

A 'SENSIBLE KNAVE'?

HUME, JANE AUSTEN AND MR ELLIOT

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1. INTRODUCTION: SENSIBLE KNAVES IN HUME AND AUSTEN

Our theme in this issue is Women, Literature and Philosophy. My paper will, I hope, be on-topic, since it deals with what I take to be one woman's literary response to a philosophical problem. The woman is Jane Austen, the problem is the rationality of Hume's 'sensible knave', and Austen's response is to deepen the problem. Despite his enthusiasm for virtue, Hume reluctantly concedes in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*¹ that injustice can be a rational strategy for 'sensible knaves', intelligent but selfish agents who feel no aversion towards thoughts of villainy or baseness. Austen agrees, but adds that *absent considerations of a future state*, other vices besides injustice can be rationally indulged with tolerable prospects of worldly happiness. Austen's creation Mr Elliot is just such an agent – sensible and knavish but not technically 'unjust'. Despite and partly because of his vices – ingratitude, avarice and duplicity – he manages to be both successful and reasonably happy.²

Hume's sensible³ knave is a sort of refined eighteenth-century Thrasymachus who figures in the conclusion of the EPM. Since the knave lacks the usual sentiments that

¹ D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Subsequent references in the text to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* use a slightly modified version of the *Hume Studies* convention: the initials EPM precede the section, part and paragraph numbers with the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch page numbers following a forward slash. Thus the reference for Hume's discussion of the 'sensible knave' is EPM, 9.2.22-24/282-3.

² J. Austen, *Persuasion*, edited by J. Kinsley, notes by D.S. Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Subsequent references to *Persuasion* will be made in the text with the letter P preceding volume and chapter numbers with the Oxford Classics page numbers following a forward slash.

³What 'sensible' mostly means in connection with both Austen's Mr Elliot and Hume's sensible knave is 'intelligent', 'level-headed' or 'rational'. In the eighteenth century 'sensible' could also mean 'aware' as in 'I was sensible of his unfriendly feelings though he endeavored to conceal them'. Both the knave

underwrite morality, it seems that on Hume's principles no rational argument could convince him to do the right thing if doing the wrong thing would pay better. This was widely regarded as a difficulty for Hume, since his contemporaries tended to think that a moralist had not really made the grade unless he had demonstrated the rationality of virtue. Austen agrees with Hume that from a worldly point of view, vice may sometimes be a rational strategy for those without a sufficient taste for morality. But she also agrees with his critics that this conclusion shows that something is wrong with Hume's irreligious system. Though worldly incentives to virtue exist, especially for those with the right kind of sentiments, they are not enough to guarantee good behavior. As the daughter and sister of parsons she did not regard religion as altogether redundant.

Hume has to admit that since the knave is deficient when it comes to the moral sentiments, it may be rational for him to be unjust so long as he 'cheats with moderation and secrecy' (EPM 9.2.24/283). But Austen goes one better by showing that other vices besides injustice are compatible with success. For Hume, knavery is *only* rational if it is confined to crimes against justice, that is, to secret violations of property rights involving theft, fraud or dishonesty. In other areas of conduct it pays to do the decent or the non-vicious thing:

Treating vice with the greatest candour, and making it all possible concessions, we must acknowledge, that there is not, in any instance, the smallest pretext for giving it the preference above virtue, with a view to self-interest; except, perhaps, in the case of justice, where a man, taking things in a certain light, may often seem to be a loser by his integrity

(EPM, 9.2.22/282)

and Mr Elliott are 'sensible' in this sense since they are both supposed to be good at reading people and at knowing what to say to keep them sweet. 'Sensible' could also mean 'aware of in a morally appropriate way'. Thus an eighteenth century person might say 'I am deeply sensible of your good offices in this matter,' meaning by this 'I am both aware of your good offices and appropriately grateful'. Mr Elliott is not sensible of the Smith's former kindness in this sense nor is the knave fully sensible of the injustice of his actions.

Hume offers two arguments for this optimistic claim. First, since virtues are mental actions or qualities that are useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others (EPM, 9.1.1/268), it follows automatically that many non-virtuous acts will be either harmful or disagreeable to the person who perpetrates them. Extravagance, for example, is not a vice that can be indulged with impunity, as many of Austen's characters discover to their cost, for instance Wickham⁴, Willoughby⁵ and Sir Walter Elliot. Nobody wants to have qualities that are immediately disagreeable to themselves, and few want to display qualities that are immediately disagreeable to others. When it comes to the '*companionable* virtues of good manners and wit, decency and genteelness', that is, those virtues that render a person immediately agreeable, 'it seems [...] superfluous to prove, that [they] are more desirable than the contrary qualities', since everyone prefers to have their 'company coveted, admired [and] followed; rather than hated, despised [and] avoided' (EPM, 9.2.18./280). Secondly, when it comes to the virtues that are *useful* to others, Hume seems to suggest a similar argument. If you are lacking in these virtues – if you are selfish, ungrateful, avaricious or unkind, or, more generally, if you are the kind of person who exploits other people – you will soon feel the effects of a bad reputation. It is unpleasant to be despised or disliked, and we all need the goodwill of others if we are going to get by. But Austen, being more alive to the social effects of power and inequality than Hume, sees clearly that this just won't do. For power and social position can often shield us from the consequences of our other-regarding vices (those vices that are immediately harmful to persons other than the agent). A Lady Catherine de Bourgh

⁴ J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, edited by J. Kinsley, notes by F. Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Subsequent references to *Pride and Prejudice* will be made in the text with the letters P&P preceding volume and chapter numbers with the Oxford Classics page numbers following a forward slash.

