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Process Note
Grace Lukens

This piece has been something I've been working on for a long time- and I'm so excited I have the opportunity to publish it! Austen has been a favorite author of mine for years, and the opportunity to develop my own bigger picture analysis has been so fulfilling. In this piece, I choose to step back from Austen's writing of *Sense and Sensibility* to examine and ignore the biased lens through which it was originally written. From there, I argue for a more holistic lens that allows for a clearer understanding of the characterization within the novel. I think this has really challenged my writing and analysis skills and taken them to a new level, and working with an editor for the first time on my own writing has been enjoyable and eye-opening. I would like to thank my Professor and Advisor for this project, Regina Martin, for all her support and encouragement, along with the staff of Prologue for allowing me to put this piece out into the world. Enjoy!

Σωφροσύνη: Moderation (And the Lack Thereof) In Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility

By Grace Lukens

Σωφροσύνη, or sophrosyne, comes from the joining of two Greek words: *sôs* [σῶς], meaning “safe, sound, whole,” and *phrén* [φρήν], meaning “mind.” Defined as “temperance” and moderation, the Greeks, who were the originators of the term, argue that in all aspects of the human experience, there should be a lack of excess (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). They believed the correct way to live a life is through careful self restraint to create balance. Jane Austen’s novel *Sense and Sensibility* benefits from an exploration through these lenses of sophrosyne and moderation, with a focus on the main characters: sisters Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. The novel is written to portray Marianne as representing a mind lacking self-control and Elinor as representing a mind of moderation. The two sisters stand as two opposing worldviews: one of emotion and one of reason. The novel portrays Marianne’s mindset as the incorrect approach towards life, since her excess of emotion reveals her lacking ability to moderate herself, while the text is inherently biased towards the sensical nature of Elinor and presents her character as synonymous with the idea of moderation. But when viewing her behaviors through the lens of moderation, Elinor is also an example of the lack of sophrosyne, but her conduct is in the opposite extreme as her sister. Through the novel, we see that Elinor exhibits a lack of moderation through means of repression, constructed through the perspective of other characters and heightened by the reader’s access to Elinor’s internal thought.

In order to accurately make a comparison of the two sisters, it is important to note that extreme lack of reservedness is one example of unbalanced moderation that the novel repeatedly acknowledges is attached to Marianne’s character. Almost immediately the reader sees Marianne’s emotions explicitly characterized as “hav[ing] no moderation” (Austen 6).

Throughout the novel, this lack of moderation is often shown by the way it categorizes the younger sister. “It was only necessary to mention any favourite amusement to engage her to talk,” the novel comments. “She could not be silent...and she had neither shyness nor reserve during [her] discussion[s].” (Austen 35). The way this quote talks about Marianne’s joy for her interests suggests a negative connotation to her behaviors- in essence, the writing is structured to influence the reader to look down on Marianne’s behavior. As with many other character traits explored in this novel, the reader quickly realizes behaviors are either praised or condemned, and Marianne often is burdened with behaviors of the latter.

As discussed, Marianne has no shame in things that bring her enjoyment, and this is true especially in the presence of men. However, this shameless merriment will directly lead to a near death experience for Marianne :the sickness of betrayal and heartbreak. She has been obsessed with one man for most of the novel, John Willoughby, and she assumes they are to be married after seeing each other for a while. However, it is revealed that he has been leading her on for many months and plans to marry another woman for her money. Heartbroken, Marianne falls into a grave illness, barely being able to recover from the intensity of her shock and heartbreak. After her recovery at the end of the novel, Marianne reflects deeply on the way her emotional folly and overzealous assumptions led to near-dire circumstances: “I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave.” (Austen 254). Marianne consequently begins to accept a mantle of emotional moderation, symbolizing she is actively growing into a more ‘morally acceptable’ character, much different from the girl who could not stop herself from talking at the start of the novel.

Elinor, however, never experiences this pointed shift in character. This is because she never sees herself as having characteristics that need to be improved or changed. From the start,

she has been the novel's model for how to think and behave, and this is because every circumstance is experienced through Elinor's worldview. More often than not, situations where we see her bias are ones concerning characteristics or behaviors that relate to imperfect emotional responses— something she deems out of line. She believes that sensible actions, not emotional ones, are indicative of good character.

Elinor's stance on her emotions manifests in multifaceted ways, and is most easily divided into two main categories: her actions, or the way she presents herself to others, and her thoughts, or the way she interacts with herself. Elinor's actions give access to an outsider perspective towards her worldview, and because they are narrated from the third person, we get a corroboration of situations where Elinor's behaviors are observed by others. By seeing Elinor through a third-person perspective that gives a view of Elinor as a person of *sophrosyne*, readers can gain a heightened sense of the juxtaposition between her behaviors and the behaviors of others. Often, we see characters discuss Elinor's behavior in conjunction with romantic endeavors, whether they be her own or those of her sister. Mrs. Dashwood wonders early on in the novel about the surprising absence of Elinor's love interest, Edward, at Barton Cottage. Marianne responds by recalling her observations on the couple's emotionless goodbye. She tells her mother that ““Elinor, in quitting Norland and Edward, cried not as I did. Even now her self-command is invariable. When is she dejected or melancholy?”” (Austen 30). This is an example of how Elinor seems completely unaffected by her separation from Edward from the outside perspective. Both Marianne and Mrs. Dashwood wonder how Elinor can be so unmoved by leaving someone that she has great affection for. Her ‘invariable’ self-command is indicative of firm character, but shows for the first time that her seeming composure may betray a deeper extreme. Logic remains a constant of Elinor's behavior, however, even in situations that do not

benefit from such a view. She often comments coldly to their mother on the lack of affection Willoughby shows Marianne, and dismisses Marianne's feelings in favor of approaching the romantic situation logically. "Oh! Elinor, how incomprehensible are your feelings!" Elinor's mother exclaims at her coldness. "You had rather take evil upon credit than good" (Austen 58). Instead of offering supportive empathy to her sister, she immediately resorts to using rationality. This shows her tendency to use logic above any other faculties—her extreme usage of sense can interfere with her compassion and gentleness. Behavior to this degree of reservedness and emotional detachment is antithetical to how the rest of Elinor's world operates, revealing a disjointedness that is most easily observed through the perception of her actions by others.

