jane Austen cherished" (48). Nevertheless, he regards as worthwhile the project of picking out "from the many shades of eighteenth-century moral philosophy one or two colors which appear most frequently in her work" (48). Perhaps the most well-known, and probably the most agreed-upon, of these shades is that of Johnson, but Devlin is also "certain" that Butler's thought, at least as found in the dissertation *Of the Nature of Virtue*, is the other (49).

Devlin begins by noting that for Johnson and Butler, the "metaphysical foundations of virtue are a moral compass without which we would be lost" (12), and that Jane Austen shared this view. Recall that for Butler, human beings had a God-given nature – a particular organization of our motivational and action-producing apparatus – which, if we preserved it in ourselves, would ensure that we acted in the ways God meant us to act. Our God-given abilities of reflection and judgment – embodied in the term 'conscience' for Butler – are the moral compass Devlin reads all three authors as having in mind (70). A key element of the (moral) education of persons, then, is learning to regulate our motivating passions according to the moral judgments we arrive at regarding a given action by attending to the 'compass' with which we have been endowed (22). But the belief that we all have this foundational ability to judge and reflect upon ourselves, and in the divine origin of that ability, is not the only conviction linking Austen and Butler (and sometimes also Johnson) that Devlin highlights. He finds that Austen and Butler share the view that being virtuous requires more than being benevolent (66-67), that conscience is the proper arbiter of how we ought to act (73), and that the judgments of conscience have an immediacy, at least once attending to them has been made a habit (23-24).

Additionally, Devlin's reading of *Mansfield Park* supports or anticipates much of my own. He contends that what is important about the ending of the novel is that "the radical deficiencies in *Mansfield Park* have been recognized and put right" (81) and that the putting of it to rights has a great deal to do with Fanny's elevation of position within the greater household. Austen makes it clear, Devlin thinks, that Sir Thomas is "not a fit guardian" of his household (98), that is, that

the organization of its component parts under his domination is not the organization which will lend itself to moral success or uprightness.¹⁴ It is Fanny, or rather her practice of reflection, exercise of judgment, and attention to the edicts of conscience that ought to be the guiding force of *Mansfield Park*, because for Jane Austen and Bishop Butler, these abilities and habits are the key to living in the way we all ought to live.

It is unfortunate that Devlin did not pursue more closely his argument for the resemblance between Austen's and Butler's moral position. I hope I have done so in the above chapters. It is also unfortunate that his argument seems to have been forgotten or hastily glossed over by more recent Austen scholars interested in tracing the content and possible sources of her moral commitments. The conclusion of Devlin's that other authors seem most often to latch onto is that Gilbert Ryle was not quite right in arguing for the affinity of Austen and Shaftesbury. Devlin's discussion of Ryle's article and of the points of dissimilarity between Austen and Shaftesbury is thoughtful and compelling, so perhaps we should not be surprised that it has effectively overshadowed his positive project. I will turn now to that discussion.

No attempt to pin-down Austen's ethics fails to comment on Gilbert Ryle's article "Jane Austen and the Moralists".¹⁵ It is certainly the most prominent, if not heretofore the only, contribution of a philosopher to the study of Austen's moral commitments, and cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, most Austen scholars at least distance themselves from Ryle's argument, and some, like Devlin, offer a rigorous refutation of it. In this section I will give a sketch of Ryle's view, consider the way each of the preceding authors handles Ryle's argument, and add some reasons of my own for disagreeing with Ryle, particularly where *Mansfield Park* is concerned.

Ryle contends that while Jane Austen is not a philosopher of any kind, she is undoubtedly a moralist (Southam 106). Furthermore, on his view, Austen is a secular moralist (117), who "represents people as differing from one another in respect not just of a single generic Sunday attribute, Goodness, say, or else Wickedness, but in respect of a whole spectrum of specific week-day attributes" (115). That is, none of Austen's characters are wholly wicked, and none are wholly good, for the simple reason that she did not believe that any person could be entirely one or the other. What this means, Ryle thinks, is that the question of whether a character is Good or Bad is not the question Austen is interested in. Rather, her concern is in representing "people we really know" (115), who might be "better than most in one respect, about level with the average

in another respect, and a bit, perhaps a big bit, deficient in a third respect” (115). Notice that this sort of approach to characters suggests that each individual’s qualities are established to a significant degree through comparison with the people around them. Nobody can be Evil itself, since human beings are complex creatures made up of many qualities (moral and mundane), but it is certainly true that someone might be the worst of the bunch. Ryle calls this understanding of human nature “Aristotelian” (115), which he contrasts with the “Calvinist” camp, which takes a more polar view of human nature or moral psychology (114). For Ryle’s Calvinists, people can be neatly sorted into the categories of “Saved or Damned, either Elect or Reject, either children of Virtue or children of Vice” (114). Some people are just Good, some are just Bad. There are no mixed characters, neither in literature nor in life.

