JANE EYRE AND THE HISTORY
OF SELF-RESPECT

By Paul Schacht

"The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I
am, the more I will respect myself."
—Jane Eyre

Appeals to self-respect occur repeatedly in Charlotte Brontë's fic-
tion. Perhaps for this reason, and perhaps too because self-respect, like
self-esteem, has become indispensable to our modern vocabulary of self-
consciousness, the significance of these appeals is easy to underrate.
Critics who refer to Jane Eyre's sense of self-respect generally do so in
passing, as if the concept itself were transparent and unremarkable.
They certainly do not afford it the kind of sustained attention that
they have lavished on that singularly modern word which appears on
the title page of Jane Eyre: autobiography. Yet in 1847 self-respect, in the
sense employed by Jane, had not been in use much longer than autobi-
ography, and the former word, no less than the latter, served to articu-
late the new sense of self that in Brontë's time was still emerging and
developing against the background of a changing social order. Unlike
autobiography, moreover, the idea of self-respect also has a place in the
web of ideas that unites the new sense of self, the new social realities,
and shifting attitudes in two areas: the significance of class and the
position of women.

In the early nineteenth century, the idea of self-respect harmonized

1 Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, ed. Q. D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 344;
hereafter cited as JE.
with the tenets of economic individualism, political liberalism, and Anglo-American feminism. Moreover, the concept embodied contradictions that were inescapable for anyone who, like Charlotte Brontë or Jane Eyre, embraced it as an ideal. This essay examines some of the ways in which Jane's behavior and hence Brontë's novel enacts those contradictions and thereby reproduces, in some measure, tensions within liberal and feminist thought of the period. But if Jane's behavior is often paradoxical, this is in part, ironically, because the motivation behind so much of it—the desire to obtain and preserve a sense of self-respect—is simple and unwavering. Thus one consequence of my approach is an emphasis on Jane's consistency and single-mindedness quite at odds with the emphasis on inner division that has been, and despite recent protests continues to be, a hallmark of Brontë criticism.

Certainly Jane and her narrative are "full of strange contrasts," to borrow Rochester's phrase; and it is not difficult to locate causes for these in Brontë's life or Victorian society (JE, p. 340). The difficulties lie elsewhere: first, in defining the range of possible causes for a plainly overdetermined effect, and second, in deciding the extent to which these contrasts originate in conflicting motivations within Jane or Brontë. By highlighting Jane's ideal of self-respect as a shaping force in Brontë's text, I wish both to extend the range of explanation for the novel's contrasts and to illustrate why these contrasts need not always be ascribed to a divided, uncertain, or disingenuous author or character. I will argue that Jane's concern for self-respect must be included among the causes for one of the novel's most puzzling divisions, that between its rebellious and conformist elements. Though this division has distinguishable social, political, and moral dimensions, we may

2 "We are not aware of Jane being a divided character as we read Jane Eyre," writes Nina Auerbach in Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 198. But we are certainly aware of it when we read criticism of the novel, including Auerbach's own. Critics have depicted Jane and her author as psychologically torn between the competing demands of, among other things, passion and reason, realism and romanticism, nature and grace, Apollo and Dionysus, rationalist individualism and Romantic conservatism. See the review of Brontë criticism by Herbert J. Rosenzweig in Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research, ed. George M. Ford (New York: Modern Language Association, 1978), pp. 184—91. This emphasis on division has been persuasively challenged by both John Kucich and Nancy Armstrong, who also point out how frequently critics have forgotten history in reading the Brontës. But Kucich, in Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987); and Armstrong, in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). attempt to locate Jane's consistency below or above the level at which I seek it, that of Jane's own conscious motivation. Kucich finds it in a culturally constructed economics of the libido that makes Victorian repression a mechanism for exalting interiority, Armstrong in a historical movement whereby "sexual repression obscures the facts of social oppression" (p. 193).
broadly characterize it, following Françoise Basch, as one between "revolt" and "duty." It comes into sharpest focus when Jane, who has seemed in constant revolt against the oppressive code of Victorian "respectability," refuses Rochester's offer of love without marriage, capitulating to moral convention—duty—with a readiness that disturbed George Eliot as much as it does Basch. But the division also appears, more generally, in Jane's accessions to conventional Victorian wisdom about women and class. Despite her ominous references to the "rebellions" that "ferment in the masses of life which people earth," despite her insistence that women "need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do" (JE, p. 141), Jane eventually adopts and preaches the virtues imposed on her by the Reverend Brocklehurst at Lowood, virtues that merely abet the dominion of property and patriarchy. It is Brocklehurst's plan, in bringing up his young pupils, "not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying" (JE, p. 95). In Jane's case the plan works, and from one perspective the novel seems to read, rather embarrassingly, as an advertisement for its soundness.

Contradictions like these do not square with interpretations—whether offered by Brontë's admirers or by her detractors—that make Jane Eyre an unmitigatedly radical text. For this reason, recent criticism has prudently cautioned against viewing Brontë's novel as a simple manifesto of rebellion, particularly feminist rebellion, and has instead tried to remind us how Jane Eyre "performs its own cultural complicity." Yet such skepticism has its own special dangers. For one thing, excessive emphasis on the novel's adherence to convention, on its sub-

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4 The nature of [Jane's] sacrifice, its advantages and inconveniences for the individuals concerned are neither evaluated nor examined; nothing counts except self-control and obedience. Thus Jane reaches the point of conforming completely to current conventional morality, especially about the absurd impossibility of divorce" (Basch, p. 175). Eliot's judgment of Jane's decision is quoted below.
6 The phrase is found in Bette London, "The Pleasures of Submission: Jane Eyre and the Production of the Text," ELH, 58 (1991): 195–213. Purna Roy offers the similar argument that Brontë's novel is "a radical text which is qualified in significant ways by a conservative subtext." "Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in Jane Eyre," Studies in English
mission to the prescriptions of duty, can easily obscure the potency of its impulse (however limited) toward rebellion. For another, skeptical criticism of the novel can take a decidedly ominous turn, making Jane and Brontë sound childish, dishonest, or hypocritical and fixing blame at the personal level—where author and character have either deceived or failed us—even as the critic (rightly) insists on situating them within a larger cultural picture.7

Looking at the history of self-respect makes it possible to examine a piece of the cultural terrain on which Jane and Brontë found themselves, to adopt the perspective from which they surveyed it, and to recover the logic that made their movements through it seem, to them, at the time, coherent and purposive rather than faltering and confused. It can also make us see how the assumptions by means of which they remained oriented on this terrain, assumptions that were themselves products of culture rather than of individual consciousness, helped determine their movements and give them the appearance, when seen from another perspective than their own, of hesitating or shutting. It can illuminate the political nature of these assumptions and of the language used to express them. And it can help us take a new measure of the novel’s subversiveness, which lies partly in Jane’s unflagging determination to wrest from convention the very means of empowerment, to make duty the vehicle of a significant, if modest, revolt.