⁵ J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, edited by J. Kinsley, introduction by M.A. Doody and notes by C. Lamont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Subsequent references to *Sense and Sensibility* will be made in the text with the letters S&S preceding volume and chapter numbers with the Oxford Classics page numbers following a forward slash.

need never lack for sycophants despite her arrogant incivilities,⁶ and a Henry Crawford can run off with Mrs Rushworth without unduly damaging his reputation with other Regency bucks.⁷ Moreover, good looks, charm and a smattering of the ‘companionable virtues’ can often atone for real moral vices. Consider this from Miss Crawford, who has willfully kept Fanny Price waiting for her health-giving pony-ride:

‘My dear Miss Price,’ said Miss Crawford, as soon as she was at all within hearing, ‘I am come to make my own apologies for keeping you waiting; but I have nothing in the world to say for myself – I knew it was very late, and that I was behaving extremely ill; and therefore, if you please, you must forgive me. Selfishness must always be forgiven, you know, because there is no hope of a cure.

(MP, 1.7/54)

As a consequence of this pretty apology and Fanny’s civil, but slightly servile, response, Miss Crawford gets four more days of exhilarating horse-riding in the company of the attractive, if unduly clerical Edmund, while Fanny has to run errands in the hot sun for her detestable aunts. Miss Crawford’s knavery is relatively mild and certainly sensible, since she is well-endowed with worldly prudence, but even the feckless Wickham manages to save himself from the consequences of one vice (extravagance) by his happy facility at another (seduction). Thus it can be rational to indulge in other kinds of knavery than the vice of injustice.

⁶ Of course *we* would not enjoy the ponderous servilities of Mr Collins. But then Lady Catharine is a Jane Austen *character* not a Jane Austen *reader*. She lacks the refined moral sensibility that Austen both expects and elicits in her audience.

⁷ J. Austen, *Mansfield Park*, edited by J. Kinsley, notes by J. Stabler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Subsequent references to *Mansfield Park* will be made in the text with the letters MP preceding volume and chapter numbers with the Oxford Classics page numbers following a forward slash.

As we have seen, Hume's sensible knave is an unscrupulous fellow who 'feels no reluctance to the thoughts of villainy or baseness' (EPM, 9.2.23/283). Lacking the moral sentiments that keep most of us on the straight and narrow, is there any argument that could prevail upon him to do the right, and specifically the just thing if he could reap some advantage by doing otherwise? There's the criminal law to worry about of course, but if you do indeed 'cheat with moderation and secrecy', it is often possible to get away with it. It is true that if everybody cheated things would get pretty bad, but the sensible knave can reply that, as a matter of fact, even if he cheats, other people won't. Although 'it is allowed, that, without a regard to property, no society could subsist; yet, according to the imperfect way in which human affairs are conducted, a sensible knave, in particular incidents, may think, that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and confederacy' (EPM, 9.2.22/282). Though society would collapse if everybody stole, a little bit of judicious theft or injustice on the part of the sensible knave is hardly likely to bring the social edifice crashing down. After all, it is not as if the knave will be setting a bad example, since part of the point of his secret cheating is that nobody finds out about it! As for honesty's being the best policy, that is no doubt true as a general rule, but, as Hume points out, it is 'liable to many exceptions: And it may, perhaps, be thought, that [he] conducts himself with most wisdom, who observes the general rule, and takes advantage of all the exceptions' (EPM, 9.2.22/282).

Though Hume frames the issue in terms of 'injustice', which in his book is mainly confined to crimes against property, the problem, as Austen convincingly demonstrates, is clearly a more general one. A sensible knave might be tempted by other ways of doing people down besides theft and fraud. Trifling with other people's affections, or getting girls pregnant and then dumping them, or sponging off your friends and then refusing to help them when they are in need, are all ways of deriving profit or pleasure at other people's expense. Of course, if you do this sort of thing too often or too openly, you can get a bad reputation, but if

you deceive, seduce and betray ‘with secrecy and moderation’, it is often possible to do so without suffering too much damage in the eyes of the world. This is all the more likely in a class-stratified or sex-stratified society. If the sensible knave treats his equals and superiors with a modicum of decency, he can often exploit his inferiors without forfeiting either the trust or the esteem of the people he needs to care about. A religious believer might worry about divine retribution, but the sensible knave, like Hume himself, is obviously an atheist or agnostic, a point not lost on Hume’s contemporaries. Hume does not even *raise* the possibility of divine punishment in an afterlife, an intellectual option that he had long since ceased to take seriously by the time he came to write the EPM.

What argument will convince the sensible knave that a policy of moderate and judicious knavery is not a rational strategy? When stripped of its rhetoric, Hume’s ultimate answer is ‘none at all’:

I must confess, that, if a man think, that this reasoning much requires an answer, it will be a little difficult to find any, which will to him appear satisfactory and convincing. If his heart rebel not against such pernicious maxims, if he feel no reluctance to the thoughts of villainy or baseness, he has indeed lost a considerable motive to virtue; and we may expect, that his practice will be answerable to his speculation.

(EPM, 9.2.22/283)

Fortunately, the hearts of most people *do* rebel against such pernicious maxims, and we do feel reluctance at the thoughts of villainy or baseness. For a person with these sentiments the consciousness of having done the right thing, or at least of not having done anything really bad, is an important constituent of happiness. As Hume writes:

[1] In all ingenuous natures, the antipathy to treachery and roguery is too strong to be counterbalanced by any views of profit or pecuniary advantage.

[2] Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct; these are circumstances very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man, who feels the importance of them.

(EPM, 9.2.22/282)

But note the qualifications scattered through these two sentences. It is only in *ingenuous* natures that we can be sure that the ‘antipathy to treachery and roguery’ is too strong to be counterbalanced by any views of profit or pecuniary advantage. In those whose natures are *not* ingenuous, it may be far otherwise. Indeed, once we appreciate the force of the qualification that first sentence verges on the tautologous. What Hume is saying is that to those with ingenuous natures – namely those who really care about doing the right thing – doing the right thing matters more than considerations of pecuniary gain. In other words, those who care more about doing the right thing than considerations of pecuniary gain care more about doing the right thing than considerations of pecuniary gain. In fact, Hume’s thesis has a little more content than that, since he has a theory about the emotional constitution of those who prefer virtue to financial advantage. Nonetheless, the characteristics that underly a virtuous disposition are neither necessary nor universal among human beings, since we all *might* lack these characteristics and some of us actually *do*. What about the second sentence? Hume says that ‘inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct’ are ‘circumstances very requisite to happiness’. But the final phrase makes it clear that this is only true of some people. These circumstances ‘will be cherished and cultivated by every *honest* man, who feels the importance of them’ [my italics] but not, presumably, by those *dishonest* men who do not.