It is clear, according to Ryle, that Austen rejects the Calvinist view of human nature, and he takes it to be likewise clear that she adds to her Aristotelian position a moral theory which connects the aesthetic and the moral. He contends that “there is a prevailing correlation between sense of duty, sense of propriety, and aesthetic taste” in Austen’s novels (117). Ryle acknowledges a significant exception to this rule in *Mansfield Park*, admitting that the Crawfords combine all kinds of aesthetic taste (musical, literary, etc) with a lack of moral sensitivity. He also implicitly recognizes, though only by admission, that a tally of Austen’s heroines would split near even between those with both aesthetic and moral taste, and those with only moral taste. Despite these outliers, Ryle maintains that “Jane Austen’s moral system was a secular, Aristotelian ethic-cum-aesthetic” (118), which is best identified with Shaftesbury’s ethics.

There are essentially two reasons Ryle gives for concluding that Austen resembled Shaftesbury more than any other 18th Century moralist. One reason is that Ryle finds a striking resemblance between Austen’s and Shaftesbury’s vocabulary, most significantly the word ‘mind’ (121). He remarks that the terms Austen uses to describe “minds and characters, their faults and excellences” are found in Shaftesbury rather than in the “bi-polar ethical vocabulary or the corresponding psychological vocabulary of the Black-White [i.e. Calvinist] ethic” (120). Austen and Shaftesbury refer to “tempers, habits, dispositions, moods, inclinations, impulses, sentiments, feelings, affections, thoughts, reflections, opinions, principles, prejudices, imaginations, and fancies” (120) when describing an individual, not to pure Virtue or pure Vice, and so the two are similar. Once again, however, Ryle qualifies this observation by admitting that “none of these general terms or idioms is, by itself, so far as I know, peculiar to Shaftesbury

or [Austen]” (120), with the possible exception of ‘mind’, as mentioned. Since Ryle recognizes that in writing about habits, tempers, dispositions, etc, Austen and Shaftesbury were both simply employing the vocabulary of their time and class (broadly construed), he focuses on their use of ‘mind’, which seems to him to stand out from the usual use of the word in the 18th century and now. ‘Mind’, he notes is used by both writers “without the definite or indefinite article, [and stands] not just for intellect or intelligence, but for the whole complex unity of a conscious, thinking, feeling, and acting person” (121). Shaftesbury and Austen both regard some persons as possessing a ‘beauty of mind’, with Austen using many analogous phrases in which she substitutes ‘elegance’, ‘delicacy’, ‘integrity’, or ‘liberty’ for ‘beauty’. Since this use of ‘mind’, as far as Ryle can tell, did not extend beyond Shaftesbury to Hutcheson, Butler, or Hume, we therefore have a reason for concluding that it was Shaftesbury, and not one of the others, who was the main moralist who influenced Austen (121).

The other reason Ryle offers to support his conclusion that Austen’s ethic most resembles Shaftesbury’s is “the impression, not based on research or wide reading, that throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the natural, habitual and orthodox ethic was, with various modifications, that Black-White, Saint-Sinner ethic that I have crudely dubbed ‘Calvinistic’” (118-119). Of course, Hutcheson, Butler, and Hume are not among those Ryle regards as Calvinistic, but that, he supposes, is because all were “considerably influenced by Shaftesbury” (119). His reason for choosing Shaftesbury as the source of Austen’s ethic rather than one of the other non-Calvinists/Aristotelians is that he simply does not “find any echoes in her from Butler or from Hume” (119). Insofar as she does resemble Hutcheson, Butler, or Hume, Ryle believes, she does so only because, and on the same points as, those authors drew on Shaftesbury. Where Butler differs from Shaftesbury, then, on Ryle’s view, he differs from Austen as well. Ryle has based his rejection of Butler, Hutcheson, or Hume upon the fact that they do not share Shaftesbury’s aestheticism, which Austen, unlike the majority of her literary contemporaries, shares on Ryle’s reading (119). He concludes that since he has the “impression that the secular and aesthetic Aristotelianism of Shaftesbury had not acquired a very wide vogue [and] it was not in the air breathed by the generality of novelists, poets, and essayists”, Austen could only have imbibed such a view from Shaftesbury directly (or indirectly – but as good as directly, for Ryle – from Hutcheson) (119).