Peter Berger has argued that the modern era replaced the notion of

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7 For example, Basch, even while she claims that Jane’s contradictions are “inherent in the position of Victorian woman and consequently insoluble on the individual level,” still attributes them in part to Brontë’s “emotional immaturity” (pp. 174, 169). On Roy’s account, Jane and Brontë sound just plain duplicitous, yielding “furtive assent to the authoritative word of [their] culture” and offering “weary acquiescence in the economic and class values of [their] society,” “surrupitious endorsement of patriarchalism,” “insidious concessions to the socioeconomic and religious imperatives [they] had begun by condemning,” and “clandestine submission to the dictates of the institutions [they] had sought to reevaluate and dilatec,” all in a text that is full of “ideological confusions and evasions” (pp. 715, 721, 725, 726, 717–18). London seems to belé the subtext of her own analysis in ultimately reducing Jane Eyre to a “nineteenth-century deportment book, offering its readers—within and outside the text—lessons in the proper forms of feminine conduct”; she warns the reader against being co-opted, framed, and seduced by this apparently dangerous novel (pp. 208–9).
honor with that of dignity. This change, he points out, reflects the larger historical transformation whereby the institutional roles played by the individual in society no longer define but instead mask the self's essential identity. Yet with equal justice Berger might have chosen, as the modern correlate of honor, the idea of self-respect. Indeed, self-respect has the advantage of being, as mentioned earlier, a genuinely new coinage, dating back no farther than the seventeenth century, no farther than the nineteenth in its current sense of a "proper regard for the dignity of one's person or one's position" (OED). Moreover, while the idea of self-respect clearly derives from the broad historical change Berger charts, and while it may also be seen to reflect the peculiarly modern sense of the self as unique, autonomous, solitary, and profound, it replicates better than does the notion of dignity a certain duality in the idea of honor. Comparing honor with self-respect thus reveals more clearly, one might argue, the ways in which the modern self, despite its putative autonomy, still feels its identity to be defined and constrained by social facts. As a property of the individual that demands a certain kind of treatment from others, self-respect, like honor, may be founded on either character or social rank, "person" or "position." Furthermore, as a principle of moral action, self-respect, like honor, is paradoxically both unilateral and reflexive; that is, it binds its possessor to certain forms of behavior irrespective of public notice or acclaim, while at the same time it assumes a correlation between private deed and public perception. Acting honorably wins you honor, if not really, then at least hypothetically; others respect you if you respect yourself, and, in a sense, by respecting yourself you have merely commandeered a part of yourself to play the role of other. One last similarity between the notions of honor and self-respect that does not easily obtain between honor and dignity has to do with sex. Berger wryly notes that "honour occupies about the same place in contemporary usage as chastity" (p. 149). In fact, honor could once mean "chastity" and is still occasionally used this way. But in encouraging a young woman to avoid sexual relations without the social legitimacy conferred by marriage, or at least the psychological legitimacy conferred by love, a contemporary moralist would be less likely to appeal to her sense of honor or chastity or even dignity than to her sense of self-respect.

Perhaps the main difference between the old idea of honor and the new one of self-respect relates to class. The new idea may not thoroughly divorce virtue from social position, but it completely lacks the old one's associations with aristocracy. Indeed, its invention seems part of the general attempt by modern bourgeois culture to appropriate and privatize aristocratic virtues, thereby extending them to all individuals in theory and to the middle class in practice. Charles Taylor has observed how an emerging "bourgeois ethic," replacing the "honour ethic" of aristocratic society, fastened upon such fundamental "warrior-aristocratic" virtues as strength, firmness, resolution, and control, pried them loose from the aristocratic goal of "winning fame in public space," and attached them to a new, private concern for maintaining "our sense of worth in our own eyes." In Victorian England, these once-aristocratic qualities became assimilated to what Harold Perkin has called the "entrepreneurial ideal"—an ideal of society and of the individual that was based on the assumed goodness of capital, competition, and the self-made man and that helped produce, for the Victorians, the defeat of genuinely aristocratic social values and the economic triumph of the bourgeoisie. In particular, the broadened conception of the "gentleman," as formulated by Samuel Smiles, plainly linked entrepreneurship with the privatization of honor, for the "true gentleman" was "honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting, and self-helping" (emphasis added).

According to Taylor, the modern internalization of the honor ethic begins with Descartes, though the most important influences on the nineteenth century were undoubtedly Kant and Rousseau. In England the process must have also owed something to the empiricist moral philosophers Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith. As part of his attempt to work out a theory of the moral sense, Hutcheson opposed "honour" and "shame" as an "immediate good" and an "immediate evil" that in every individual produce "natural" sentiments

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11 The passage from Smiles's Self-Help (1859) is quoted in Perkin, p. 278.
12 On Descartes, see Taylor, pp. 143–58. Thomas E. Hill, Jr., points out that Rousseau "was instrumental in convincing Kant to place human dignity at the core of his ethical theory," and he also notes the important influence of the French Revolution in promoting the idea that "all humanity has a dignity independent of social class and individual distinctions." Autonomy and Self-Respect (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 155. Kant knew and admired Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments; see the introduction to the edition by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), p. 51; hereafter cited as TMS.
of pleasure and displeasure, respectively. We have, Hutcheson claimed, a natural "determination" to "desire and delight in the good opinion and love of others, even when we expect no other advantage from them," just as we are "subjected to a grievous sensation of misery, from the unfavourable opinions of others concerning us, even when we dread no other evil from them." Hume, in the conclusion to An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751), saw in the "love of fame" an attempt to reinforce and ratify self-judgment by the judgment of others. "By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world," he reasoned, "we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets in noble natures a certain reverence for themselves as well as others, which is the surest guardian of every virtue." Among the empiricists, however, it was Adam Smith who put the processes of self-reflection and self-reverence at the center of moral behavior, and he did this with his famous theory of the "impartial spectator." In the Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), Smith attempted to explain the roles played in moral conduct by "self-approbation" and "self-disapprobation." According to Smith, "We either approve or disapprove of the conduct of another man according as we feel that, when we bring his case home to ourselves, we either can or cannot entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives which directed it" (TMS, p. 109). It follows, then, that "we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it" (TMS, pp. 109–10). In this process of internal review, the self seems to be split in


half: "When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, when I endeavour to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of" (TMS, p. 113). The individual is at once both "agent" and "spectator" (TMS, p. 113), as for Freud he would be both ego and superego (see "Spectator," pp. 97–98). It is not for Smith the "soft power of humanity" nor the "feeble spark of benevolence" lighted in us by nature that enables us to overcome our native selfishness in order to behave virtuously, but the effort to win the approval of this spectator self—the "inhabitant of the breast," the "man within," "conscience" (TMS, p. 137). "It is not the love of our neighbour, it is not the love of mankind, which upon many occasions prompts us to the practice of those divine virtues. It is a stronger love, a more powerful affection, which generally takes place upon such occasions; the love of what is honourable and noble, of the grandeur, and dignity, and superiority of our own characters" (TMS, p. 137). By resolving the formerly class-bound qualities of honor and nobility into class-neutral confederates of ordinary conscience, Smith has put them within reach of every individual; by describing the psychological consequence of virtue as a condition of "self-approbation" or "inward tranquillity and self-satisfaction" (TMS, p. 119), while depicting the consequence of vice as a state of "inward disgrace" (TMS, p. 138), he has all but reduced honor and nobility to a simple matter of self-respect.

