

Forthcoming in *The Unique, the Singular, and the Individual*, edited by Ingolf U. Dalferth. Claremont Studies in Philosophy of Religion. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. Please do not circulate or cite without permission.

The Universal, the Individual, and the Novel: Hegel, Austen, and Ethical Formation

Thomas A. Lewis, Brown University*

As contemporaries whose historical contexts were defined by the social and political upheavals of the French Revolution and its aftershocks, as well as the intellectual developments of the tail end of the Enlightenment, G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and Jane Austen (1775-1817) each grapple with dramatic transformations in the individual's relation to broader social structures and communities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For both, education, or *Bildung*, or ethical formation, are central to this task. Moreover, both can and should be seen as inheriting and transforming more classical models of ethical formation, often associated with virtue theory, in light of what might be described as distinctly “modern” concerns with freedom and reflection. My use of “modern” here is deliberately vague: I want to point to preoccupations with freedom, the individual, and subjectivity but recognize that the conceptualization of these terms was itself central to their work and disagreements. To say that both Hegel and Austen were engaged in the modern

* This paper has benefited greatly from insightful responses to an earlier version by participants in “The Unique, the Singular, and the Individual: The Debate about the Non-Comparable,” particularly Robin Lehitner. I am particularly grateful to Ingolf Dalferth for conceiving and hosting the conference. Finally, I would like to thank the Senior Fellows of the Religion and Its Public project for their feedback on another version of the paper.

transformation of traditions of virtue theory is to say that they neither reject attention to character in favor of duty, nor hold that inherited models of ethical formation are sufficient—on either ethical or practical grounds—for a rapidly changing world.

In negotiating this inheritance, both engage the manner in which a distinctly modern ethic must reflect and enhance individual subjectivity, yet their levels of analysis diverge along with their genres. Hegel's philosophical writings and lectures offer a large-scale, structural account of the social dimensions of subjectivity. He attends—in broad strokes—to the practices through which human beings are habituated to the social norms of the community; yet he combines this emphasis on discipline and the overcoming of much of our natural particularity with powerful claims about the need for the practices that are taken on to be validated through the subject's own reflective scrutiny if the subject is to be free. Austen's novels, by contrast, work at a different, largely complementary scale: while she shares Hegel's concerns with the subject's social formation, the more proximate scale brings the reader into the characters' reflection on and—in some cases—critical judgment of this formation. Her attention to particulars also highlights tensions within the formation being provided in Austen's social world. She thus engages with and illuminates powerfully the kind of critical reflection that is central to subjectivity and individuality in Hegel. Moreover, by bringing readers into this reflection without being didactic, she not only portrays this process of reflection but also enables for the reader a kind of formation through guided reflection that generates critical reflection on the norms that are inherited. This paper reads these two figures together in order to interrogate the manner in which deeply social conceptions of the self enable certain claims to singular individuality while qualifying others. While reading them together will illuminate their shared concerns, much work remains to be done regarding the contrasts and their implications.

My focus on “formation” as an organizing concept merits attention here. I use the term to focus on how subjects are formed through bodily practices, *askesis*, intellectual exercises, disciplining, modeling by others, and so forth. Habituation generally plays a central role, and while formation is sometimes, in some sense “voluntarily” chosen, it is generally at least relatively opaque to those

within and those outside the process.¹ I associate this formation with virtue theory precisely because of the latter's attention to the shaping of dispositions, often—as in Aristotle's case—principally through habituation. At the same time, framing the concerns in terms of formation, rather than simply the cultivation of virtue, has the advantage of revealing profound commonalities between that tradition and subject formation as examined by a wider range of thinkers, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault. To be sure, these figures conceptualize formation differently; but they can productively be seen as developing competing, rather than unrelated, accounts.

Both separately and together, Hegel and Austen offer particularly illuminating sites for interrogating the persistence of attention to ethical formation during just the period that many have described as constituting a shift from virtue and character, on one hand, to duty and right action, on the other—a shift that is often glossed in terms of a shift from Aristotle to Kant.² In Hegel's case, he is frequently taken to be attempting to bring together central elements of Aristotelian thought, including its paradigmatic conception of the formation of character, with a Kantian focus on autonomy. Hegel is also particularly interesting in this context by virtue of his notorious—though unmerited—reputation as a totalitarian thinker for whom the individual is entirely subordinated to the universal. Austen—in part by virtue of being treated a novelist rather than a philosopher or theologian—is generally left out of narratives of modern morality; yet Alasdair MacIntyre, one of the most influential recent crafters of this particular narrative of modern morality, labels her “the last great effective imaginative voice of the tradition of thought about, and practice of, the virtues....”³ Thus, both Hegel and Austen are often seen as being at odds with conceptualizations of freedom that stress the individual's self-determination and self-conscious freedom in relation to inherited practices. Yet I take both of them to be centrally concerned to champion just such conceptions of freedom. Perhaps I should also add that they are also both subject to wildly divergent interpretations and whole scholarly industries, which means that trying to say something about both of them in a single chapter is daunting.