To challenge Ryle's argument for Austen's drawing upon Shaftesbury in forming her own thoughts on human nature and moral psychology we need to look for three things. First, we must consider whether there are 'echoes' of thinkers other than Shaftesbury that Ryle may have missed. I take the previous two chapters to show that Ryle was much too hasty in proclaiming that there is no resemblance to Butler to be found in Austen's works. Second, we must establish that Austen's and Shaftesbury's use of the term 'mind' is as distinctive, and therefore significant, as Ryle takes it to be. Finally, and most importantly perhaps, we ought to assess Ryle's reasons for taking Austen's ethic to have an aesthetic component. If it is not there, we have the most substantial objection to Ryle's conclusion allying Austen and Shaftesbury. Ryle himself noted not-so-insignificant exceptions to his claim that for Austen moral and aesthetic taste are co-occurring or perhaps even the same faculty, and I will suggest that Devlin's discussion of this subject leaves Ryle's argument on thin and disappearing ice.

So then, does Austen's use of the term 'mind' deserve the emphasis Ryle places on it? That is, do most instances of the term in her novels denote the broad conception of 'mind' as 'the complex unity of consciousness of a thinking, acting, person'? In *Mansfield Park*, at least, the answer is no.¹⁶ Of the 163 uses of 'mind' in the novel, only eight could be read as instances of the Shaftesburian use of the term Ryle attributes to Austen, and of those eight we must read half charitably. Austen does indeed refer to characters' "uprightness of mind" (23), "delicacy...of mind" (94), and "beauty of mind" (231), but the vast majority of her uses of 'mind' are in the context of describing a character's state of mind, someone changing their mind or employing their mind, and the like, which clearly are the more commonplace use, restricting the reference of 'mind' to a character's memory, intellect, or intelligence.

Nevertheless, the unexpected, Shaftesburian (according to Ryle), uses of 'mind' are there in *Mansfield Park*, and they are striking. However, a cursory glance through Butler's Sermons reveals that his use of 'mind' is not strictly commonplace either. At various points he alludes to "soberness of mind" (S.6.11) and a certain "temper of mind" (S.5.13), as well as "tranquility of mind" (S.3.8) and "feebleness of mind" (S.5.13). The latter two instances may be less compelling, but the former seem well enough in line with what Shaftesbury and Austen have in mind when they attribute qualities like beauty and uprightness to minds. Butler's allowances for sober minds and of various minds having various tempers suggests that the "idiosyncratic" (121) use of 'mind' Ryle attributes to Austen and Shaftesbury was not exclusive to them, and may be

less idiosyncratic than he thought. The two important points to note here are a) that Austen's use of 'mind' is the commonplace use far more often than it is not, at least in *Mansfield Park*, and b) moral writers other than Shaftesbury – notably Butler – sometimes use 'mind' to refer to more than an individual's intellect or powers of reasoning. That Austen occasionally uses the term that way as well is not a strong enough reason to conclude, as Ryle does, that it was Shaftesbury, and not Butler, who was the significant influence on Austen's ethic and moral psychology.

Of course, we still have Ryle's strongest argument to deal with. If, as he claims, "there is a prevailing correlation between sense of duty, sense of propriety, and aesthetic taste" (Southam 119) in *Mansfield Park*, and that Austen is thereby affirming "the aestheticism of Shaftesbury" (119), then insofar as Butler's thought is distanced from this aestheticism his thought is further removed from Austen's than is Shaftesbury's. As above, I believe that I am justified in looking only at *Mansfield Park*, and not all of Austen's novels, to counter Ryle's argument since, a) it is the novel I am focusing on in this project, and b) for Austen's most substantially moral novel to be more in line with Butler than Shaftesbury makes it a significant exception or counterexample to Ryle's argument.