The word self-respect was available to Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith, but only in a pejorative sense. Originally, the word meant either "self-love, self-conceit" or "a private, personal, or selfish end" (OED). Its change in meaning corresponds to new attitudes toward the independent, disconnected, and assertive self that had been developing since the advent of modernity and would triumph in the economic individualism and political liberalism of the nineteenth century. These same attitudes no doubt account for the fact that in the mid-sixteenth century the self prefix first became, as the OED puts it, a "living formative element" in English. In Old English, the OED reports, the number of compounds using self was a mere thirteen, of which only a handful—self-will and its cognates—survived into Middle English. The seventeenth century saw the formation of self-denial, self-righteous, self-evident, self-knowledge, self-reflection, self-consciousness, and self-interest; the eighteenth century added self-centred (of people), self-control, self-important,
self-improvement, self-indulgence, self-renunciation, and self-possession. Concordances to some of the major English writers from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth tell a similar story of increasing self-preoccupation. There are no self combinations to be found in Chaucer, but 13 different ones in Spenser; 23 in Milton’s poetry and 18 in his prose; 11 in Dryden; 26 in Pope. With the Romantics we get, not surprisingly, a general increase: 58 different combinations in Blake; 33 in Shelley; 16 in Keats; 51 in Coleridge, whose list begins with self-abhorring. Wordsworth, who helped make a literary industry of self-reflection, stands out from writers before or since with an unrivaled 110. It is he who provides the OED’s earliest example of self-respect in its laudatory sense. In the nineteenth century the numbers remain relatively high: Jane Austen, 52; Arnold (whose Shakespeare was “self-school’d, self-scann’d, self-honour’d, self-secure”), roughly 30; Tennyson (who logs the first recorded use of self-involved), 29; Browning, 85.

The doggedly individualistic spirit of nineteenth-century capitalism, with its myth of the “self-made man” and its frequent insistence that the poor “are themselves the cause of their poverty,” gave rise to an appropriate vocabulary that included self-assertion, self-reliance, self-help, and self-dependence. This last, like self-respect, had been used pejoratively in the eighteenth century, as in Augustus M. Toplady’s hymn “Lord, I Feel a Carnal Mind,” which contains a supplication for “a submissive Heart, From Pride and Self-dependance free.” But self-dependence was used positively by Harriet Martineau, that redoubtable apostle of laissez-faire, in her 1837 work Society in America, which provides the OED with its first or near-first illustration for a number of other significant self- words, including self-estimate, the modern sense of self-perfection, and—four years before Emerson’s essay—self-reliance. Martineau’s use of self-reliance highlights an important fact about the Victorian vocabulary of self, for the context is not poverty or social mobility but the position of women. “Women are, as might be anticipated, weak, ignorant and subservient, in as far as they exchange self-reliance for reliance on anything out of themselves.” In her dauntingly full career Martineau would, of course, champion the rights of women as ardent as she would preach the gospel of political economy; this sentence from Soci-

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ety in America sounds a theme that would be heard in English and American feminists for some time to come.

In her 1841 article titled "Woman and Her Social Position," Margaret Mylne asked her readers (rhetorically), "Do [men] not require . . . to be taught . . . to repress their selfish, to cultivate their social affections, while women . . . are found to be most wanting in the opposite qualities of self-respect and self-reliance?"28 As the women's rights advocates who gathered at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 saw it, man had actively hindered woman from cultivating these two qualities. "He has endeavored," they wrote in their "Declaration of Sentiments," "in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life."19 A few years earlier, in 1845, Margaret Fuller had described a woman for whom a "dignified sense of self-dependence" served as "a sure anchor." The great difficulty with women, asserted Fuller's Miranda in Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1855), "is to get them to the point from which they shall naturally develop self-respect, and learn self-help." Fuller explained that for Miranda "outward adversity came, and inward conflict; but that faith and self-respect had early been awakened which must always lead, at last, to an outward serenity and an inward peace."20 She might have been describing the career of Jane Eyre.

These early feminists' calls for greater self-help, self-reliance, and self-respect presuppose a belief in an individual self that requires psychological, moral, and social space for growth and development. As Margaret Fuller rather starkly put it, "All tends to illustrate the thought of a wise cotemporary [sic]. Union is only possible to those who are units. To be fit for relations in time, souls, whether of Man or Woman, must be able to do without them in the spirit" (p. 119).21 Since society had traditionally defined women not by what they were in themselves but by what they did for others, advocates of women's rights had an understandable motivation to declare ontological as well as economic

and political independence. In Margaret Mylne’s words, “The prejudices of sex have a tendency to make women be regarded oftener in the dependent and subordinate position in which they appear in relation to man, than as possessing, in common with him, a moral, rational, responsible, and, therefore, independent existence of their own” (p. 15). This view of the self also dovetailed with the Benthamite hedonistic calculus that inspired both political economists and democratic reformers, with the liberalism on which early Anglo-American feminists staked their claim to equal legal and political rights, and with the entrepreneurial ideal through which some women saw the opportunity to win genuine economic and social equality with men.22 It was, claimed Harriet Martineau, “the women who are obtaining access to real social business,—the female physicians and other professors in America, the women of business and the female artists of France; and the hospital administrators, the nurses, the educators and substantially successful authors of our own country” who were, in the long run, “the best advocates” of “Woman’s cause.”23 In a similar vein, Charlotte Brontë’s lifelong friend Mary Taylor frankly confessed that “the object of most of the papers” in her series “The First Duty of Women” was “to inculcate the duty of earning money.”24 She had herself already fulfilled this duty by emigrating to New Zealand and opening her own business.

There is a paradox, however, in the idea of the independent self’s achieving full development by means of economic self-reliance and social prestige. For in pursuing this course the self necessarily compromises its supposed independence, not only by entering into economic relations with others but by regarding the respect of society as a crucial measure of developmental success. Because capital and social position are what win this respect, it becomes once again natural to define and value the self according to its place in the social scale—as, say, pauper, laborer, goveness, entrepreneur, or professional. Moreover, those once-aristocratic virtues—strength, resolution, firmness, control—that the “bourgeois ethic” claimed to define in private rather than public terms, in terms of self-worth rather than fame, must be

measured publicly again as accumulating capital and rising status become the most reliable objective evidence that the virtues are really being exercised. Selves in general begin to lose the original, native equality that was the premise of liberalism; self-worth and social place are reconnected; status is once again the outward sign of an inward grace; and the first condition of self-respect becomes respectability.

In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith grappled with just this paradox, though in different terms, of course. The economic individual who forms the basis for the egoistic calculus of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) may appear an autonomous atom, but the moral individual of the *Theory* is profoundly dependent on others. This dependence springs from a logical problem at the heart of self-perception, as Smith illustrates with his analogy of the mirror:

> Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than of the beauty or deformity of his own face. All these are objects which he cannot easily see, which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with the mirror which he wanted before. (*TMS*, p. 110)

Morally as well as physically, we cannot see ourselves without the help of others. Without some appeal to their judgment, self-judgment is impossible. Indeed, beginning from this premise of essential dependence, Smith’s challenge is to avoid reducing virtue to whatever society calls good.

This reduction, or at least the appearance of it, is a problem in Hume. Having defined virtue as “whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation” (p. 107), Hume imagines a moral world that Basil Willey has called a “closed and

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interlocked system of mutual admiration and criticism," in which "respectability," the virtue of standing well with one's neighbors, becomes . . . the sumnum bonum." To be sure, Hume remarks as well that "we never excuse the absolute want of spirit and dignity of character, or a proper sense of what is due to one's self in society and the common intercourse of life. . . . A certain degree of generous pride or self-value is so requisite that the absence of it in the mind displeases" (p. 77). The "proper sense of what is due" not only sounds extremely close to the dictionary's definition of self-respect but assumes the possibility of a rift between how others judge one and how they ought to judge one ("what is due"), and thus between approval and virtue. Indeed, in one footnote Hume surprisingly risks undermining his whole position by claiming that internal approval must precede external: "Where a man has no sense of value in himself, we are not likely to have any higher esteem of him" (p. 77 n. 9). But only in such obiter dicta does the Inquiry recognize the complexity of the virtue/approval problem, and as a result the problem remains more or less in the air.