I. G. W. F. Hegel on Social Formation and Modern Subjectivity

More obviously than Austen, Hegel grapples throughout his career with the intellectual, social, political, and economic transformations that have come to be associated with “modernity.” He develops this project through a grand system that *in some sense* encompasses metaphysics, philosophy of nature, a conception of human beings (philosophical anthropology), politics, art, and religion. Just how grand it is and in what sense it constitutes a system continue to be the subject of much debate. In recent decades, a family of “non-traditional” interpretations of Hegel’s project have powerfully challenged more traditional readings that understand his thought preeminently in terms of a metaphysics of cosmic monism.⁴ In so doing, these interpretations have illuminated the centrality of intersubjectivity or sociality to his philosophical project and enabled us to appreciate his accounts of ethical formation without committing to the monistic conceptions of a grand “Spirit” that have often been attributed to him.

For the present purposes, I am centrally concerned with the manner in which Hegel brings together a vision of the social constitution of the subject through often unconscious processes of habituation and an emphasis on individual subjectivity. Combining classical notions of habituation and a “modern” focus on the individual, he both attends to the power of the collective and community in shaping the self and attributes a central role to individual subjectivity. Thus, where Hegel’s account of social and political life has often been seen as subordinating the individual to a collective, perhaps universal, totality—particularly the state—we need instead to appreciate the manner in which he provides an account of subjectivity as intersubjectively constituted.⁵

The resulting attention to both social formation and subjectivity thus opens the way for readings that pull together Hegel’s complex appropriation and transformation of traditions of ethical formation. To be sure, Hegel’s system does not include a work or major section of the *Encyclopaedia* that focuses on ethics in the manner of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Nonetheless, central elements of Hegel’s corpus—including his anthropology, his political thought, and his philosophies of art and of religion—demonstrate a

pervasive engagement with the practices and institutions through which individuals are formed—as well as his contention that recent intellectual and social developments have both enabled and prized the capacity to reflect upon and critically evaluate these practices. While many elements of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* as well as the treatment of subjective spirit in Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia* elaborate his account of a socially formed subjectivity at a relatively abstract level, Hegel’s philosophies of right, of art, and of religion consistently identify the practices through which institutions such as the family, schools, the market economy, and religious communities mold the habits and dispositions of individuals. While some of these habits and dispositions may not pertain to ethics, Hegel’s notion of ethical life, or *Sittlichkeit*, does much to illuminate how many of them do, even when that is not initially obvious.

Notably—and in important contrast with Austen’s work—Hegel’s most systematic accounts of processes of formation, such as those set out in the *Philosophy of Right*, are not in themselves preeminently formative. That is, his *analyses* of the manner in which practices such as child-rearing, economic activity, and religious rituals mold the subject do not *themselves* substantially mold the subject’s habits and desires. To be sure, this claim is partially qualified by Hegel’s commitment to the role of the university and of the practice of philosophy in developing the capacity to think. Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* and the three editions of his *Encyclopaedia* published in his lifetime were “outlines” conceived to accompany his lectures.⁶ And it is important to keep in mind that most of what we think of as Hegel’s work consists in notes and transcriptions from his university lectures, e.g., the lectures on the philosophy of spirit, on philosophy of history, on aesthetics, on the philosophy of religion, and on the history of philosophy—not to mention the *Zusätze*, or additions, that are taken from his lectures but have been included in most editions of both the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopaedia* since the 1830s. A more comprehensive account of Hegel’s works’ roles in shaping the subject would also need to account for the centrality of the lecture in its university setting as the site of the work’s delivery. Without downplaying the importance of those aspects of Hegel’s philosophical project, the present treatment seeks to draw attention to the manner in which the written form of Hegel’s works, including

his own publications as well as select material published from his lectures, offer systematic accounts of formation that are not themselves principally formative. Doing so brings into focus Hegel's conceptualization of the relationship between ethical formation and individual subjectivity.

While Hegel's accounts of ethical formation and subjectivity draw on many elements of his thought, these elements and their consequences for an account of modern social life come together most clearly in the account of ethical life, *Sittlichkeit*, in the *Philosophy of Right*.⁷ His handling of ethical life in the *Philosophy of Right* does many things, but among them is to provide an account of what he sees as the decisive social practices and institutions of a newly emerging world. Precisely in the conceptualization of ethical life in terms of practices and institutions rather than moral rules, Hegel makes central to the project the molding of the subject by these modern social practices. Focusing on this section of the *Philosophy of Right* offers a concise but broad view of the manner in which, according to Hegel, important social and political practices and institutions instill the habits and mold the subjectivities of modern life. The introductory paragraphs of this section (*PR* §§ 142-157) offer an account of the conception of ethical life that illuminates the centrality of ethical formation in Hegel's vision, its imbrication in modern daily life, and its coherence with his vision of individual subjectivity.⁸

Hegel's notion of ethical life encompasses both the actual practices and institutions of a social world and the participants' consciousness and understanding of these actual practices and institutions (*PR* § 142). Over the course of part 3 of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel will elaborate the first aspect of this conception in terms of the institutions of the family; civil society, particularly the market economy; and the state. Hegel presents the forms of these institutions that he sees as constituting the basic structures of modern social and political life. In this context—as compared to his philosophy of history—he is concerned with what he conceives as the developed form of ethical life, not with the history of its emergence. It is largely in these institutions—and the practices that constitute them—that contemporary ethical formation takes place.

While this existing, actual aspect of ethical life is the most apparent, no less important is Hegel's account of the individual subject's relationship to these practices and institutions. This relationship can take a number of different forms—sometimes a largely unconscious, immediate and unreflective identification with these norms and sometimes a highly conscious, thoughtful and reflective relationship to them. Any given individual's relationship with the existing practices usually begins as a form of “simple *identity* with this actuality” (*PR* § 151, emphasis in original). Simply through participating in the daily life of the society around them, children largely unconsciously take on its practices, become habituated to them such that they become “second nature” (*PR* § 151, emphasis in original). In this account, the subject is formed or molded through a process of habituation. Precisely here we see Hegel carrying forward important elements of traditions of thinking about ethical formation.