Hume points out that judicious knavery is not a risk-free strategy. It is possible to miscalculate, especially through over-confidence, and many knaves are not as sensible as they like to think themselves, cheating without the ‘moderation and secrecy’ that is necessary for success. The virtuous man, he says, has

the frequent satisfaction of seeing knaves, with all their pretended cunning and abilities, betrayed by their own maxims [...] a tempting incident occurs [where the gain is large but the secrecy of the cheating is difficult to maintain], nature is frail, and they give into the snare; whence they can never extricate themselves, without a total loss of reputation, and the forfeiture of all future trust and confidence with mankind.

(EPM, 9.2.22/282)

But the fact that overconfident knaves sometimes come a cropper does not mean that a policy of cautious and well-conducted knavery is not a recipe for social success.

Hume is relatively unfazed by this, because he thinks that most people possess the sentiments necessary to sustain a virtuous life. As a matter of fact our hearts do rebel against the knave’s pernicious principles, and we do feel reluctance at the thoughts of villainy or baseness. This may be a contingent fact, but since it is indeed a fact, we need not worry too much about the occasional sensible knave who cannot be argued into justice. Of course, this is not to say that we should not be on our guard. Hume thought that political institutions should be devised on the assumption that people are generally knaves even though it is a fact that most of us are not. ‘Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, co-operate to public good [...] It is, therefore, a just

political maxim, that every man must be supposed a knave: Though at the same time, it appears somewhat strange, that a maxim should be true in *politics*, which is false in *fact*'.⁸

This principle, which Hume restricts to politics, is extended by his disciple Jeremy Bentham to social institutions in general under the name of the 'Duty and Interest Junction Principle'.⁹ But the basic idea is the same. Since not everyone feels reluctance at the thoughts of villainy or baseness, we must make sure that self-interest dictates the conduct we wish to promote – even on the part of sensible knaves.

First, I shall background Hume's sensible knave passage, explaining its origins in the meta-ethical controversies of the eighteenth century and discussing the critical reaction to a passage that caught the attention of his contemporary critics William Paley, William Belsham and George Gleig. Second, I shall argue that Jane Austen was probably aware of this passage either from reading Hume directly or from reading Hume's critics. Finally, I shall contend that whether she was aware of the Hume passage or not, she was certainly aware of the problem, and that her views on this topic were remarkably similar to Hume's. Mr William Elliot is a sensible knave who manages to achieve an agreeable life with no more disappointments than many more virtuous people have to put up with (P, 2.12/201). What rational argument could convince *him* that knavery does not pay? The ruthless, grasping and social-climbing General Tilney, who is prepared to turn a girl out of doors for not being as rich as he thought she was, winds up with a viscountess for a daughter and a tolerably well-endowed wife for his son. His display of 'parental tyranny' does not seem to do him much damage in the eyes of the world (NA 2.16/184-187).¹⁰ Frank Churchill is a borderline knave

⁸ Hume, 'Of The Independency of Parliament', in *Essays, Moral Political and Literary*, edited by E.V. Miller, revised edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 42-3.

⁹ R. Harrison, *Bentham* (London: Routledge, 1983), Ch. 5.

¹⁰ J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon*. edited by J. Kinsley, introduction by J. Davie and notes by C.L Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Subsequent references to *Northanger Abbey* will be made in the text with the letters NA preceding volume and chapter numbers with the Oxford Classics page numbers following a forward slash. For references to the other works I will use the abbreviation NA etc. followed by the Oxford Classics page numbers.

who deceives his way to a happy marriage and a large inheritance (E, 3.10/308-315).¹¹ The manipulative Lady Susan, a sort of toned-down English Madame de Merteuil,¹² winds up with a rich and titled, if rather dull, husband who she can easily dominate. She manages to dump the daughter she despises, and who might otherwise cramp her style, on the more tender-hearted Vernons (NA etc, 248-9). Indeed, in Jane Austen's fiction, even the knaves who are far from sensible often manage to fall on their feet. Wickham has his debts paid and his living secured at the price of having to put up with a silly, shallow wife, an affliction that many better men such as Mr Bennet have to labour under (P&P, 3.19/296-297). And even here the fact that Lydia is probably good, or at least enthusiastic in bed, may afford some slight consolation to a man of his disposition. Willoughby loses out on the girl he loves, but he still has his hunting and his wife's fortune to console him (S&S, 3.14/288-289). True, the vain, foolish and snobby Robert Ferrars, who is happy to soak up the inheritance of his dispossessed brother, winds up with a wife, the conniving Lucy Steele, who, once there is no more need to fawn and flatter, subjects her new husband to 'frequent domestic disagreements' (S&S 3.14/287). But again, there are many better men who suffer the same fate, and his ample fortune no doubt affords him considerable consolation for any lapses in marital harmony. He certainly appears to have no regrets: 'Nothing ever appeared in Robert's style of living or of talking to give a suspicion of his regretting the extent of his income, as either leaving his brother too little, or bringing himself too much' (S&S, 3.14/287). As for Lucy Steele herself, what a sensible knave is she! As Austen writes, 'The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging

¹¹ J. Austen, *Emma*, edited by J. Kinsley and A. Pinch (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003). Subsequent references to *Emma* will be made in the text with the letter E preceding volume and chapter numbers and the Oxford Classics page numbers following a forward slash.