By contrast, as D. D. Raphael has pointed out, the originality of Smith's impartial spectator theory lies largely in the ingenious way it wrestles the problem down. For Smith's spectator-self does not represent any particular person or class of persons; it does not speak by ventriloquism, mechanically articulating the moral views of "society" or the majority of one's fellow humans, though it may indeed concur with the judgments of real people. Its impartiality lies precisely in its imaginary character and its independence from any real human judge. Any act of self-assessment "must always bear some secret reference, either to what are, or to what, upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others" (TMS, p. 110; emphasis added). Smith distinguishes between "praise" and "praise-worthiness," "blame" and "blame-worthiness," between the condition of being loved or hated and that of deserving love or hate (TMS, p. 113). A situation in which "all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt" (JE, p. 101) is as possible in Smith's mind as in that of Jane Eyre's schoolfriend Helen Burns. But hardly as probable. For we "desire both to be respectable and to be respected. We dread both to be contemptible and to be con-

temned" (JE, p. 62). In Smith there remains a strong presumption that morality will square with the consensus view, as the language in which he formulates the spectator principle occasionally suggests. We "must become the impartial spectators of our own character and conduct. We must endeavour to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them" (TMS, p. 114; emphasis added). In other words, while he would have wholeheartedly endorsed the famous declaration in Brontë's preface to the second edition of Jane Eyre—"Conventionality is not morality" (p. 35)—Smith would have also understood Jane's rejoinder to Helen's declaration of moral self-confidence: "I cannot bear to be solitary and hated" (JE, p. 101).

Throughout Brontë's novel, in fact, Jane's thoughts and actions reflect the complex and paradoxical relation between external approval and self-approval recognized by Smith. This is not because Brontë is writing with the Theory of Moral Sentiments in mind but because the relation comes packaged with the moral concept that Smith helped invent and that Brontë has very much in mind, the concept of self-respect. 27 Brontë makes Jane's concern for self-respect the focus of her demand for freedom from class and patriarchal oppression; as a result, the contradictions that dog the idea of self-respect take the shape of apparently contradictory values or impulses in Jane. What may look like ambivalence or compromise or cowardice in Brontë's protagonist is really the result of acting consistently on an intrinsically contradictory principle.

27 It might be added that in the eighteenth century the Theory of Moral Sentiments was highly popular and its influence widespread, so that by Victorian times some of its central ideas and metaphors would have undoubtedly touched many who had not themselves read it. The work went through six authorized editions in Smith's lifetime and was known to and admired by, among others, Hume, Burke, Kant, Leibniz, and Herder. The last two were particularly interested in the essay's implications for aesthetic thought (TMS, pp. 25–32, 34). Kenneth Maclean discerns similarities between Smith's discussions of imagination and sympathy and Sterne's use of these ideas in A Sentimental Journey, though he stops short of asserting direct influence. "Imagination and Sympathy: Sterne and Adam Smith," Journal of the History of Ideas, 10 (1949): 399–410. A. L. Macfie supposes that Burns, who "treasured his copy of the Moral Sentiments," was inspired by Smith when declaring, "O wad some Pow'r the gie us / To see ourselves as others see us!" The Individual in Society: Papers on Adam Smith (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 66. As Macfie points out, Smith had written, "If we saw ourselves in the light in which others see us, or in which they would see us if they knew all, a reformation would generally be unavoidable. We could not otherwise endure the sight" (TMS, pp. 158–59). Needless to say, this idea would be frequently articulated in Victorian literature, together with its informing metaphors of light and vision. Particularly striking is the way that Dickens makes a character's reformation or "change of heart" hinge on seeing, in Barbara Hardy's words, "his situation or his moral defect enacted for him in external coincidence: by his twin, who forces a recognition of leathome resemblance, or his opposite, who forces reluctant admiration and comparison." The Moral Art of Dickens (London: Athlone, 1970), p. 51. The immediate context for Smith's discussion of "reformation" is the subject of "self-deceit," another favorite Dickenstein theme.
As mentioned earlier, there are three conspicuous areas where Jane's consistent concern for self-respect pushes her to think and act in apparently contradictory ways, making her seem divided between the claims of revolt and duty. These are class and poverty, sexual morality, and the social role of women. In each of these areas Smith's moral thought, which illuminates the complex nature of self-respect, can also clarify the logic of Jane's behavior.

In their attitude toward class and poverty, both Jane and Brontë seem most revolutionary in the Gateshead and Lowood sections of the novel. As the Reed family's poor relation, Jane at Gateshead lives a marginalized and powerless existence, suffering injustice and imprisonment. At Lowood Institution she exchanges oppression in solitude for oppression in the company of some eighty similarly circumstanced girls. At the institution poverty has been criminalized, for the uniforms, regimented schedule, paltry food, harsh discipline, and "spiked-guarded" garden walls (JE, p. 107) seem more appropriate to a prison than to a place of learning. When the school's overseer, the Reverend Brocklehurst, waxes rightly indignant over one pupil's untamed red hair, we get one of the novel's most memorable scenes and one of Victorian fiction's most enduring symbols of the way evangelical piety can serve as an instrument of both class and patriarchal oppression. Even as Brocklehurst reminds his superintendent Maria Temple that his mission "is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel" (JE, p. 96), his own wife and daughters arrive on the scene "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs" (JE, p. 97) and crowned by a profusion of artificial curls. Brocklehurst's family, Jane acidly remarks, "ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress" (JE, p. 97).

Yet though Gateshead and Lowood may stand out from the novel as brilliant symbolic projections of an oppressive system that calls for a radical response, Jane's actual response is anything but radical, while her various direct pronouncements about class and poverty, sprinkled throughout her narrative, reveal her anxieties about her own class status and constitute a rather hearty endorsement of the bourgeoisie's entrepreneurial ideal. The young Jane at Gateshead makes plain her unwillingness to "purchase liberty at the price of caste" by going to live with more "beggarly" relatives (JE, p. 57). The mature Jane, starving and penniless after fleeing Rochester at Thornfield, feels it would be "degrading to faint with hunger on the causeway of a hamlet" (JE, p. 352) and
reflects that it would be "far better that crows and ravens . . .
should pick my flesh from my bones, than that they should be imprisoned
in a workhouse coffin and moulder in a pauper's grave" (JE, p. 356). In
a passage that echoes one of Adam Smith's most famous aphorisms,
Jane even excuses the bakery woman who refuses her a roll in
exchange for a handkerchief: "Why, she was right, if the offer appeared
to her sinister or the exchange unprofitable" (JE, p. 355).28 Forced to
make her living as a teacher in a charity school, Jane feels "degraded"
by a "step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social exis-
tence" (JE, p. 385), despite a guilty sense that the feeling is wrong.