Although the subject's relation to these practices typically begins as one of unreflective identification, it need not remain that way. Contrary to the claims of some of those who see him as simply calling for uncritical conformity, genuine freedom, for Hegel, includes and requires moving beyond a merely habitual identification with these practices. For Hegel, we are most free when we exist in a society with whose practices and institutions we can identify on the basis of this reflective, critical scrutiny; yet that is the more developed form of the subject's relationship with these norms and practices—not the starting point. This point in particular draws upon Hegel's conceptions of theoretical spirit and free spirit, as developed in subjective spirit.⁹ As we will see in a moment, this vital role of critical reflection in Hegel's conception of freedom is central to the way in which subjectivity and individuality are preserved in his larger project.

Before elaborating upon emphasis on the individual, it is important to attend more closely to his account of the manner in which modern subjects are formed. Whereas figures such as Benedict, Teresa de Ávila, and Ignatius of Loyola offered explicit, highly structured practices and disciplines for the sake of the formation of an elite few, Hegel offers an account of formation that is thoroughly embedded in daily life. On one hand, Hegel sees this point as a classical one. Thus, Hegel writes, “When a father asked him for advice about the best way of educating his son in ethical

matters, a Pythagorean replied: ‘Make him the citizen of a state with good laws.’ (This saying has also been attributed to others.)” (PR § 153 A). Hegel’s point in this passage is dual: first, we find our right to freedom fulfilled not by escaping the norms of society but rather by being formed by a good society, such that our inclinations align with what is right. Second, Hegel tells us that the most effective formation is not wrought by participation in highly specialized disciplines for an elite but through participation in the broader society. Unlike many advocates of particular models of formation, Hegel is not calling for retreat from the general ethos or for a dramatic transformation of it.

These points frame the pedagogical, ethically formative functions of the modern institutions of the family, civil society, and the state (see PR § 156). This embeddedness of formation within these “mundane” institutions makes them harder to appreciate for two reasons. First, insofar as we expect practices of ethical formation to resemble the deliberate exercises of a Marcus Aurelius or an Ignatius, we will not find them. Second, precisely because they are the familiar fabric of daily life, Hegel points to them relatively briefly. He does not unpack the specific practices, because his audience is already familiar with them, even if Hegel seeks to frame the familiar in a new light, illuminating their formative, pedagogical role.

Two examples are particularly salient in his account of the institutions of ethical life: In his treatment of the family, Hegel focuses on what he sees as the crucial role of the family in educating the child. Rather than emphasizing either gaining information or independent thought, Hegel views this education largely in terms of habituation into the norms of the community, appropriating them such that they constitute one’s will rather than opposing it: Education [*Pädagogik*] is the art of making human beings ethical [*sittlich*]: it considers them as natural beings and shows them how they can be reborn and how their original nature can be transformed into a second, spiritual nature so that this spirituality becomes *habitual* to them. In habit, the opposition between the natural and the subjective will disappears, and the resistance of the subject is broken; to this extent, habit is part of ethics.... (PR § 151 Z)

Hegel’s close association of education, habituation, and ethics is potent. Moreover, the passage illuminates the depth of the subject’s transformation through this process; “formation” seems almost weak

to express the extent of remaking. A little later, Hegel expresses this remaking of the individual child through discipline even more strikingly: “One of the chief moments in a child’s upbringing is discipline, the purpose of which is to break the child’s self-will [*Eigenwillen*] in order to eradicate the merely sensuous and natural” (*PR* § 174 Z).¹⁰ As harsh as Hegel’s language initially sounds, his point is that our desires, passions, and will require shaping. Early habituation into the social norms of a society remakes or forms the subject into one for whom these norms are second nature. On a first reading, such passages likely set off alarm bells: I return below to consider what is and is not given up in this transformation.

At a different level, Hegel makes a parallel point regarding the way that we are formed through labor and participation in the market economy. While the modern, market-oriented economy generally presents itself as allowing me to pursue the satisfaction of my particular, sometimes idiosyncratic desires, Hegel hones in on the manner in which our participation in this economic system promotes conformity with the styles, manners, and customs of others (*PR* §§ 192 Z, 193). As a result, in precisely the sphere that appears to provide the greatest space for the expression of our particular, arbitrary wills, our desires are schooled—frequently without our being aware of the process—to correspond with the tastes and inclinations of our society. We come to “spontaneously” desire much of what others around us desire, and our particular, self-interested efforts to satisfy those desires in turn contribute to the satisfaction of others’ desires.¹¹ While this point exemplifies what Hegel takes from the Scottish political economists—this is arguably Adam Smith’s invisible hand write large—my focus is on the molding of particularity to accord with social norms.

Whether in the family or the market, this schooling and molding of our dispositions and desires—which happens both consciously and unconsciously—can be seen as a matter of effacing particularity and taking on a more general, or universal, [*allgemein*] mode.¹² This transformation is not simply a matter of a learning new ways to act in certain settings but rather reconstitutes the subject. For Hegel, they makes us who we are, determining not simply how we think we ought to act but also how we want to act. They shape our desires, pleasures, and joys.¹³ Consciously and unconsciously, they do

much to shape our view of the world. Hegel's account easily appears as a sacrifice of my own particularity to the customs, norms, and expectations of society; it can seem an ethically and politically dangerous defense of conformism.