The outside picture of Elinor's relationship with her emotions continues to be developed as she continues to interact with Edward. He eventually comes to visit Barton, but Mrs. Dashwood's wish for a heartfelt reunion between Edward and her daughter does not occur. Instead, the family notices that "the meeting between Edward and [Elinor] was but a continuation of that unaccountable coldness which [Marianne] had often observed at Norland in their mutual behavior" (Austen 64). This shows another perspective into Elinor's behavior: from the point of view of others, Elinor operates with a 'coldness', or a general lack of emotion that pervades her actions and is off-putting and jolting. Marianne's use of 'unaccountable' is subtle, but it reveals that the actions Elinor believes are led completely by sense do not always translate as sensible by observers. We can begin to realize now that Elinor is portrayed as a figure of balance through her *own* lens of what moderation means. With a neutral frame, she is clearly lacking sympathy, as she displays behaviors of extremity to the side of absolute logic, cold responses, and lack of expression. But by showcasing the way she acts in emotional situations from external perspectives, the framework is effectively set in the novel to show how she

operates within her own definition of moderation. To add to the reader's understanding of Elinor, her mindset becomes more comprehensive to the reader when subsequently examining passages where Elinor relays her introspective musings. When able to inspect Elinor's personal thoughts and feelings from her perspective, readers gain firsthand insight on how she views emotions. Instead of being in complete control of them, like how she prefers to present herself, it becomes clear she actually relies on extreme repression to create an illusion of moderation.

We see this expression of Elinor's inner monologue primarily through the lens of her relationship with Edward. This is the one situation in which Elinor seems unable to distance herself completely from her feelings, and thus forces her to speculate on her emotions and how to handle them. This internal battle that occurs throughout the novel culminates with the news that Edward has been long engaged to Lucy Steele, a woman Elinor is quite familiar with. When she finds out, Elinor's "heart sunk within her...but exertion was indispensably necessary, and she struggled so resolutely" to suppress her feelings so as not to seem affected by the news (Austen 99). This shows that Elinor does actually experience emotional reactions, but refuses to express them, and would rather put herself through arduous fatigue than be seen with anything other than a complete sense of composure. As a result, she relies on burying her emotions and refusing to feel them as the way to achieve this, hinting at her unhealthy pattern of emotional dysregulation. Instead of being openly expressive she is emotionally repressive, demonstrating that her reactions are of the same caliber of extremity as Marianne, just in the opposite direction. The language used presents her composure as a valiant struggle rather than a problem, because Elinor views it as 'necessary' to maintain her standard of moderation.

The other response Elinor has to this situation is thorough logical examination of all the things she knows about the circumstances pertinent to Edward's engagement. She is only able to

accept that Lucy's claim to her and Edward's engagement is true when she has exhausted the subject and can see no lingering breaks in logic or fact. She badly wants to believe the engagement is falsified, but she "dared no longer doubt; supported as it was too on every side by such probabilities and proofs, and contradicted by nothing but her own wishes" (Austen 101). This cold, methodical way of acceptance contrasts the way most of the characters in the novel would react when discovering the man they care most for has been engaged to another. She refuses to accept Edward's engagement as fact until she uses extreme logic to justify it- which is equally as intense as Marianne's open excess of emotion. Elinor is shown to go to extreme measures- exhausting all forms of logic to confirm a truth in order to maintain her standard of moderation through fact.

Through the circumstances she experiences, Elinor's response to emotions shifts slightly by the end of the novel. When she believes Edward is married to another woman, she "condemned her heart for the lurking flattery, which so much heightened the pain of the intelligence" (Austen 262). This is the first time in which we see Elinor recognize her emotions (like she usually does) but does not proceed to endeavor to change them. There is no language of action here, simply frustration with herself at having emotions. While this may be a minute change in perspective, it indicates the possibility for a more moderate response to her emotions, even though she still refuses to express them.

Elinor feels an inherent sense of shame and condemnation around experiencing her emotions because they lack logical sense. Displayed emotion would be an understandable reaction for her in the situations she is faced with, but she refuses because it is not the most sensible way forward. This betrays the extreme regulation she submits herself to. The fact that she refuses to let herself properly process these emotions and is subjugating them for the sake of

others is an unhealthy behavioral pattern she persists with throughout the novel. Being privy to these inner thoughts and feelings allow the reader to take the actual situations presented to them, and contextualize them with Elinor's framework of extreme logic. By doing so, we can see that she takes things to an extreme degree, and though her perspective does not villainize logic like it does emotion, it is clear she is out of the pattern of sophrosyne.

When viewing the two girls together through an impartial lens, it becomes evident that the two actually mirror each other's flaws. While Marianne is emotionally volatile, too easily invested, and desperate for male attention, Elinor is emotionally repressive, coldly distanced, and refuses to attach herself to others. I believe that Austen is trying to draw the sisters as foils, but the only way readers can truly recognize the parallels is if Elinor's bias is stripped away from the comparison. 'Sense and Sensibility' refers to the two sisters- Elinor representing sense and Marianne representing sensibility. And as these girls are both on opposite extremes, the lens of sophrosyne is incredibly useful due to the fact it gives readers a way to accurately compare the two characters and their lack of moderation within the novel.

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