Aside from the suggestion that Lowood criminalizes poverty, Jane
does not represent the poor as an aggrieved class. She insists instead on
the individual differences among them, distinguishing in particular
those who have from those who lack a sense of self-respect. The one
piece of legislation that perhaps did the most to criminalize poverty in
the nineteenth century, the 1834 Poor Law, made a different but
plainly related distinction between "independent" and "dependent"
poor. 29 The self-respecting poor are by implication self-helping and
self-reliant; they subscribe to the entrepreneurial ideal while of course
maintaining due deference toward their betters. Here is how Jane
describes her pupils at the Morton charity school:

Wholly untaught, with faculties quite torpid, they seemed to me
hopelessly dull; and, at first sight, all dull alike; but I soon found I
was mistaken. There was a difference amongst them as amongst
the educated; and when I got to know them, and they me, this dif-

28 An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, ed. R. H. Campbell and
of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to
their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and
never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages."

29 The New Poor Law, for which Harriet Martineau was an influential advocate, aimed to
keep the "independent" laborer from sinking to the level of "pauperism" or dependency by
making the condition of the pauper, who could receive public relief, an undesirable one.
See Himelfarb, pp. 147—90. Though writing a little later in the century, John Hollingshead
helps clarify the connection, in this context, between self-respect and independence: "Hos-
pitals, asylums, charity schools, and other forms of permanent outdoor relief, are worm-
esten by imposition, and yet they flourish. They stand up as monuments for foreigners to
gaze at, and are, at the same time, our glory and our shame. They show a class on one hand
always ready to give, and they show another class—low, wanting in self-reliance and self-
respect, demoralized by much charity—always ready to receive. . . . The most perfect
poor-law, the most perfect administration of that poor-law, the most lavish charity can do
nothing for them compared to the wonders of self-help." Ragged London in 1861 (London:
Dent, Everyman's Library, 1986), pp. 121—22. See also F. M. L. Thompson, The Rise of
ference rapidly developed itself. Their amazement at me, my lan-
guage, my rules, and ways, once subsided, I found some of these
heavy-looking, gaping rustics wake up into sharp-witted girls
enough. Many showed themselves obliging, and amiable too; and I
discovered amongst them not a few examples of natural polite-
ness, and innate self-respect, as well as of excellent capacity, that
won both my goodwill and admiration. These soon took a pleasure
in doing their work well, in keeping their persons neat, in learning
their tasks regularly, in acquiring quiet and orderly manners. (JE,
p. 392)

When, having come into her fortune, Jane finally closes the Morton
school, she describes her farewell to a half dozen of her "best scholars":
"as decent, respectable, modest, and well-informed young women as
could be found in the ranks of the British peasantry. And that," she
adds in an access of national pride, "is saying a great deal; for, after all,
the British peasantry are the best taught, best mannered, most self-
respecting of any in Europe" (JE, p. 415). The remark will be echoed
by the narrator of Shirley, who assures us, in describing the Sunday
school pupils of Caroline Helstone, that "the poverty which reduces an
Irish girl to rags is impotent to rob the English girl of the neat
wardrobe she knows necessary to her self-respect."30

The implied radicalism of the Gateshead and Lowood sections may
conflict with Jane's condescension toward her "gaping rustics," but
both attitudes arise partly from the importance Jane attaches to self-
respect. Like her contemporaries, Brontë thinks of the struggle of
women against patriarchal society as one for self-development and self-
assertion. Like them, then, she envisions the self, at least part of the
time, as unique and autonomous, possessing integrity and capable of
considerable self-reliance, as suggested by Jane's self-imposed isolation
in the window seat behind the red curtain or her fascination with the
romantic images of solitude and alienation in Bewick's History of British
Birds (the "rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray," the
"black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock" [JE, p. 40]). Indeed, the

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30 Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, ed. Andrew and Judith Hook (Harmondsworth: Penguin,
1974), p. 295; hereafter cited as S.
efforts of various people, mostly men, to vanquish a strong and independent female self by authority or seduction constitutes from one perspective the main drama of Jane Eyre, if not of Charlotte Brontë's œuvre. The Reeds, Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John Rivers all make the attempt and fail. With all of them, Jane either overtly insists or covertly ensures that, come what may, "I should still have my unblighted self to turn to. . . . There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine" (JE, pp. 432–33).

The connection between self-respect and self-reliance produces in Jane, as in the entrepreneurial ideal that Adam Smith helped shape, a tendency to view dependence on others as a degradation. Yet like Smith, Jane finds herself caught in the paradox whereby the chief means of cultivating self-respect—earning the respect of others—produces considerable dependence, along with an inclination to conflate respect-worthiness and respectability. Regularly taunted and belittled by the Reeds, Jane maintains against all odds a sense of "pride" and "self-esteem" that can be "wounded" and "mortified" (JE, p. 55) by Bessie’s representation of her to Mr. Lloyd the apothecary as pettish and infantile. Yet if Jane’s self-esteem were entirely invulnerable, she would not ask herself in frustration, "Why could I never please?" It would not bother her that "Eliza, who was headstrong and selfish, was respected," and she not (JE, p. 46). At Lowood, she would not have been shamed, as Brocklehurst wishes her to be, by being "exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy" (JE, p. 99) as punishment for inadvertently dropping her slate. "I had meant to be so good," Jane reflects after this incident, "to make so many friends, to earn respect, and win affection" (JE, p. 100). But it is precisely this aim that Brocklehurst's regimen is meant to foil. Brocklehurst maintains class and patriarchal dominance by withholding from his charity students the opportunity to acquire self-respect by winning external approval, and he manages to do so not only, as Mrs. Reed does, through an arbitrary system of punishment but also by denying these girls the external appearance of respectability. Hence the poignancy of Maria Temple’s decision to break Lowood rules and risk Brocklehurst’s wrath by issuing two clean tuckers in a single week to Agnes and Catherine Johnstone (JE, p. 94). The girls had been invited to tea outside the school, and Miss Temple obviously knew what the narrator of Shirley knows about the relation between self-respect and a "neat wardrobe."

When all is said and done, in other words, Lowood under Brocklehurst does not fail its pupils by preventing their liberation from the
existing class structure or the bourgeois conception of self; it fails them by blocking their advance within that structure and their attainment of the personal satisfactions available within that conception. Indeed, once a typhus epidemic brings Brocklehurst’s behavior under public scrutiny and his authority at Lowood to an end, it becomes clear that the source of evil at Lowood was not so much what Brocklehurst seems to symbolize—the despotism of class and patriarchy—as Brocklehurst himself. It would be absurd to argue that with Brocklehurst’s demotion to treasurer (he is not even dismissed!) Lowood loses its character as an instrument for keeping poor women in their place; yet this one change, by permitting Jane to win the external approval she so desperately requires, proves adequate to erase her sense of oppression. The school now becomes in her eyes a “truly useful and noble institution” where she receives an “excellent education,” becoming “the first girl of the first class,” and even serving for two years as a teacher (JE, p. 115). Upon leaving Lowood, Jane significantly does not take the opportunity to wear fine things and give her hair free rein; her signature at Thornfield, like Brontë’s at Haworth or London, is her “Quaker trim” (JE, p. 160)—plain clothes, minimal ornamentation, smoothed hair. The general system of Lowood (not to be confused with the cruelty of Brocklehurst) evidently does her good. If it cannot quell a restless desire to discover the “real world” and “to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils” (JE, p. 116), it ironically makes such a quest possible by transforming Jane, as her old nurse Bessie puts it, into “quite a lady” (JE, p. 123).