Yet Hegel makes a surprising and powerful argument that this formation by and conformity to the norms of society is nothing of the sort. The argument contains two crucial elements, one of which concerns his understanding of what precedes these habits and the other of which concerns the end toward which they aim in the form of modernity that Hegel seeks to defend. With respect to the first, what is given up, or sacrificed, according to Hegel, is not some essential self or "who I really am." Rather, Hegel understands what is given up here to be an insubstantial particularity—arbitrarily given qualities of nature rather than spirit. To overcome my earlier penchant for unhealthy donuts by cultivating a taste for healthier foods need not be seen as sacrificing my essence. Learning to stand up straight, rather than slouch, is not an abandonment of who I truly am. Nor is training a child's squeaks and cries into a particular language a matter of preventing her from being her authentic self. While each of these examples merits caveats, to be sure, the central point is that what is sloughed off is a merely given, particular feature of the human being that Hegel thinks we have no good reason to think of as essential to who we are. For Hegel, such qualities are not what make us individuals in the most important sense of that word.

Hegel's claim turns on distinguishing between idiosyncrasy, on one hand, and individuality on the other. I suspect that important elements of our initial resistance to Hegel's claim derives from a sense that individuality is tied to distinctiveness or uniqueness. For Hegel, that manner of conceiving of individuality might be appropriate to the consideration of material objects or the sphere of nature (though Hegel does not typically use the term individuality in those contexts), but when we are dealing with self-conscious beings—the realm of spirit—individuality lies not in empirical uniqueness but in a manner of relating to, judging, and appropriating one's commitments. Mere idiosyncrasies do not make me who I am.

This point leads us to the second line of argument regarding why Hegel's vision does not entail the evisceration of individuality: Hegel's account of the reflection on and critical validation of these

norms. Though our initial appropriation of the norms of our society may be unreflective, “mere” habit, ethical life is not intrinsically unreflective. As much as Hegel seems to celebrate a conformity to existing norms, he also argues for the importance of the individual’s own judgment that they are justified. This point encompasses, in part, that in acting in accord with them, I am acting according to—not against—my own will, a point that Hegel expresses in terms of the “*right of individuals to their subjective determination to freedom*” (*PR* § 153, emphasis in original). Hegel champions subjective freedom—which concerns our experiencing ourselves as free: even in the society that is most “objectively” free, we are not free if we cannot understand ourselves to be acting freely, to find our most powerful commitments actualized through participation in our society. Further, crucial for Hegel is not simply my desiring to act in accord with these norms but comprehending their rationality and justification. Ethical life is most developed precisely when the subject can recognize this rationality in thought. Only then can we be fully free.¹⁴

At a level that is simultaneously more fundamental and more comprehensive, Hegel articulates what might be seen as the decisive instance of this demand for the subject to be able to authenticate these norms in his philosophy of religion. Hegel associates this demand to move beyond an authority independent of the self with the Protestant Reformation and sees it as a defining characteristic of modernity. Put in the theological language that Hegel often uses to make the point, the “witness of spirit” cannot be given from beyond the self. Rather, this witness of spirit, and with it the genuine content of ethics and religion, find their justification in reason: “The content is justified by the witness of spirit, insofar as it is thinking spirit. The witness of spirit is thought” (*VPR* 3:268). Hegel’s use of the same language in his articulation of the conception of ethical life is no coincidence (*PR* § 147). The content—whether we are talking about ethical norms or religious doctrines (which for Hegel are interconnected)—does not justify itself. In order to be free, we must be able to find ourselves in this content, to find it justified and expressive of who we are.

Most strikingly, this championing of critical interrogation of the practices we inherit is not simply a complement or counterweight to an appreciation of the importance of these practices in forming us.

Rather, Hegel interprets decisive features of modern formation as cultivating just this concern with subjectivity and individuality. For instance, participation in the market economy, Hegel contends, both subtly molds our desires to cohere with others' and provides a sphere for the development and expression of our particular needs and desires (PR §§ 190-195). By virtue of the explicit role of our individual and particular desires in the activities of civil society, this sphere—particularly in the form that Hegel saw it emerging in his day—instills a sense of oneself as an individual subject. In this manner, Hegel conceives of participation in the market economy as enhancing a sense of one's own subjectivity.

More broadly, Hegel conceives of the most developed form of the consummate religion, which he associates with Lutheran Christianity, as both recognizing this subjectivity and recognizing the manner in which ethical life actualizes it. In this developed form of the religious community, the contradiction [between church and world] is resolved in ethical life... [T]he principle of freedom has penetrated into the worldly realm itself.... The institutions of ethical life are divine institutions—not holy in the sense that celibacy is supposed to be holy by contrast with marriage or familial love, or that voluntary poverty is supposed to be holy by contrast with active self-enrichment, or what is lawful and proper.... Thus, it is in the ethical realm that the reconciliation of religion with worldliness and actuality comes about and is accomplished. (VPR 3:264-65, translation amended)¹⁵

The passage both highlights the centrality of freedom to this conception and makes the connection to and contrasts with earlier Christian models of formation explicit. Such claims exemplify a turn to daily life as the outworking of the Protestant Reformation. As Max Weber has famously put this point:

At its beginning, Christian asceticism had fled from the world into the realm of solitude in the cloister.... Yet, in retreating to the cloister, asceticism left the course of daily life in the world by and large in its natural and untamed state. But now Christian asceticism slammed the gates of the cloister, entered into the hustle and bustle of life, and undertook a new task: to saturate mundane, *everyday* life with its methodicalness.¹⁶

Hegel shares this account of the formation that was previously associated with a retreat from the world into the cloister being moved into the everyday world. Crucially, though, for Hegel this formation corresponds to the actualization of freedom, in a manner that distinguishes it in important respects from other forms (*VPR* 3:262). The practices and institutions of modern ethical life thus develop us to care about and value our own will and thinking, including critical thinking.