¹² Compare Lady Susan's letters to her friend Alicia with Mme de Merteuil's letters to Valmont in P. Choderlos de Laclos, *Dangerous Liaisons*, translated and edited by Douglas Parmee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially Letter 81. Both Lady Susan and Mme de Merteuil enjoy exerting power over men by means of their sexuality and both are consummate actresses who are constantly playing a part. But whereas Lady Susan is merely a power-loving flirt, Mme de Merteuil is a power-loving seductress. Lady Susan is also much less cruel than Mme de Merteuil. No naive young girls get seduced and ruined at *her* command.

instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience' (S&S, 3.14/286). She entices an honorable man into marriage, holds him to it at the cost of his inheritance, and then throws him over in favor of his more financially well-endowed brother.

2. THE SLAVERY OF REASON THESIS

In the eighteenth century, the British Moralists divided into two meta-ethical factions, the rationalists and the sentimentalists. The rationalists thought that the basic truths of morality were accessible to reason. The sentimentalists such as Hutcheson and Hume thought that we access the moral facts via our feelings or sentiments, and that the moral properties themselves are akin to secondary qualities. Vice and virtue, says Hume, 'may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold' (T, 3.1.1.26/469).¹³ According to Hutcheson,

the Word Moral Goodness, denotes our Idea of some Quality apprehended in Actions, which procures Approbation and Love toward the Actor, from those who receive no Advantage by the Action. Moral Evil, denotes our Idea of a contrary Quality, which excites Aversion, and Dislike toward the Actor, even from Persons unconcern'd in its natural Tendency.¹⁴

Now what I shall argue is that the Rationality of the Sensible Knave (RSK for short) is a very plausible claim given the SRT or Slavery of Reason Thesis, the doctrine that reason 'is

¹³ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Subsequent references to the *Treatise* are made in the text using a slightly modified version of the *Hume Studies* convention: the initial T precedes the book, section, part and paragraph numbers with the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch page numbers following a forward slash.

¹⁴ F. Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Originals of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, edited by W. Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004), 85.

and ought only to be slave of the passions' (T, 2.3.3.5/415). The SRT played an important part in the debates between the rationalists and the sentimentalists. Though widely credited to Hume, it goes back (at least) to Hobbes and was affirmed by Hume's sometime philosophical hero Francis Hutcheson. Hume's formulations are too familiar to quote. Not so Hutcheson's:

When we ask the Reason of an Action we sometimes mean, 'What Truth shews a Quality in the Action, exciting the Agent to do it?' [These] sort of Reasons we will call exciting [...] Now we shall find that all exciting Reasons presuppose Instincts and Affections [...] As to exciting Reasons, in every calm rational Action some end is desired or intended; no end can be intended or desired previously to some one of these Classes of Affections, Self-Love, Self-Hatred, or desire of private Misery, (if this be possible) Benevolence toward others, or Malice: All Affections are included under these; no end can be previous to them all; there can therefore be no exciting Reason previous to Affection.

We have indeed many confused Harangues on this Subject, telling us, 'We have two Principles of Action, Reason, and Affection, or Passion (i.e. strong Affection): the former in common with Angels, the latter with Brutes: No Action is wise, or good, or reasonable, to which we are not excited by Reason, as distinct from all Affections; or, if any such Actions as flow from Affections be good, 'tis only by chance, or materially and not formally.' As if indeed Reason, or the Knowledge of the Relations of things, could excite to Action when we proposed no End, or as if Ends could be intended without Desire or Affection.¹⁵

This is clear enough. An exciting reason is a true proposition believed in by the agent which excites the agent to action. The proposition cannot do its exciting business unless 'some end is

¹⁵ F. Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, edited by A. Garrett (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 138-139.

desired or intended’, and no end can be intended ‘without Desire or Affection’. Hence ‘all exciting Reasons presuppose Instincts and Affections’, that is, they are incapable of exciting action without them.

The SRT plays a dual role in the polemics of the sentimentalists. In Hume’s work, it provides one of the premises for the famous Motivation (or Influence) Argument, which can be read either as an argument for sentimentalism or as an argument for emotivism. In my view this argument fails, so I won’t be discussing it here.¹⁶ Besides, Hutcheson also insists on the SRT even though there is no trace of the Motivation Argument to be found in his work. Why then was the SRT so important to Hutcheson as well as Hume? Because it supports a counter-argument to one of the most dangerous arguments of the rationalists.

The Slavery of Reason Thesis goes something like this. No belief, or no belief derived from reason, can give rise either to a new desire or an action without the aid of a pre-existing passion. When Hume discusses these matters, he sometimes seems to think of passions as desires, but in my view the SRT is only plausible if some passions are what I call DTADs,¹⁷ that is dispositions to acquire desires. Kindness to children, one of Hume’s own examples, provides a case in point. If I am kind to children, it is not usually because I have a desire to maximize the welfare of children generally. Rather, my kindness consists in a disposition to acquire desires to do kindly things for the children that I happen to meet. Thus reason produces an action or gives rise to a new volition, that is, a movement of the will such as a new desire, by pointing the way to realize an end set by passion. Passions for Hume – and desires or affections for Hutcheson – are end-setting entities. And the obvious examples of end-setting mental entities are DTADs and desires.

¹⁶ See C. R. Pigden, ‘If Not Non-cognitivism Then What?’, in *Hume on Motivation and Virtue* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 80-104.

¹⁷ Pigden, ‘Introduction’, in *Hume on Motivation and Virtue*, 1-29.

3. THE SLAVERY OF REASON THESIS AND THE RATIONALIST CHALLENGE

Here then is the Slavery of Reason Thesis:

SRT: Given the constitution of the human mind, beliefs (or beliefs derived from reason) are causally incapable of producing either actions or new desires without the aid of pre-existing passions, which passions themselves are usually to be understood *either* as desires *or* as dispositions to acquire desires.

The point of the SRT is to answer the rationalists; the problem is that it lends support to the RSK – the Rationality of the Sensible Knave.