In his discussion of Ryle, Devlin contends that not only is Ryle wrong to think that Austen's moral thought most resembled Shaftesbury's, but in fact much of the content of Austen's novels goes some way to attacking the extreme version of the aestheticism Shaftesbury espoused. He begins by noting that the exception Ryle himself acknowledged to the rule of aesthetic taste coinciding with moral good in Austen's characters – Henry and Mary Crawford of *Mansfield Park* – is an exception which "should alone destroy [Ryle's] thesis" (Devlin 51). For that matter, Devlin observes, there are other exceptions to be found. Ryle seems to have forgotten, Devlin supposes, that the "most moral of all Jane Austen's characters, Mr. Knightley, shows very little interest in drama, books or music, and does not even like to dance" (51). Austen's villains, conversely, are men of taste whose "Shaftesburian sentiment is close to selfishness, and in Jane Austen's work often signals it" (57). If Ryle were right that characters with aesthetic taste were characters with moral taste, we should expect to find that Austen's most aesthetically sensitive characters are her most moral characters. Such is not the case, however, and in *Mansfield Park* (and for Devlin, all of Austen's works) the characters with the most developed aesthetic sensibility are the least developed morally: Henry Crawford the seducer reads Shakespeare intuitively and exceptionally well, and his status and money-loving sister

plays the harp beautifully. In fact, Devlin takes it to be more than plausible that Austen's intention in creating Henry Crawford was to "critic[ize] the Shaftesburian philosopher and the possibilities of corruption to which a blurring of the distinction between the beautiful and the right could lead" (64).

Since Devlin's discussion is not limited to *Mansfield Park*, his objections to Ryle often come from his readings of *Sense and Sensibility* and to a lesser extent *Emma*. Especially in *Sense and Sensibility*, we find Austen gently mocking the sentimental novel, which Shaftesbury's aestheticism and moral sense theory underlie. Devlin notes that

In *Sense and Sensibility* we are told that Willoughby's 'musical talents were considerable' and that 'he read with all the sensibility and spirit which Edward had unfortunately lacked'. Marianne finds that Edward has 'no real taste'; he admires Elinor's drawings simply because he admires Elinor. 'He admires', Marianne explains, 'as a lover, not as a connoisseur. To satisfy me these characters must be united'. Her vocabulary is similar to Henry Crawford's when she adds "I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings..." (66)

Of course, Willoughby turns out to be morally disappointing, and Marianne learns to appreciate the value of goodness over sensibility. Furthermore, Devlin finds that "Shaftesbury and Chesterfield both come to mind when we find Marianne suggesting that mere goodness is inferior to 'the delicacies of a strong sensibility and the graces of a polished manner'" (66). Marianne resembles Harriet Smith from *Emma* in an important respect as well. Neither character feels much concern for the well-being of others despite the capacity for great feeling about matters concerning themselves. While "Harriet Smith can show great feeling for a piece of court plaster which had belonged to Mr. Elton...when she goes with Emma to visit the poor sick family her unthinking, unfeeling 'Oh! Dear no' and 'Oh! Dear yes' show that this sensibility cannot be extended to the real distress of others" (57). Having great depths of feeling, for Austen, does not ensure depth or goodness of character. Emma herself gives us evidence that feelings of compassion or benevolence, on Austen's view, are only praiseworthy insofar as they bring people to act in praiseworthy ways. Devlin highlights her observation that "if compassion has produced exertion and relief to the sufferers, it has done all that is truly important. If we feel for the wretched, enough to do all we can for them, the rest is empty sympathy, only distressing to ourselves", which is clearly at odds with Shaftesbury's view that our affective moral sense

will motivate us to act or avoiding acting in some given way due to its having excited certain feelings in us.¹⁷

Devlin comes back to *Mansfield Park*, however, to further illustrate Austen's disagreement with Shaftesbury regarding the profundity of natural affection as a motive for moral action. While we need feelings to help motivate us, Fanny's experience upon returning to her parents' home shows that Austen was deeply skeptical about the likelihood of familial affections, those most common affections, to alone bring people to truly care for and act for each other's good. Upon arriving at the house, Fanny is received politely and even kindly, but Fanny's hopes of finding a friend and confidante in her mother are dashed as she becomes just another, largely ignored, member of the household. Her mother's kindness peaked at their first meeting because, Austen writes, "the instinct of nature was soon satisfied, and Mrs. Price's attachment had no other source" (*MP* 450). Innate affection, then, is not to be relied upon as an exclusive motive to good action; judgment and reflection are needed as well. This does not fit all that comfortably with Shaftesbury's belief that, although reason can tell us if our moral sense is malfunctioning, our moral sense is both our means of determining which actions are right and which are wrong and a reliable means of motivating us to act accordingly.¹⁸