As much as we are formed through processes of habituation that are often opaque to those experiencing them, Hegel argues no less for a distinctly modern concern with the individual's ability to call these into question and ultimately either find them justified or experience the destabilizing tensions within them. Insofar as Hegel argues for the rational justification of the social norms of the modern world he sees emerging around him, he sees these norms as both justified for the society as a whole and possessed by the singular individual.

II. Jane Austen: Individual Formation through Guided Reflection

Jane Austen's novels take place principally in the homes and estates of the landed gentry, situated well above the majority of the population but below the aristocracy, in Regency-era England. Because much of the "action" consists in social interactions in these homes and the nearby villages and towns, it is easy to view her work as ignoring broader industrial, economic, and political developments of the day—or as simply celebrating an era that, in hindsight, we view as a relic of the past.¹⁷ That impression is enhanced by many of the cinematic adaptations of her novels, as well as by contemporary Janeites who dress in period costume. Yet the broader historical "background," is not simply background (nor simply a matter of history). Whether we are considering Sir Thomas's extended absence to attend to the family's plantations and slaves in Antigua in *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford's social daring in the same novel, or Anne Elliot's abandonment of this social world to marry a Navy captain who was initially judged to be an ill-advised match for someone of her social standing (in *Persuasion*), social and economic transformations are crucial.¹⁸ This context provides much of the

material with which Austen is grappling as she examines the way that inherited conceptions of ethical and social formation are transforming in her present. Crucially for the present purposes, however, she interrogates these developments not through high-level overviews but through their manifestations in particular characters, situations, and lives.

These broad historical developments thus provide the context in which she examines education and formation. Conceptions of education, or formation, form a central theme through much of her corpus. To appreciate this point, we need to understand the concept of education or formation broadly. She examines the way that individuals are shaped by their positions within specific social hierarchies, by governesses and parents, by transformative events, and—no less importantly—by their friends. She probes the relations between merit and being born into a family with social standing and/or money (two elements that frequently but inconsistently coincide in this social world). She is deeply concerned with the significance of habituation; and the connections to Aristotelian virtue theory are significant—as MacIntyre and Gilbert Ryle have stressed. Yet Austen is also concerned with the limits of habituation for education. Emulation of good people is a vital aspect of good education, but Austen is keenly aware of the dangers and frequency of emulating those with social standing, even when they are not actually good people. We see her attention to the limits of habituation when she is critical of inherited social mores as well as in her attention to the interior lives of her characters and to the urgency and difficulty of the particular decisions faced. These aspects of her account of the limits of habituation, however, can be seen as largely continuous with more classical instances of virtue theory: as much as Aristotle stresses habituation, he does not imply that it obviates the need for deliberation and difficult choices. Aristotle’s account of semblances of virtue provides significant resources for articulating the contrasts between merely apparent virtue—as in many whom society presents as “good men”—and genuine virtue.¹⁹ Importantly, Austen’s attention to gender entails more intensive attention to and probing of this gap than we find in Aristotle, and this point merits further attention; for the purposes of the present chapter, however,

Austen's most distinctive contributions to the transformation of this tradition arguably lie elsewhere.

To appreciate the most powerful elements of Austen's reworking of conceptions of ethical formation in light of modern concerns with subjectivity and freedom, we would do well to focus our attention at a different level: their work on the reader. While the events in Austen's novels frequently revolve around competing visions of education or formation, she generally avoids clear endorsement of one side of the debate. She draws out not simply the nuances of the issues but also the power in competing positions. In doing so, Austen's novels drive the reader to critical reflection. She does not straightforwardly offer clear models to emulate. The point is hinted at in Austen's famous description of Emma as a heroine whom "no one but myself will much like."²⁰ Austen brings the reader into complex situations without paragons of virtue or didactic messages. The novels frequently probe their heroes' and heroines' faults—and specifically the faults in their judgments. Even the villains frequently make ethically compelling points and are treated with sympathy. The situations and conflicts are themselves presented with nuance and subtlety that illuminates their difficulty. The result is a process of formation for the reader that works not principally through the presentation of "good people" (to frame the point in Aristotelian terms) to emulate but through a kind of guided reflection that exercises and develops the reader's capacity to think for her- or himself.

Crucial to the novels' ability to provide this formation is their careful attention to the thoughts and emotions of the characters. Austen's development of free indirect discourse does much to forge this interior life of her characters and to bring the reader into a character's experiences and deliberations without requiring that character to become a narrator. As a literary technique, free indirect discourse articulates a character's thoughts and feelings without framing these with phrases such as "she thought" or "he felt." The text thus slides from third person to first and back again. Austen largely pioneered this technique for bringing the reader into the characters' perspectives, to inhabiting and judging their judgments. In doing so, she provides a style that enables the novels to guide the reader's reflection less by presenting obvious models of virtue to

emulate than by enabling us to accompany rich characters through their own struggles and deliberations and illuminating how much more than habituation must be involved. The reader is thus educated through accompanying, questioning, critiquing, and being critiqued by the character's interiority. While free indirect discourse is by no means the only manner in which Austen evokes such reflection, its prominence in her work reflects her concern with individual, critical reflection on social norms.