As we have already noted, the sentimentalists viewed the moral properties as akin to secondary qualities. Roughly speaking, they thought that to describe an action as right or virtuous is to say it would arouse the approbation of a suitably qualified human spectator, someone impartial, informed, dispassionate and devoid of any distorting psychological quirks. The rationalists disagreed. But what was their argument? Here is John Balguy:

Supposing us void of natural compassion as well as benevolence; might we not possibly be induced to attempt the relief of some person in distress, merely from the reason of the thing? [...] In short, if we made use of our understandings, they would not fail, I think, to discover our duty in such a case. Nay they would prompt us to undertake it, and condemn us if we omitted it.¹⁸

(Foundations, 390-391)

If we try to elevate this into an argument we get something like this:

¹⁸ J. Balguy, *The Foundations of Moral Goodness*, 3rd edition (1733) excerpted in *The British Moralists*, vol. 1, *Hobbes to Gay*, edited by D. D. Raphael (Indianapolis: Hackett) originally published in London by John Pemberton.

(1R) It is a conceptual truth that the moral facts, if any, would have to be both accessible to reason and (in today's terminology) *objectively prescriptive* (that is, such as to defeasibly motivate any conceivable rational agent that became aware of them of them, whatever that agent's desires or inclinations).

(2R) Facts about what would arouse the approbation or disapprobation of a suitably qualified human observer are *not* accessible to reason (at least not in the right kind of way), and are *not* objectively prescriptive (that is, such as to defeasibly motivate any conceivable rational agent that became aware of them, whatever that agent's desires or inclinations).

(3R) So the moral facts, if any, are not facts about would what arouse the approbation or disapprobation of a suitably qualified human observer.

The sentimentalists' reply can be formulated as follows:

(1S) There are no objectively prescriptive facts (facts that would be defeasibly motivating to any conceivable rational agent that became aware of them, whatever that agent's desires or inclinations).

(2S) So if there are to be any moral facts, it is *not* a conceptual truth that the moral facts, if any, would have to be objectively prescriptive (that is, such as to defeasibly motivate any rational agent that became aware of them). They may be facts that are only motivating to human beings or creatures with similar dispositions (and not necessarily to all of them).

The SRT is important because it underwrites (1S). Reason is either the faculty that forms beliefs or a sub-faculty of that faculty. Reason-based beliefs cannot motivate without the aid

of a pre-existing passion, either a DTAD or a desire. Hence facts accessible to reason cannot motivate *human* beings without the aid of a pre-existing desire or DTAD, since to be aware of a fact is, in part, to believe in it. Rationality itself does not include any desires or DTADS, except perhaps a taste for true, as opposed to false, beliefs and a penchant for the right kind of belief-forming strategies. But if facts accessible to reason cannot even motivate *human* agents without the aid of a pre-existing desire or DTAD, and if no morally salient desires or DTADS are constitutive of rationality, then there are no objectively prescriptive facts, that is, facts that would be defeasibly motivating to *any* conceivable rational agent that became aware of them whatever the agent's desires or inclinations.

4. THE SLAVERY OF REASON AND THE RATIONALITY OF THE SENSIBLE KNAVE

But what has all this got to do with the RSK? Well, what the SRT means for Hume and Hutcheson is that even if we build what they sometimes call Self-Love into our conception of rationality, that is, if we stipulate that an agent does not really count as rational unless she has some interest in her long-term survival and satisfaction, then, absent considerations of a future state, morality is rationally optional. Moral considerations will appeal to those with the right kind of psychological make-up, but not to those without. Such people may be repellent but they need not be irrational. Why so? From the SRT, a rational human being can entertain any reason-derived belief while remaining unmoved. So if moral beliefs are derived from reason – as they must be for those rational beings without the relevant sentiments – they need not be motivating. This conclusion will be true even if we incorporate something like self-love or a desire for the agent's 'good on the whole' into our conception of rationality. So long as doing the right thing and avoiding the wrong are not always in the agent's self-interest, a rational being can remain unmoved by moral considerations.

But, you may protest, according to the Hutcheson/Hume theory, human beings typically derive their moral opinions from sentiment not from reason. We *think* that an action is wrong because we have *felt* a sentiment of disapprobation when trying to approximate an impartial spectator. And the moral sentiments – the feelings of approval and disapproval – are motivating kinds of things. So when a person *feels* that he ought not to do something – that is, when he feels a sentiment of disapprobation to actions of a certain kind – he will *feel* a corresponding reluctance to perform such acts. So although a hypothetical rational creature whose moral beliefs are derived from reason might remain unmoved by moral considerations, on the Hume/Hutcheson theory this is impossible for real-life human beings.

Not quite. Although it may be impossible for *normal* human beings to formulate their moral opinions without feeling – and being moved by – the moral sentiments, this is indeed possible for *abnormal* human beings, who are lacking or deficient in ordinary human feelings. And the sensible knave is supposed to be just such a person. It is possible for the knave to remain unmotivated by the moral sentiments if he is altogether lacking in the moral sentiments, for in that case his knowledge of right and wrong would be like that of an alien anthropologist – entirely reason-based, and hence not motivating to the knave in his capacity as a rational being. And it is possible for the knave to remain unmotivated if he is *deficient* in the moral sentiments, for in that case his sentiments may be enough to induce knowledge, but not enough to induce motivation. *Ex hypothesi*, the knave is a sensible and hence a rational human being. But, also *ex hypothesi*, he is a knave, someone who ‘feels no reluctance [at] the thoughts of villainy or baseness’, which means that his feelings are not powerful enough to motivate him to virtue. Absent sufficiently powerful feelings, he cannot be confuted by reason. This is because no facts calculated to move him can be brought to his attention. It is not his good sense that is at fault, but his deficient sensibility; not his views on matters of fact or existence or even on matters of morals, which may be entirely correct, but the DTADs and the desires that drive his actions.