There seems to me to be enough evidence from *Mansfield Park* for concluding that Ryle is wrong to dismiss Butler as a mirror for Austen, and equally wrong to nominate Shaftesbury in his stead. Devlin puts the final nail in the coffin of Ryle's argument by citing the rest of Austen's work, but rightly points out that the existence of the characters of Henry and Mary Crawford, with their aesthetic taste and moral laxity, is enough to reject any attempt to ally Austen with the sort of aestheticism we find in Shaftesbury. We can also treat with some skepticism Ryle's claim that Austen's use of the term 'mind' is a use shared only by Shaftesbury, and in my previous two chapters I have show that there are more than echoes of Butler to be found in *Mansfield Park*. Accordingly, I conclude that my reading of Austen's moral allegiances is preferably to Ryle's. His is certainly the most read contribution of a philosopher to the discussion of Austen's ethics, but I do not think it ought to be taken as the definitive philosophical contribution. I suspect that the main reason authors like Tarpley, Ruderman, and Emsley dismiss Butler as an indirect or direct influence on Austen is that Ryle dismissed him, and so Austen scholars have largely assumed that the work of investigating Butler was done for them. Unfortunately, this has had the effect of the Austen scholarship neglecting the potentially illuminating source of Butler when it

comes to clarifying the moral position of *Mansfield Park*, and to making sense of its controversial handling of the performance of “*Lover’s Vows*” and the ultimate separation of Fanny and Henry. Devlin’s effort to show Ryle’s mistakes is admirable, but it was beyond the scope of his project to pursue in detail the points of resemblance between Austen and Butler, and I hope I have done so here.

Section 5: Concluding Remarks

It is probably clear that I find Devlin’s reading of Austen’s moral commitments to be the most compelling of those above, not to mention the most sympathetic to my own. While Tarpley, Ruderman, Emsley and even Ryle give thoughtful and enlightening commentary on Austen’s works, I believe it is the sort of work and line of thought that Devlin offers which is most worthwhile to pursue. In many respects this dissertation can be understood as a sequel to Devlin’s book, which attempts to remind Austen scholars of the advantages to be found in reading Butler’s *Sermons and second Dissertation* alongside *Mansfield Park*. Perhaps the most important point to take away from this chapter, however, is the observation that the five authors considered here have in common certain themes of interpretation, such as Austen’s concern with judgment and reflection, and that these are themes that can be found in Butler.

¹ Joyce Kerr Tarpley. *Constancy and the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.

² Anne Crippen Ruderman. *The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995.

³ See Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. James W. Ellington. Hackett Publishing, Inc., 1993. Paragraphs 396-397.

⁴ See *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* 421 and 424.

⁵ See *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals* 422-423.

⁶ Diss II.8

⁷ S.12.15, S.12.19

⁸ See S.11.9

⁹ Again, note that I am not arguing that Austen intended to incorporate Butler's thought into her novels, much less that Austen meant to refer to Butler rather than to Aristotle. It is perfectly consistent with what I say here that Austen was wholly unaware of Butler's influence on her conclusions about morality or of any resemblance between them.

¹⁰ Sarah Emsley *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

¹¹ See p. 10

¹² This might well resemble Aristotle's views of moral motivation also, which is not surprising since Butler and the other moralists were working, to a significant extent, with classical ideas about how the human mind and motivation worked.

¹³ D.D. Devlin. *Jane Austen and Education*. London: MacMillan Press, 1975.

¹⁴ See Devlin 110: "the aim of the novel has been to show the inadequacy of Mansfield Park as a way of life, and how little qualified the people in it are to think themselves superior".

¹⁵ Gilbert Ryle. "Jane Austen and the Moralists." *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, Ed. B.C. Southam. Bristol: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968.

¹⁶ I believe focusing on *Mansfield Park* is justified for two reasons. First, it is the novel I am concerned with here. I do not mean to say that Austen's moral psychology in all her novels resembles Butler's (especially rather than Shaftesbury's), only that it does in *Mansfield Park*. Ryle might be correct to note a resemblance between Shaftesbury and the ethic of the rest of Austen's novels. That does not affect my conclusion that Butler is our man when it comes to *Mansfield Park*. Second, it is worth noting that if I am right, and the moral psychology and larger ethic of Austen's most overtly moral novel resembles Butler's thought, and (and we shall fully see below) not Shaftesbury's, this raises a serious obstacle for anyone who wishes to argue that Austen's ethics ought to be regarded as aligned with some other thinker, whether Shaftesbury, Aristotle, or Aquinas. Some rigorous argumentation and interpretation would be in order to explain how it is that Austen was really Thomistic, say, while the novel which most clearly expresses her moral thought is not.