We find a powerful instance of this strategy of guided reflection in *Mansfield Park*, when the heroine, Fanny Price, leaves Mansfield Park to visit her parents' home in Portsmouth. Fanny has lived for the past nine years, since she was ten, with her aunt's family at their opulent estate; she is seeing her parents and most of her siblings for the first time in almost a decade. At Mansfield Park, Fanny had been surrounded principally by her wealthy relatives and their wealthy friends. Austen's portrayal of life at Mansfield Park brings to the fore the snobbery, arrogance, and superficiality we often associate with such wealth. Not only is it no idyll; many of its faults appear closely connected to its wealth and social standing. In returning to Portsmouth, Fanny returns to a family in very different economic circumstances, with less education, and little of the etiquette and manners that do so much to define life at Mansfield Park. (The contrast is a major reason that her uncle sent her to visit her parents; he wants her to value his social world society more and to reconsider a marriage proposal that she had turned down.) One of her brothers, William, has met her midway in order to accompany her on the final part of the journey. Upon arriving in Portsmouth, they learn that the Thrush, the ship on which William is about to serve, has left the dock and will soon be setting sail. The news about the grand ship's movement largely overshadows Fanny's arrival. The scene's complexity, the subtle shifts, and the repeated movements between various possible judgments justify careful attention to Austen's text.

The situation's complexity is apparent from the moment Fanny enters the house after the long and arduous journey: Another moment, and Fanny was in the narrow entrance-passage of the house, and in her mother's arms, who met her there with looks of true kindness, and with features which Fanny loved the more because they brought her aunt Bertram's before her; and there were her two

sisters, Susan, a well-grown fine girl of fourteen, and Betsey, the youngest of the family, about five—both glad to see her in their way, though with no advantage of manner in receiving her. But manner Fanny did not want. (256)²¹

In this entering scene, Austen directs the reader to genuine kindness and sincerity. The “manner” of Mansfield Park is absent, but what appears to matter are not manners but genuine feeling. A contrast between simple but genuine kindness and more artificial manners forms an important element of the scene’s dynamic.

Already in the following paragraph, however, the judgments become more complex. Fanny “was then taken into a parlour so small that her first conviction was of its being only a passage-room to something better.” Yet there is no other room; there is nothing better. Fanny “called back her thoughts, reproved herself, and grieved lest they should have been suspected.. Her mother, however, could not stay long enough to suspect any thing” (256). Fanny’s negative judgment of the home is not yet given an ethical tone, and the reproach is directed against Fanny’s own judgment. Yet we also note that her mother lacks the attentiveness and/or perceptiveness to grasp a crucial element of the situation.

After having greeted the brother who arrived together with Fanny, however, her mother “having kindly kissed her daughter again, and commented a little on her growth, began with very natural solicitude to feel for their fatigues and wants as travellers” (257). Again, Austen highlights a consideration of others that is natural and unaffected, rather than the product of social etiquette.

This concern for weary travelers quickly prompts a call for tea and complaint about the fire not having been tended. The noise and activity quickly increase, and “[f]urther discussion was prevented by various bustles” (257). The mother participates fully in the noise; she is not an outlier being celebrated here. Then Fanny’s father arrives: loud and crude. Only after being prompted by her brother does Fanny’s father even acknowledge her (despite this being her return from years of absence).²² In response, “Fanny shrunk back to her seat, with feelings sadly pained by his language and his smell of spirits” (258). The younger siblings then begin to run around, opening and slamming doors.

The impact on Fanny is dramatic: She “was almost stunned. The smallness of the house and thinness of the walls, brought every thing so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, and all her recent agitation, she hardly knew how to bear it” (259). Though Austen is not blunt about a value judgment, the noise, the small space, the “bustle”—as she repeatedly puts it—are not simply less pleasant but seem to bear a negative value judgment; or, more precisely, they are presented as so unpleasant that the reader is prompted to judge whether they have a negative ethical significance. Fanny herself immediately reflects upon the experience, illuminating the complexity and ambiguity, rather than straightforwardly resolving it:

She was at home. But alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as—she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of importance to her family? She could have none, so long lost sight of! William’s concerns must be dearest—they always had been—and he had every right. Yet to have so little said or asked about herself—to have scarcely an enquiry made after Mansfield! It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much—the dear, dear friends! But here, one subject swallowed up all the rest. Perhaps it must be so. The destination of the Thrush must be now pre-eminently interesting. A day or two might shew [*sic.*] the difference. *She* only was to blame. Yet she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle’s house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body which there was not here. (260)

The passage contains crucial elements of Austen’s project. The reader is brought into the character’s internal deliberations. It is vital that the reader experiences so much of this from Fanny’s perspective, highlighting the central role of reflection and judgment. The activity of reflection, not simply the outcome, matters. Fanny wrestles with her own response, considering whether her disappointment stems from inappropriate expectations on her part, thereby questioning her own motivations. She also contrasts the more bustling, chaotic world of her parents’ house with the more structured norms of Mansfield Park, suggesting the manner in which the norms that often seem insincere and artificial can play a vital role in making each person feel

attended to. These norms or mores may in some sense be artificial, but they are not false. The conjunction wrought in the paragraph bears emphasis: Austen presents us with an appreciation of the ethical value of formal, even traditional, social mores but frames this appreciation in the context of an individual character's intense, internal reflection, bringing the reader into the need to think for oneself when engaging these norms.