5. THE RSK – AN OBJECTIONABLE CONSEQUENCE

The RSK was a much-discussed thesis, since for many of Hume's critics it represented a fundamental problem for his system. Here for example is George Gleig, author of the entry on moral philosophy in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

It is indeed true, as Mr Hume affirms, that the virtues which are immediately useful or agreeable to the person possessed of them, are desirable in a view to self-interest, and that a regard to self-interest ought to engage us in the pursuit. but he states a case himself, in which they would certainly fail to make a man abstain from his neighbour's property [...] a sensible knave, by secretly purloining from the hoards of a worthless miser might make himself comfortable and independent for life without causing any breach in the social union, and even without hurting a single individual. What then should hinder him from acting thus? His self-interest would be promoted; and if he possessed a generous spirit, he might gratify his sentiment of benevolence or sympathy by doing good with his money to the poor, which the miser never did. For enforcing the uniform practice of justice in such cases as this, Mr Hume's theory of morals contains no adequate motive; but a very sufficient one is held out by the system which we are now to consider [i.e., the religious system of morality].¹⁹

Gleig seems to be hinting at least two distinct arguments which can be expressed as follows:

Argument (A)

(1a) It is not rational (where rationality has something to do with long-term self interest which all rational beings can be presumed to share) to be a sensible knave.

¹⁹ G. Gleig, 'Moral Philosophy' (1797), originally published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, excerpted in *Early Responses to Hume's Moral, Literary and Political Writings*, second edition, edited by James Fieser (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), vol. 1, 295-298 (298).

(2a) Hume's theory implies that it *is* rational to be a sensible knave.

(3a) Therefore Hume's theory is inadequate and/or false.

Argument (B)

(1b) It is not rational (where rationality has something to do with long-term self interest) to be a sensible knave.

(2b) Only religious systems of morality can explain *why it* is not rational to be a sensible knave.

(3b) Therefore some religious system of morality must be true.

Paley, who advocates an odd combination of utilitarianism and Divine Command ethics, seems to concur:

Mr. Hume [...] has been pleased to complain of the modern scheme of uniting Ethics with the Christian Theology. They who find themselves disposed to join in this complaint will do well to observe what Mr. Hume himself has been able to make of morality without this union. [...] let them read [EPM, 9.2] – a treatise which Mr. Hume declares to be ‘incomparably the best he ever wrote’. When they have read it over, let them consider, whether any motives there proposed are likely to be found sufficient to withhold men from the gratification of lust, revenge, envy, ambition, avarice; or to prevent the existence of these passions. Unless they rise up from this celebrated essay with stronger impressions upon their minds than it ever left upon mine, they will acknowledge the necessity of additional sanctions.²⁰

²⁰ W. Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) excerpted in *Early Responses to Hume*, vol. 1, 170-179 (173-4).

Indeed Paley seems to suggest a *third* argument which we can reformulate thus:

Argument (C)

(1c) It would be a dreadful thing (a sort of social disaster) if there were no rationally compelling answer to the sensible knave.

(2c) According to Hume there is no rationally compelling answer to the sensible knave.

(3c) Therefore Hume's theory is inadequate and/or false.

William Belsham makes a similar point:

Mr. Hume admits [the knave's] objection to be, strictly speaking, unanswerable; but endeavours to raise a feeble barrier in support of virtue, by opposing to its attacks certain mental feelings and associations, which are known to be accidental, variable, and factitious [...] To banish the belief of a future state from a system of morality, would lead to consequences as dangerous and fatal as a total abolition of penal laws would produce [...] Hope and fear are the two grand springs by which that curious machine, the human mind, is actuated; and to deprive virtue of that support which she receives from their influence and operation, and to substitute, in their room, a sense of honour, or a love of moral beauty and order, is to betray the cause of virtue.²¹

Needless to say, Argument (A) is deductively valid, but it begs the question by assuming the point at issue, namely that it is not really rational to be a sensible knave. Argument (B) is an inference to the best explanation, but it too begs that question by assuming as a fact-to-be-

²¹ W. Belsham, *Essays, Philosophical, Historical and Literary* (1789), excerpted in *Early Responses*, 251-272 (257).

explained that the knave's strategy is indeed irrational. Argument (C) is worse, since even if the premises were true, it would prove at best that it would be a Bad Thing if the RSK were correct (or that it would be a Bad Thing if the RSK were *thought* to be correct) not that it is actually false.

However, it is not so much the content of the criticisms as the fact that the RSK was widely criticized that is important for the purposes of this paper. For this makes it highly likely that Austen would have been aware of Hume's 'sensible knave' either by hearing the passage discussed, by reading it herself, or by reading one of Hume's critics. After all, George Austen, Jane's father, supplemented his income as a parson by running a small school where the teenage sons of the local gentry were prepared for Oxford and Cambridge, the two universities. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* and Paley's *Principles*, were just the kind of thing that a conscientious and book-loving teacher like the Reverend George Austen would have been likely to have had on his shelves, especially as the *Principles* was a set text at Cambridge.

6. AN UNLEARNED AND UNINFORMED FEMALE?

Jane Austen professed herself to be an ignorant woman, and specifically ignorant of philosophy. She claimed to 'know nothing' of 'Science and Philosophy', to know only 'her own Mother-tongue' and to have 'read very little in that.' Indeed she 'boas[ted herself] to be with all possible Vanity the most unlearned and uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress' (SL,80/191).²² In an age when Sarah Palin can write a best-seller, she has surely been outdone in this department, but there is reason to think that that even in 1815, she was not being entirely honest. For a start, she knew a bit more than her mother-tongue, having passable French and a smattering of Italian. As her nephew James somewhat tartly remarked

²² J. Austen, *Selected Letters*, edited with an introduction and notes by V. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Subsequent references in the text as SL followed by the letter number and the page number after a forward slash.

