

And Symmetry contriv'd? Who bade the Blood
Forth-issue from the Fountain of the Heart,
And thence thro' all th' Arterial Roads diffuse
Its purple Current; then return its Streams,
And to its Source with winding Tide convey?
Who spun the fibrous Threads that form the Nerves,
And taught 'em, from their Brainy Origin,
Thro' ev'ry Limb t' extend their Branches long?
Who form'd the curious Organ of the Eye,
And cloth'd it with its various Tunicles,
Of Texture exquisite; with Chrystal Juice
Supply'd it, to transmit the Rays of Light,
Then place'd it in its Station eminent,
Well fence'd and guarded, as a Centinel
To watch abroad, and advertise the Soul
Of things without, and needful Caution give?
Whence came the Active and Sagacious Mind,
Self-conscious, and with Faculties endu'd
Of Understanding, Will and Memory,
And Reason to distinguish True from False?
Who join'd it to the Body, and of Both
Made up one perfect Being, gave it Pow'r
To move the Limbs, and bade the brawny Arm
Obey its Will? What but an Infinite,
Almighty God, supremely Wise and Good,
Could all these great and beauteous Works produce? (pp. 204-06)

Apart from such verbal parallels as the many questions, the phrases "artful Hand," "Symmetry contriv'd" and the relationship of Blake's "the stars threw down their spears" and Needler's

the Rays of Light,
Then place'd it in its Station eminent,
Well fence'd and guarded, as a Centinel
To watch abroad, . . .

the most interesting aspect of the relationship between the two poems is Blake's refusal to add Needler's final triumphant rhetorical question in "The Tyger":

What but an Infinite,
Almighty God, supremely Wise and Good,
Could all these great and beauteous Works produce?

The omission makes Blake's poem essentially elliptical, ambiguous when seen without its prototype in Needler, but, with Needler's side by side with it, revolutionary and iconoclastic.

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THE BENNET GIRLS AND ADAM SMITH ON VANITY AND PRIDE

Modern scholarship has repeatedly borne witness to the truth of Mary Lascelles' remark that "allusions to books run like an undercurrent through Jane Austen's writings." I believe that one further

manifestation of this allusive undercurrent occurs in one of the more memorable conversation scenes in *Pride and Prejudice*, the scene in Volume I, Chapter v in which various members of the Bennet and Lucas families discuss Mr. Darcy's pride, and thereby reveal important characteristics of their own minds and hearts. Here Jane Austen echoes several passages on pride and vanity that occur in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), and recognition of her echoes gives additional point to the distinction between the characters of Mary and Elizabeth Bennet that it is one of the functions of this scene to reveal.

In the scene in question the women of the Lucas and Bennet families gather to discuss the events of a recent Meryton "assembly." One of the subjects of conversation is the excessive pride of their new acquaintance Mr. Darcy, who has so rudely slighted Elizabeth Bennet. Charlotte Lucas, characteristically alert to the hard social and economic facts of life, defends Darcy's pride to some extent: because of his many advantages, she says, he has almost "a right to be proud." Elizabeth replies, in a typically amusing fashion, "That is very true . . . and I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*." This inspires a small dissertation on pride, amusing in quite another way, by Mary Bennet. Mary ponderously remarks:

Pride . . . is a very common failing I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.¹

The reader suspects, from their length and language, that Mary's remarks here (as elsewhere) must have their origins in the "great books" with which she is so frequently occupied. In fact, Mary's distinction between pride and vanity echoes, embarrassingly closely, the substance and language of some of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, one of the most important and best known philosophical works of the day. In Part VI, section iii of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith discusses "the principle of self-estimation" in two manifestations, those of vanity and pride. In the course of his discussion he remarks that while

our dislike to pride and vanity generally disposes us to rank the persons whom we accuse of those vices rather below than above the common level . . . I think we are most frequently in the wrong, and that both the proud man and the

¹ *The Novels of Jane Austen*, (Oxford, 1932), II, 20.

vain man are often (perhaps for the most part) a good deal above it; though not near so much as either the one really thinks himself, or as the other wishes you to think him.²

Having outlined “the distinguishing characteristics of pride and vanity” Smith goes on to explain that

the proud man is often vain; and the vain man is often proud. Nothing can be more natural than that the man who thinks much more highly of himself than he deserves should wish that other people should think still more highly of him; or that the man who wishes that other people should think more highly of him than he thinks of himself should, at the same time, think much more highly of himself than he deserves. (p. 380)

Mary is serving up a warmed-over “extract” from her “great books,” and her doing so helps to reveal her essential intellectual sterility.

Interestingly enough, however, Mary’s display of borrowed wisdom has been sparked by a “borrowing” on the part of Elizabeth Bennet—her remark on the “mortification” of her pride by Darcy’s—that also echoes the third section of Part VI of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Speaking of the effects of vain and proud men’s behavior on others Smith states that when such men

assume upon us, or set themselves before us, their self-estimation mortifies our own. Our own pride and vanity prompt us to accuse them of pride and vanity, and we cease to be the impartial spectators of their conduct. (p. 362)

Elizabeth’s light and deft allusion, aphoristic and à propos, is as characteristic of her intellect as Mary’s ponderous plagiarism is of hers. The contrast between the two girls’ uses of “borrowings,” is one of many subtle devices that Jane Austen uses to underline important features of character in *Pride and Prejudice*.

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² *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (London, 1802), p. 378. Page references, hereafter included in the text, are to this edition.