If the above paragraph catches Fanny mid-deliberation, Austen also provides us with Fanny's more settled judgment a couple of days later. After her brother William has departed, "the home he had left her in was—Fanny could not conceal it from herself—in almost every respect the very reverse of what she would have wished. It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be" (264). The absence of regulating social norms to structure life in the household produces not freedom but a kind of degeneracy.²³

Such passages, which implicitly and explicitly contrast the moral degeneracy of her parents' poorer, less privileged household with the etiquette and other customs of that wealthy seat of privilege, Mansfield Park, contribute to widespread views of *Mansfield Park* as uncharacteristically conservative relative to Austen's other novels.²⁴ It can appear to morally celebrate the social lives of a wealthy, landed gentry. That reading, however, fails to appreciate key elements of Austen's project.

In the first place, Fanny's judgments—and with hers, the reader's—continue to evolve. Walking around town a few days later, Fanny and her father encounter Henry Crawford, the acquaintance of Fanny's from Mansfield Park whose marriage proposal she has declined. Upon seeing Henry Crawford, Fanny is embarrassed by the impression she is sure that her father will make. Yet Fanny's father immediately adopts manners appropriate to Mansfield Park: "her father was a very different man, a very different Mr. Price in his behavior to this most highly-respected stranger, from what he was in his own family at home. His manners now, though not polished, were more than passable; they were grateful, animated, many, his expressions were those of an attached father, and a sensible man..." (273). While Fanny's "feelings were infinitely soothed" by the performance, the reader ought to be simultaneously disturbed. The

social norms that were championed a few pages ago are here manifest in Mr. Price's performance of care for his daughter for the sake of a wealthy stranger, though he has utterly failed to express that care at home. The contrast between sincerity and the social propriety of a Mansfield Park is again on display. Austen makes the point even more powerful in retrospect, as Henry Crawford later reveals himself to be a scoundrel.

In many respects, the critique of the false virtues of Fanny's father or of Henry Crawford exemplify a classical concern with semblances or counterfeits of virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre takes Austen in this direction and links it with a focus on self-knowledge that he associates with an effort to forge an account of virtue that brings together Christian and Socratic heritages.²⁵ While I find much of value in MacIntyre's reading, it overlooks how dramatically Austen's reworking of virtue theory traditions is shaped by concerns with self-determination and reflection, what we might think of as distinctly modern commitments.

Austen's novel attends closely to Fanny's deliberations, to the urgency and challenge of developing her own judgments about the matters at hand. Austen's free indirect discourse is crucial to this dimension of the work. Part of what we see in Fanny's deliberations is that, as much as she values many of the social norms at stake, they do not validate themselves. They are constantly contested; more critically, the point is not simply that they are questioned and contested but that *this questioning is constitutive of formation and excellence themselves*. The questioning is not merely a means to arrive where we want to go but is constitutive of the destination. The form of the novel is integral to this point. It enables us, the readers, to view the characters' deliberations over time. By dwelling on nuances and particularities, by tracing the shifts and the impossibility of a fully settled judgment, Austen brings out the interminable need for reflection and deliberation. She is not tracing a teleological path to an endpoint but illuminating the path's lack of an endpoint—in this particular respect. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen achieves this through a combination of bringing the reader into Fanny's deliberations, showing key elements of what such thinking for oneself looks like, and providing the reader with further opportunities that prompt the reader's making these judgments for her- or himself. The reader's

ethical formation thus occurs through a combination of witnessing Fanny's particular formation and practicing that deliberation for oneself.

Reading Hegel and Austen together illuminates a shared concern with the positive value of and ineliminable need for habituation into particular kinds of social norms as well as with the essential role of the individual's critical interrogation of just these norms. For both Hegel and Austen, the frequently unconscious process of taking on the norms of our society is not simply inevitable but is essential for ethical development. While this formation is often flawed—we often develop corrupt dispositions through this process of habituation—without it we would never develop the kinds of ethical dispositions that are important to both. Moreover, both provide subtle but striking accounts of the practices through which this formation occurs in their social worlds. At the same time, Hegel and Austen, in very different ways, both develop an essential role for critical reflection and deliberation on these norms. A certain kind of singularity, connected to individual subjectivity, is of critical importance for both.

Highlighting these commonalities, however, begs further questions regarding the relationship between their distinctly modern accounts of ethical formation. In many respects, they appear complementary: they exhibit common concerns, and there are important parallels in their responses. This paper has focused on these parallels; yet the differences in their accounts—partially reflected in the very different kinds of handling that I offer in my treatments of them—should prompt us to ask in what respects they are complementary (offering largely compatible views but developing them from different perspectives) and to what extent profound tensions emerge. One element of tension certainly concerns their views on gender, toward which I have only hinted. Relatedly, another concerns Austen's attention to the contradictions within the worlds that she examines. And the differences in their genres also raise questions regarding whether Austen's novelistic form is committed to a role for particularity that stands at odds with Hegel's project. Taking this project into the next phase will require probing each of these interrelated lines.

¹ On the notion of “chosen submission,” see Jonathan W. Schofer, “Self, Subject, and Chosen Subjection: Rabbinic Ethics and Comparative Possibilities,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 2 (2005): 255–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2005.00192.x>.