It should really not surprise us, then, that Jane divides her Morton pupils, in good bourgeois fashion, according to the degree of self-respect they exhibit; or that she and her author both deduce the self-respect of the British peasantry, a psychological condition, from the only outward manifestation of it they can recognize, respectability; or that for them respectability means, in this case, what it generally meant for the Victorian middle class in thinking about the lower orders: clean dress and deferential manners. In life, a poor person’s self-respect might reveal itself as contempt for and open revolt against the laws, institutions, standards of conduct, and social classes responsible for the existence of poverty; but in Brontë’s fiction it never does. “All human beings, men, women, or children, whom low breeding or coarse presumption did not render positively offensive, were welcome enough” to Shirley Keeldar, Brontë tells us (S, p. 294), intending to illustrate her character’s lack of snobbery. Throughout her fiction
Brontë is a great deal less radical than Jane's apparently symbolic confrontations at Gateshead and Lowood might lead us to believe, and a great deal less so than some critics have made her out to be.\(^{31}\) If those confrontations nevertheless jar against Jane's and Brontë's "cultural complicity" with bourgeois society, we may explain this dissonance by reference to the paradox of self-respect without labeling Jane or her author personally inconsistent, uncertain, immature, or uncandid. The same holds true a fortiori for Jane's behavior toward Rochester, the paradigmatic instance of Jane's purported ambivalence between revolt and duty.

In *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, Kathleen Tillotson long ago defended Jane Eyre against the charge of compromise implied in George Eliot's famous letter to Charles Bray: "All self-sacrifice is good, but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcass."\(^{32}\) Tillotson argued that if Jane "had yielded, the novel would still be 'serious'; a novel with a purpose indeed, striking a blow for insurgent feminism, the anarchy of passion, and the reform of the divorce laws. But it would have been smaller and narrower, and would have violated its own moral pattern" (pp. 309–10). That moral pattern is laid by the "invisible world" Helen Burns invokes, with its "kingdom of spirits . . . commissioned to guard us" (*JE*, p. 101). Jane's resistance to Rochester "belongs" to this world, Tillotson wrote; it does not derive from "any sense of social convention, or shocked morality" (pp. 306–7). Tillotson's defense of Jane against Eliot might also serve against Françoise Basch's claim that in resisting Rochester Jane "reaches the point of conforming completely to current conventional morality" (p. 173), if the defense were adequate to begin with; but we are now in a position to see why it is not.

For Jane's resistance belongs as much to the human world as to the

\(^{31}\) For example, Gilbert and Gubar reach the bewildering conclusion that in *Shirley*, Brontë "implies . . . that the work ethic of self-help means selfishness and sexism, and, linking the exploitation of the workers with the unemployment of women, she further indicates that the acquisitive mentality that treats both women and workers as property is directly related to disrespect for the natural resources of the nation" (p. 579). Helene Moglen, in a more subtle analysis, similarly asserts that the theme of *Shirley* is "nothing less than [sic] the misuse of power within a patriarchal society, and 'women,' rather than a particular woman, would stand for her as the appropriate and central symbol of powerlessness." Moglen awkwardly attributes the discrepancy between this theme and the actual contents of *Shirley*, especially toward the novel's end, to "a dispersal of energy, a movement from social vision to private perspective: a descent from artistic vitality to personal confusion and disillusionment." *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conscious* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), pp. 158, 186.

spiritual, and Basch is at least right in seeing that conventional morality has a good deal to do with it. To understand precisely how this is so, it may help to compare Jane's situation with that of Elizabeth Hastings, an early model for Jane who appears in Brontë's juvenilia. In "Captain Henry Hastings," Elizabeth, Henry's sister, rejects Sir William Percy's proposal to make her his mistress. Elizabeth loves Percy, just as Jane loves Rochester, and like Jane she must counter her lover's compelling arguments. When Percy reminds Elizabeth that "you said you adored me," she explains, "I do, intensely—but I'll never be your mistress—I could not without incurring the miseries of self-hatred." "That is to say," replies Percy, suggesting a different, more cowardly motive, "you are afraid of the scorn of the world." To which Elizabeth returns instantly, "I am—the scorn of the world is a horrible thing, & more especially I should dread to lose the good opinion of three persons—of my father—of Henry & of Mr Warner—I would rather die than be despised by them." Self-hatred and the world's hatred are not neatly separable for Elizabeth any more than they are for Jane Eyre or David Hume or Adam Smith. The difference between Elizabeth and Jane, however, parallels the difference between Hume and Smith. Elizabeth, like Hume, risks the appearance of reducing virtue to public approval, of equating sexual morality with sexual respectability. Jane, like Smith, avoids this problem by inserting between internal and external approval the mediating influence of rules and conventions.

In the Theory of Moral Sentiments, Smith derives the "general rules of morality" empirically from our experience that "all actions of a certain kind, or circumstances in a certain manner, are approved or disapproved of" (p. 159). Rules do not originally determine, but rather grow out of, the approval or condemnation of particular actions. Once arrived at, however, these rules—adherence to which "is properly called a sense of duty"—become "a principle of the greatest consequence in human life" (TMS, pp. 161-62).

Without this sacred regard to general rules, there is no man whose conduct can be much depended upon. It is this which constitutes the most essential difference between a man of principle and honour and a worthless fellow. The one adheres, on all occasions,

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34 Rebecca Fraser overlooks this point in claiming of Elizabeth, that "her self-respect is more important to her than what the world thinks of her." The Brontës: Charlotte Brontë and Her Family (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 121.
steadily and resolutely to his maxims, and preserves through the whole of his life one even tenor of conduct. The other, acts variously and accidentally, as humour, inclination, or interest chance to be uppermost. (TMS, p. 163)

Upon adherence to duty depends "the very existence of human society, which would crumble into nothing if mankind were not generally impressed with a reverence for those important rules of conduct." Moreover, Smith claims, this reverence "is still further enhanced by an opinion which is first impressed by nature, and afterwards confirmed by reasoning and philosophy, that those important rules of morality are the commands and laws of the Deity, who will finally reward the obedient, and punish the transgressors of their duty" (TMS, p. 163). By means of this argument concerning general rules, Smith, as noted earlier, can divorce conscience from conventionality in principle while presuming their general concordance in practice.

At the climax of her moral battle with Rochester, Jane's reasoning closely resembles Smith's. Unlike her predecessor Elizabeth Hastings, she does not worry about any particular person's opinion of her conduct. On the contrary, she honestly asks herself, "Who in the world cares for you?" (JE, p. 544). Her "indomitable" reply is of course that "I care for myself." The more solitary her condition, the more she must respect herself. Yet this memorable example of Jane's self-reliance is also an example of total reliance. Respecting herself, it turns out, does not mean following the dictates of private conscience in defiance of convention, but relying on public canons of acceptable conduct. "I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this. . . . If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?" What, Smith might ask, would be hers?