‘it was her pleasure to boast of greater ignorance than she had any just claim to’.²³ Moreover these extravagant professions of ignorance occur in a letter to a bumptious court-librarian, James Stanier Clark, who was pestering her to write an uplifting novel about a learned clergyman (‘no man’s enemy but his own’), a proposal she regarded as ridiculous. (See Austen’s ‘Plan of Novel according to hints from various quarters,’²⁴ a hilarious sendup of the kind of novel that would result if she followed the suggestions of Mr Clark and other officious critics.) The protestations of ignorance were a blind to put him off. Though the breadth of her learning is debatable, it was great deal more extensive than she liked to let on. She came from a cultured family²⁵ and had pronounced intellectual interests herself. Witness her letter to Martha Lloyd discussing her leisure reading: the learned Dr Henry’s daunting *History of England*, a formidable-sounding tome divided into ‘seven parts, The Civil and Military – Religion – Constitution – Learning and Learned men – Arts and Sciences – Commerce Coins & Shipping – and Manners’ (SL 17/12-13). We know from *Northanger Abbey* (1.14/79) that she was familiar with Hume’s history,²⁶ as most educated people would have been at that time. But did she read Hume’s *philosophy*? We can’t say for sure. Although as Peter Knox-Shaw²⁷ and Eva Dadlez²⁸ make clear, there is much in Austen to *suggest* some knowledge of Hume’s philosophy, there is nothing that amounts to a literary proof - a point that Dadlez is careful to stress. The best we can say is that Austen probably read Hume, and that even if she did not, she is highly likely to have heard him talked about. After all, Hume was the frequent butt of Dr Johnson’s conversational put-downs, and we know from her letters that the family

²³ J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, edited by K. Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 95n.

²⁴ J. Austen, *Catherine and Other Writings*, edited by M.A. Doody (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230-232.

²⁵ C. Tomalin, *Jane Austen: a Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998).

²⁶ D. Hume, *The History of England*, edited by William Todd, 6 vols (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983).

²⁷ P. Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁸ E. M. Dadlez, *Mirrors to One Another: Emotion and Value in Jane Austen and David Hume*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), viii-viii.

owned Boswell's *Life of Dr Johnson* (SL, 8/15).²⁹ She was therefore probably aware of Hume's sensible knave, and she was certainly aware of the problem. She agreed with Hume that there are indeed sensible knaves, and that if we forget about religious considerations, these rogues cannot be rationally answered. One such sensible knave is the odious Mr William Elliot.

8. 'A VERY SENSIBLE MAN'

I begin with a snatch of dialogue from Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act II:

Miss Prism. Do not speak slightly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

Cecily. Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

Miss Prism. The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

Cecily. I suppose so. But it seems very unfair.³⁰

If we pedantically try to spell out Wilde's joke, we can see he is making (at least!) two points. The first is that in fictions the good end happily, and the bad unhappily with a rather depressing regularity. The second is that such outcomes are indeed fictional, since in real life the good often end unhappily and the bad happily. Austen was a writer of comedies, that is, stories with more or less happy endings. And happy endings entail that the good – or at least the characters we are supposed to like and admire – do not suffer too much. But Austen was

²⁹ J. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, edited by R.W.Chapman, introduction by P. Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³⁰ O. Wilde, *The Major Works*, edited by Isobel Murray (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 501.

remarkably averse to inflicting too much suffering even on her bad characters: ‘Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest’ (MP 3.16/362). But in fact, even those greatly at fault often wind up surprisingly well off. The over-sexed and silly Lydia, whose elopement with a rogue plunges her family into disgrace and threatens the marriage prospects of her elder sisters, ends up with a handsome husband who she adores, the prospect of endless flirtations with other handsome officers and all the consequence of being, as she loudly proclaims, ‘a married woman’ (P&P, 3.9/240). True, her life is not going to be a bed of roses, but it is not clear that it will be any worse than it would have been had she behaved with more prudence and circumspection (P&P, 3.19/296-297). A more sensitive soul might have suffered at the thought of her own misdeeds. Not so Lydia. On her return to the Longbourne from her nearly catastrophic escapade, ‘Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. She turned from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations; and when at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round the room, took notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a laugh, that it was a great while since she had been there’ (P&P, 3.9/239). Both Wickham and Lydia ‘seemed to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain; and Lydia led voluntarily to subjects which her sisters would not have alluded to for the world’ (P&P, 3.9/240). But whatever else she is, Lydia can hardly qualify as a sensible knave since she lacks the precondition of being sensible. The same cannot be said for Frank Churchill in *Emma*, who has plenty of sense plus a glossy duplicity that stands him in good stead.

Remember what Hume says? That in the case of justice, a man may often seem to be a loser by his integrity, and that a sensible knave, in particular incidents, may think, that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and confederacy. Had Frank Churchill acted with integrity and confessed his engagement to his termagant aunt, he would certainly have been

the loser by it, missing out on a substantial inheritance. Instead he performs acts of duplicity if not of iniquity, deceiving almost everyone including his doting father and stepmother, pretending to an attachment he does not feel and flirting with Emma to throw everybody off the scent. As she says,

Impropriety! Oh! Mrs. Weston – it is too calm a censure. Much, much beyond impropriety! – It has sunk him, I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what a man should be! – None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness, which a man should display in every transaction of his life (E, 3.10/312).

But it all works out for him. The termagant aunt dies and he gets both the girl and the money. True he does not manage to extricate himself, without some loss of reputation, and the forfeiture of some of the trust and confidence he might otherwise have retained. But all things considered, he seems to have had the best of the bargain. Mr Knightley speaks up for the moralistic reader:

Frank Churchill is, indeed, the favourite of fortune. Every thing turns out for his good. – He meets with a young woman at a watering-place, gains her affection, cannot even weary her by negligent treatment – and had he and all his family sought round the world for a perfect wife for him, they could not have found her superior. – His aunt is in the way. – His aunt dies. – He has only to speak. – His friends are eager to promote his happiness. – He had used every body ill – and they are all delighted to forgive him. – He is a fortunate man indeed!