² For the paradigmatic articulation of this narrative in recent decades, see Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For other comparable narratives, see Charles E. Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). Importantly, this key elements of this narrative have been shared by many who celebrate it and many who lament it.

³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 240.

⁴ Hegel’s emphasis on system pertains both to the meta-level of the project and to his treatments within individual spheres, such as the philosophy of right or philosophy of religion. My interpretation of Hegel’s larger philosophical project is situated among a family of readings that I would describe as emphatically post-Kantian. Building on the work of scholars such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, I argue that Hegel does not attempt to resurrect the metaphysics that Kant has so powerfully critiqued. Rather, Hegel’s philosophical project extends Kant’s attention to the spontaneity of thought through attention to what Pinkard labels “the sociality of reason.” Moreover, contra the claims of Frederick Beiser and certain other critics of this strand of Hegel scholarship, this post-Kantian reading of Hegel by no means requires neglecting his philosophy of religion. I have developed this argument at length in Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Terry P. Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Frederick C. Beiser, “Introduction: The Puzzling Hegel

Renaissance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–14.

⁵ More specifically, his account of ethical life, or *Sittlichkeit*, has appeared to many as calling for the individual’s complete submission to a sanctified totalitarian state. In recent decades, that once influential reading has been persuasively undermined. On this debate, see Thomas A. Lewis, “Beyond the Totalitarian: Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion in Recent Hegel Scholarship,” *Religion Compass* 2, no. 4 (2008): 556–74, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00077.x>.

⁶ University instructors were at that time provide a text that accompanied their lectures, but the lectures themselves often expanded dramatically on these outlines. On the importance of the lectures for engaging Hegel’s thought, see, for instance, Peter C. Hodgson, “Editorial Introduction,” in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 14–15.

⁷ More specifically, Hegel’s treatments of ethical formation in these contexts depend on the notion of habituation that he elaborates in his account of subjective spirit. In its treatment of reflection and thinking as well, the philosophy of subjective spirit articulates much of the conception of subjectivity that undergirds these more specific accounts of formation. On these points, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, vol. 8–10, 20 vols., Werke (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), §§ 387–482. For more extensive elaboration of the material provided in the *Encyclopaedia*, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes: Berlin 1827/1828*, ed. Franz Hesse and Burkhard Tuschling, vol. 13, Vorlesungen (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994).

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, vol. 7, Werke (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W Wood, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Cited parenthetically, as PR, by paragraph (§) number. Remarks are

indicated by an “A” [*Anmerkung*], additions by a “Z” [*Zusatz*], and Hegel’s marginal notes by an “N.”

⁹ See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, §§ 445-468 and §§ 481-482, and Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes*, 178-237 and 261-264. On these points, see Lewis, *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel*, 155-161.

¹⁰ The passage continues: “One should not imagine that kindness alone is sufficient for this purpose; for it is precisely the immediate will which acts according to immediate fancies and desires rather than reasons and representations. If one presents children with reasons, it is left to them to decide whether to accept these or not, and thus everything is made to depend on their caprice.”

¹¹ As Hegel puts this point, “By a dialectical movement, the particular is mediated by the universal so that each individual, in earning, producing, and enjoying on his own account thereby earns and produces for the enjoyment of others” (*PR* § 199).

¹² In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* as well, Hegel is attentive to social formation through habituation. His account of the cultus, or religious community, is attentive to the seemingly small practices through which particular attitudes and inclinations are cultivated. Dressing appropriately for church, for instance, is—for Hegel—important in instilling attitudes toward the absolute (*VPR* 1:336n). Here as well, Hegel emphasizes the connections between education, practice, and habituation (*VPR* 3:259). More than in other the other contexts, however, Hegel also emphasizes the importance of critical reflection on the habits and dispositions that have been formed through this formation. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. Walter Jaeschke, 3 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983); G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Cited parenthetically, as *VPR*, by volume and German pagination; the German pagination is included in the margins of the translation.

¹³ Put in terms of the habits that are thereby formed, we are, in key respects, , “the totality of [our] habits” (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes*, 124, my translation).

¹⁴ This point builds on the accounts of theoretical, practical, and free spirit that Hegel develops in the first part of his philosophy of spirit.

On Hegel on subjective and objective freedom, see Lewis, *Freedom and Tradition in Hegel*; Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ On this point, see my *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel*, 224–27.

¹⁶ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism with Other Writings on the Rise of the West*, trans. Stephen Kalberg, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 140.

¹⁷ On this feature of earlier scholarship on Austen, see Aileen Douglas, “Austen’s Enclave: Virtue and Modernity,” *Romanticism* 5, no. 2 (1999): 147–60.

¹⁸ For important work marking this turn toward attention to the political in Austen, see, for instance, Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁹ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999).

²⁰ Quoted in George Justice, “Introduction,” in *Emma: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, by Jane Austen, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2012), viii.

²¹ Citations are from Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, 1st ed., A Norton Critical Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998). Pagination will be indicated parenthetically.

²² “With an acknowledgment that he had quite forgot her, Mr. Price now received his daughter; and, having given her a cordial hug, and observed that she was grown into a woman, and he supposed would be wanting a husband soon, seemed very much inclined to forget her again” (258).

²³ Fanny’s critical judgment of her parents is crucial to this (264–65).

²⁴ See, for instance, Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 77. Trilling views *Mansfield Park* as less dialectical than Austen’s other writings.

²⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 241.