Although Hume does not, like Smith, thoroughly explore the complex relation between self-approval, external approval, and general rules of morality, he adumbrates that relation in a passing remark that throws some light on the logic of Jane's resistance: "Our regard to a character with others seems to arise only from a care of preserving a character with ourselves; and in order to attain this end, we find it necessary to prop our tottering judgment on the correspondent approbation of mankind" (Hume, p. 97). The difference between Jane and
Rochester, as between Jane and Helen Burns or Jane and St. John Rivers, lies in Jane’s recognition of the individual’s “tottering judgment.” She has not the audacity to claim, as Rochester does, “I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world’s judgment—I wash my hands thereof. For man’s opinion—I defy it” (JE, p. 284). Nor does she share Rivers’s contempt for “human guidance . . . the defective laws and erring control of my feeble fellow-worms” (JE, p. 427). Rather, as she tells Rochester early on, she believes that “the human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted” (JE, p. 169). To follow individual conviction in defiance of generally accepted laws risks such arrogation, whereas to follow “preconceived opinions, foregone determinations” (JE, p. 344)—in short, duty—does not, the principles of duty being for her, as for Smith, the human echo of divine command.

Jane’s adherence to duty, moreover, is not a retreat from revolt but the form of her revolt against yet another threat of male domination. If she were Rochester’s mistress she would also be his inferior, his “slave,” as Rochester’s disparaging reference to Céline Varens reminds her (JE, p. 389). Indeed, living the “guarded” life Rochester proposes for her in the south of France (JE, p. 331), she would resemble no one so much as Bertha Mason, the guarded tenant of Thornfield’s attic. Having sacrificed independence and self-respect, she would have sacrificed two qualities that Rochester, as a man, feels entitled to but that he evidently thinks Jane, as a woman, can live without. Rochester refers dismissively, at one point, to Jane’s “sensitive self-respect” (JE, p. 308). Yet speaking of his mercenary union with Bertha, he confides in Jane that “I have no respect for myself when I think of that act!—an agony of inward contempt masters me” (JE, p. 339). When Bertha went mad, “a remnant of self-respect was all that intervened between me and the gulf” (JE, p. 334). Despite the “grime dishonesty” that Bertha’s behavior brought upon him, he resolved “to be clean in my own sight” (JE, p. 334). One might say that Jane’s revolt lies simply in her demand, as an independent woman, to be clean in hers.

To be sure, Jane’s sense of cleanliness is that of a society which oppressively regulates women’s sexual behavior and tends to be suspicious of sexual pleasure altogether. At Thornfield as at Lowood, against the tyranny of gender as against the tyranny of class, Jane stages her revolt within rather than against the institutions that constrain her. It is thus a limited revolt, but hardly one of which “the advantages and inconveniences . . . are neither evaluated nor examined” (Basch, p. 173).
For Jane, if not for Rochester, to be clean in one's own sight is difficult when one looks dirty to the world. The paradox of Smith's mirror may help explain, then, Jane's preoccupation with one of the chief domestic virtues conventionally entrusted to women: cleanliness. After more than three days in bed at Moor House, when Jane prepares for her first appearance in dress before benefactors who are as yet strangers, she feels "ashamed" at the thought of descending in her "damp and bemired" apparel, then is relieved to find her clothing washed so that she may come down to the Rivers family "clean and respectable-looking," with "no speck of the dirt, no trace of the disorder I so hated, and which seemed so to degrade me" (JE, p. 366). Jane is here thinking less about standards of feminine appearance than about class. "The unwashed," one remembers, was in Brontë's time a common epithet for the lower orders; Hiram Yorke applies it ironically in Shirley (p. 494), and Brontë takes pains in that novel, as in Jane Eyre, to show that one class of poor does not deserve it. (The home of William Farren, who challenges hard-hearted manufacturers but not capitalism, and who thinks it "no hardship and no injustice to be forced to live by labour" [JE, p. 157], is so clean that you might eat porridge from the floor [JE, p. 162].) Jane fears being placed by her benefactors below the level of the self-respecting (that is, respectable, independent) poor.\(^{35}\) But her need to make inward cleanliness outwardly visible shows itself, too, in her reaction to the news of her uncle's death. "My first aim," she tells St. John Rivers, "will be to clean down (do you comprehend the full force of the expression?)-to clean down Moor House from chamber to cellar; my next to rub it up with beeswax, oil, and an indefinite number of cloths, till it glitters again; my third, to arrange every chair, table, bed, carpet, with mathematical precision" (JE, p. 416). When St. John expresses his hope that she will eventually "look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys," her unabashed reply is, "The best thing the world has!"

Such domestic zeal was not unusual among Brontë's feminist contemporaries, who "often based their claims on natural rights, while

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\(^{35}\) Cf. G. M. Young, Victorians England: Portrait of an Age, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 24: "Cleanliness is next to godliness. The Victorian insistence, whenever the poor are the topic, on neatness, tidiness, the well-brushed frock and the well-swept room, is significant. 'The English,' Treitschke once told a class at Berlin, 'think Soap is Civilization.' Neatness is the outward sign of a conscious Respectability, and Respectability is the name of that common level of behaviour which all families ought to reach and on which they can meet without disgust."
remaining wedded to natural roles.” The attitude of these early activists toward “womanly and domestic employment” was that of Shirley’s Rose Yorke: “I will do that, and then I will do more” (S, p. 386). If this position embodies a conflict between revolt and duty, the conflict, like the position, is not unique to Jane. More difficult to explain, however, is the apparent contradiction between Jane’s struggle for self-assertion and her habit of self-denial. In Woman’s Mission (1899), the great celebrant of the home as woman’s sphere, Sarah Lewis, named “renunciation of self” as “the one quality on which women’s value and influence depend,” while John Stuart Mill, criticizing Victorian conventions of femininity, identified “exaggerated self-abnegation” as “the present artificial ideal of feminine character.” While not as self-effacing as Lucy Snowe of Villette, Jane prides herself on her plain dress and manners, her patience, her endurance, and her self-control; when, in rejecting Rochester’s proposal, she admonishes him that “we were born to strive and endure” (JE, p. 349), it may seem as though she has permitted the Brocklehurst in her to cut her off from the true path of enjoyment and fulfillment.

We have already seen, however, that Jane’s rejection of Rochester is as much self-assertion as self-denial—or rather, that it is self-assertion by means of self-denial, the path of pleasure being also the path of dependence and submission, the path of pain being that which leads her back to Rochester “independent” and her “own mistress” (JE, p. 459). In refusing temptation, then, Jane does not capitulate to patriarchy but subverts it; hers is the self-denial not of the Angel in the House but of the gritty entrepreneur. Brontë’s projection of herself in The Professor as William Crimsworth, that avatar of industry, perseverance, self-control, and self-reliance, is a similar subversion, as is, of course, her adoption of the name Currer Bell. The asceticism of the “Protestant ethic” has often served the spirit of patriarchy, as it does for Brocklehurst at Lowood, but Jane makes it serve another spirit, one tra-

ditionally associated with "manly" rather than "womanly" self-denial, the spirit of capitalism. Admittedly, Jane's wealth comes to her, in the end, through inheritance rather than industry. Yet perhaps no character in Victorian literature who inherits a fortune seems so thoroughly to have earned it. No wonder Eugène Forçade, in a review of Jane Eyre that Brontë found "one of the most able," claimed to feel all through the novel "the spirit of that Anglo-Saxon race, crude if you will—you Frenchmen who still imagine yourselves Athenians in 1848—but masculine, inured to suffering and hardship," and that this story of "an orphan, cast alone on the world and fighting a solitary battle" caused him to link Brontë with Daniel Defoe and Benjamin Franklin. 99