But sensible as he is and as far as he is from living up to his honest-sounding Christian name, Frank Churchill is only a borderline knave. Not so Mr Elliot. He is much more ruthless than even the insincere Frank. For Mr Elliot is ‘a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; whom for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the smallest compunction. He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion’. So says his former friend Mrs Smith (P, 2.9/160). And she has good reason to say so. He sponges off the Smiths, when he is poor and they are rich with a specious air of manly camaraderie:

Dear Smith, – I have received yours. Your kindness almost overpowers me. I wish nature had made such hearts as yours more common, but I have lived three-and-twenty years in the world, and have seen none like it. At present, believe me, I have no need of your services, being in cash again. – Wm. Elliot.

(P, 2.9/164)

He marries for money a woman he despises and then neglects her. He tempts the trusting Smiths into habits of extravagance which ultimately ruin them. Then, when Charles Smith is dead and Mrs Smith a destitute invalid, so far from repaying the debt of gratitude by helping her out with a little of his overplus, he does not lift a finger to secure an encumbered estate in the West Indies that might have restored her to a tolerable degree of financial comfort. When young, he despised the title he was due to inherit, but later on he changes his mind, desiring

the status that being a baronet would bring him. In order to keep the susceptible Sir Walter out of the clutches of the designing Mrs Clay and to forestall the possibility of an intervening heir, he cultivates the society of the vain and vapid twosome Sir Walter and Miss Elliot for whom he has nothing but contempt: ‘Give me joy’, he once wrote to Charles Smith, ‘I have got rid of Sir Walter and Miss. He is worse than last year’ (P, 2.9/164). The relationship with Sir Walter’s family only approaches sincerity when he takes a genuine fancy to Anne Elliot. But though he has a real feeling for Anne he is nevertheless playing a double game, pursuing a secret relationship with his eventual mistress Mrs Clay, so as to stop her becoming the fecund second wife of the aging Sir Walter. Thus Mr Elliot’s knavishness is indisputable. But so is his good sense. Indeed, Austen emphasizes the fact that he is ‘sensible’ over and over again. When Anne Elliot first makes his acquaintance she is a little surprised that he wants to be reconciled to Sir Walter’s family since he will inherit the baronetcy whether he is friends with Sir Walter or not. ‘A sensible man, and he had looked like a very sensible man, why should it be an object to him?’ (P, 2.3/114). Even the empty-headed Sir Walter notices his ‘gentlemanlike appearance, his air of elegance and fashion, his good shaped face, his sensible eye’ (P, 2.3/114). But it is not just his eye that is sensible. So too is his conversation. ‘He sat down with them, and improved their conversation very much. There could be no doubt of his being a sensible man. Ten minutes were enough to certify that. His tone, his expressions, his choice of subject, his knowing where to stop; it was all the operation of a sensible, discerning mind’ (P, 2.3/116). He praises Anne to Lady Russell and when Lady Russell relays his good opinion to Anne, she ‘could not know herself to be so highly rated by a sensible man, without many of those agreeable sensations which [Lady Russell] meant to create’ (P, 2.5/129). But even though Anne has no doubts about Mr Elliot’s good sense, she has doubts about his good character. ‘Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew his character. That he was a sensible man an agreeable man, that he talked well, professed good opinions, seemed to judge properly and as a man of principle, this was all

clear enough. He certainly knew what was right, nor could she fix on any one article of moral duty evidently transgressed; but yet she would have been afraid to answer for his conduct' (P, 2.5/130). Despite his charm and the good opinions he professes, Anne has her suspicions about his moral sentiments. 'Who could answer for the true sentiments of a clever, cautious man, grown old enough to appreciate a fair character? How could it ever be ascertained that his mind was truly cleansed [of his former bad habits]?' Mr Elliot, she thinks, 'was rational, discreet, polished, – but he was not open' (P, 2.5/130). Anne feels that she cannot depend upon the sincerity of someone 'whose presence of mind never varies, whose tongue never slips' (P, 2.5/131).

It seems to me that if someone had tried to paint a literary portrait of a Humean sensible knave they could hardly have done better than Jane Austen's Mr Elliot. And it is because she could not have done better if she tried that I inclined to think that she was in fact trying. Mr Elliot is definitely a knave and emphatically sensible, as Austen makes repetitiously clear.

But this rolls us towards the overwhelming question. Does Austen agree with the RSK, the thesis that the sensible knave cannot be argued out of his knavery by any appeal to reason? The answer, I think is yes (absent a future state). Mr Elliot has the right opinions. He knows that some actions are right since they arouse general approbation, and that some are wrong since they arouse the contrary emotion. But lacking these sentiments himself, he has no desire to do the right and avoid the wrong, except in so far as this is necessary to maintain a good reputation. Nor, if we confine ourselves to this life, is he making any kind of mistake. There is nothing irrational about failing to act on sentiments that you are temperamentally incapable of feeling.

This is not to say that being a sensible knave has no drawbacks, for it is possible to miscalculate and come a cropper. Though Mr Elliot betrays with moderation, he does not quite manage to do it with the secrecy that he intended. Having dumped Mrs Smith, he forgets

about her, never imagining that this ghost from the past might arise in Bath to reveal his secret self to the highly desirable Anne Elliot. But though his best plan of domestic happiness is deranged, and his best hope to keep Sir Walter single by the watchfulness which a son-in-law's rights would have given him is discomfited, he can nevertheless do something 'for his own interest and his own enjoyment' (P, 2.12/201). He is still a rich man and a potential baronet still, and his betrayals are not widely known. He quits Bath in company with Mrs Clay whose caresses will probably afford him some consolation for his recent disappointments. We might not want to be Mr Elliot with his impoverished emotional life, but then he might not want to be us with our pointless sentiments and scruples. Not such a bad day for the sensible knaves. The bad day, if it comes, will come with the last trump.