¹⁷ See Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*. Ed. Lawrence E. Klein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

¹⁸ See Isabel Rivers. *Shaftesbury to Hume. Grace, and Sentiment*. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. P. 126.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

My goal in this dissertation has been to argue that the resemblance between the ethic of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and the moral psychology of Bishop Joseph Butler's works is stronger than is the similarity between *Mansfield Park* and the doctrines of other moral philosophers or schools of moral thought. Essentially, my argument rests on two observations, the first being that of the number and prominence of shared concepts between the two authors including: the nature and importance of moral judgment to moral behavior and the corresponding unreliability of reference to moral rules for producing moral behavior, the idea that there is a natural and beneficial hierarchical organization of motivational principles within an individual agent's psychology, and an appreciation of the dangerous connection between self-deceit and vice. My second observation is that the plot of *Mansfield Park* bears out these commitments beyond simply affirming them in particular characters whom Austen wants her reader to accept as moral role models or exemplars. That is, while it is true that Fanny Price, as an individual, demonstrates the value of judgment and critical reflection, and of successful moral action without reference to strict moral principles or rules, what seems to me to be more important is the fact that controversial elements of the plot of the novel seem to be expressions of Butler's views as well. Austen is worried about Edmund Bertram's infatuation with Mary Crawford because she, like Butler, is worried about the reinforcing effect of self-deceit on establishing morally problematic action a habit. This causes her to be anxious about the morality of her characters' efforts to perform the play "Lover's Vows". It seems to me that when we properly appreciate the moral thought underlying this worry, Austen's much-maligned 'priggishness' regarding the play becomes more understandable and less alien than it first appears. In other words, when we have Butler's *Sermons* and the Dissertation *Of the Nature of Virtue* at hand when we read *Mansfield Park* we are less likely to be perplexed by events in the novel and the narrator's perspective on them for the simple reason that we have better access to the moral psychology Austen was working with.

Of course, these observations alone do not support the conclusion that we ought to have Butler's works at hand, *rather than any others*, when we read *Mansfield Park*. To this effect I

have considered recent and prominent scholarship on Austen's ethics, which is primarily the purview of Austen scholars or literary critics. I have suggested that their arguments for reading Austen generally, or *Mansfield Park* particularly, as a classical or Christian virtue theorist leave much to be desired and fail to properly consider the similarities to be found between Austen and the British Moralists of the 18th century. Even some authors who have considered the resemblance between Austen and the Moralists, such as Philip Drew and Gilbert Ryle, do so with problematic readings of either Austen or Butler (or both), and so offer at best unconvincing arguments for their view concerning Austen and Butler, or Austen and Shaftesbury. Accordingly I conclude that my reading, which draws a tighter connection between Austen and Butler than between Austen and another thinker, is preferable to other readings of Austen's ethic.

Finally, I would like to remind the reader of two things. First, as I have tried to stress throughout this dissertation, my arguments apply only to *Mansfield Park*. The question of the underlying ethic or moral psychology of Austen's other published and unpublished works thus remains open. I suspect, however, that arguments like mine could be fairly easily made for *Sense and Sensibility* and for *Persuasion*. I would also be rather surprised if the most overtly moral of Austen's works was unique among those works in its moral perspective. Nevertheless, the project of testing this suspicion and attempting to trace Butlerian themes throughout Austen's works remains to be undertaken. The last aspect of my argument that I wish to highlight is the claim I have omitted from it. I do not mean to argue anywhere that Austen either read any of Butler's works or that she intentionally drew on them as she wrote *Mansfield Park*. It is possible for her to have absorbed some of his thought indirectly in a number of ways, whether through her father or brother in the clergy or through other sermons she read or heard. Austen herself may have been largely unaware of the resemblance her novel bore to Butler's thought. I am, at least, unwilling to go so far as D.D. Devlin and claim to be certain that Austen had read Butler. I believe that I have shown as much as can be shown: that there is a strong resemblance between the views found in Butler's works and those expressed *Mansfield Park*, and that there are advantages to approaching the novel as one that is a literary embodiment of many of his thoughts and that shares his concerns. At present, I do not think there is more to be said about the direct or indirect means by which Austen came to have those thoughts or concerns herself. What matters is that we have hopefully gotten a little clearer about the moral commitments and concerns

underlying the novel, and that some effort has been made to revive or re-establish the dialog between the literary and philosophical scholarly communities.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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