The echo of stoicism in Protestant asceticism reminds us that the association between self-mastery and masculinity has a history that stretches back to the identification of the warrior's honor with his strength and firmness. This association was memorably articulated in Cicero's "emphasis on self-control as a virtue of 'manly' strength" (Taylor, p. 153). 40 Stoicism itself had a direct influence on Smith, who attached great importance to the virtue of self-command. "The most perfect knowledge, if it is not supported by the most perfect self-command, will not always enable [a man] to do his duty" (TMS, p. 237). 41 This is because a man's "passions" may "seduce him to violate all the rules which he himself, in all his sober and cool hours, approves of" (TMS, p. 237). For Smith, the impartial spectator is responsible for "two different sets of virtues" (TMS, p. 23) that are clearly gendered: on the one hand, the "soft, the gentle, the amiable virtues, the virtues of candid condescension and indulgent humanity"; on the other, the "awful and respectable, the virtues of self-denial, of self-government, of that command of the passions which subjects all the movements of our nature to what our own dignity and honour, and the propriety of our own conduct, require" (TMS, p. 23). In the nineteenth century's formulation of this "dignity and honour" as self-respect, the connection with masculinity continued, as evidenced by Margaret Mylne's equation, quoted earlier, of women with the "social affections" and men with the "opposite qualities," self-respect and self-reliance. The idea that self-respect requires a sacrifice of seductive passion—that is, self-

99 Forçade's review is reprinted in Allott, pp. 100–104.
40 As Taylor emphasizes in his accompanying note, Cicero played up the origin of "virtue" in vir.
denial—which then catapults one free of socially oriented femininity into masculine self-reliance and independence, reverses the paradox we have already examined whereby self-respect, in requiring adherence to "general rules of morality" and the approval of an impartial spectator, binds one closely to fellow human beings and to communal standards of conduct. In its reversed form the paradox fits perfectly the entrepreneurial ideal's assumption that the road to economic and social liberation lies through the masculine-ascetic "work ethic," which is why Richard Cobden could make a disparaging contrast between the "maternal" charity of the squirearchy's women with "the masculine species of charity which would lead me to inculcate in the minds of the labouring classes the love of independence, the privilege of self-respect, the disdain of being patronized or petted, the desire to accumulate and the ambition to rise" (quoted in Perkin, pp. 224–25). In refusing to stay with Rochester, Jane acts out the paradox in both directions, maintaining self-respect by preserving respectability and exhibiting "manly" self-assertion by means of stoic self-denial. Indeed, through Jane's exercise of Smith's "awful and respectable" virtues at the moral climax of her narrative, as through Rochester's readiness to be seduced by passion, Brontë anticipates the gender reversal that will leave a crippled Rochester Jane's dependent at the novel's end. It may seem ironically prophetic, in retrospect, that at Lowood Institution "the girls . . . were all called by their surnames, as boys are elsewhere" (JE, p. 85); for surely Brocklehurst never suspected that in teaching Jane to be a patient, self-denying young lady, he was helping to make a man of her.

For the "outcast" who is the typical Brontë "hero," writes Philip Mombberger, the self "presents itself as something given—an elusive, sensed 'treasure' of individuality within—and something to be achieved. This inmost sense of self must somehow be declared in interaction with the opposing world and, if it is to be fulfilled, must be recognized and supported by something in that world."42 Mombberger's is an impressive phenomenological reading of the Brontë fictive universe, but it disregards the social and historical situation in which Brontë's characters experience the tension between self and world. The dilemma Mombberger describes being precisely that of the modern self, the distinctive quality of Brontë's fiction, as opposed to much

other literature from the eighteenth century onward, lies in the facts that for Momberger represent a vague and mysterious "somehow" and "something"—as if it were incidental to Brontë's vision that the self she depicts might be a woman demanding to be "recognized and supported" by, among other things, the enfranchising and empowering institutions of society, or that this self might wish to "declare" itself in interaction with that society by obtaining social status or rewarding work.

The present essay has not only assumed the centrality of such facts but tried to establish the importance of another: the fact that Jane Eyre experienced the tension between self and world in part as the tension between internal and external approval that inhered in her ideal of self-respect. Connected with economic individualism, political liberalism, and nascent feminism, this ideal was not Jane's or Brontë's invention but a given of their historical moment. Much of what seems incongruous in their attitudes and actions may originate in their consistent commitment to this ideal: the combination of hostility to degrading domination, whether in the name of class or patriarchy, with individualist assumptions about poverty and anxious concern for bourgeois respectability; the mixture of flagrant scorn for unthinking moral conventionalism with an approach to sexual morality that lends considerable weight to established conventions; the simultaneous insistence on women's right to a "field for their efforts" and acceptance of certain traditional domestic virtues. It would make little sense to rule out other causes for these incongruities, which, as I suggested earlier, seem plainly overdetermined; and mixed allegiances, conflicting impulses, uncertainty, ambivalence, and other kinds of motivational dividedness must take their place among such causes, as they do in all human behavior. But no one could complain that Brontë criticism has failed to do these causes justice. On the contrary, it has done them so much justice that it now risks doing Jane and her author a serious injustice, either by underplaying their consistency or, worse, by using evidence of their duality to support dark suggestions of duplicity.

My emphasis on Jane's concern for self-respect raises two further questions that deserve at least brief attention. Do Jane's efforts to maintain self-respect strictly entail the configuration of social and moral attitudes embodied in her narrative? And how thoroughly, if at all, can the concept of self-respect be separated from the political and economic assumptions with which it was entangled at its birth? The first question is the easier to answer. If self-respect implies "respectability" in
some sense, it need not be the sense attached to it in the Victorian middle-class imagination. The meanings of respectable and respectability relevant to our discussion have, indeed, a history not much older than that of self-respect, and a glance at the OED reveals these meanings to be similarly equivocal about the matters of "character and social standing," capable of suggesting either the independence or the interdependence of these two attributes. From the nineteenth century to the present, such equivocations have perhaps been one measure of liberal society's simultaneous escape from and enthrallment by the definition of identity by class. We can see the power of that enthrallment, the difficulty of complete escape, in the fact that common English usage simply lacks a thoroughly class-neutral word to express the concept of respectworthiness. But difficulty is not impossibility, and neither the limitations of language nor the powerful coercive force of middle-class ideology absolutely barred Jane and her creator from stepping outside the specifically bourgeois standard of respect-worthiness, with its attendant entrepreneurial ideal, its hidebound notions of sexual propriety, and its patriarchal assumptions about feminine domestic responsibility. We have seen, in fact, how Brontë managed to play one aspect of the standard against another, using the entrepreneurial ideal to challenge gender stereotypes; she could have taken this challenge much farther, as the example of her own friends Harriet Martineau and Mary Taylor illustrates. It would be erroneous to conclude, then, that the ideal of self-respect gave Jane and Brontë no choice but to seek respect by the canons of bourgeois respectability. Yet it is important to acknowledge that a logic one may understand and, at times, respect stands behind their choice, even while recognizing the possibility and asserting the preferability of other logics, with more power to promote liberation and reduce enthrallment.

If we can detach the concept of self-respect from the entrepreneurial ideal, we can do the same for the related concepts of self-help and self-reliance, and we can shake this whole triad loose from the specific economic order that their effective manipulation did so much to uphold. From the very beginning, their connection with that order was in any case incomplete. Within the working-class alternative to the entrepreneurial ideal, an alternative in which the model society was "an equalitarian one based on labour and co-operation," the model citizen remained, according to Harold Perkin, the "productive, independent worker" (p. 231). Asa Briggs has observed that "the creed of self-help grew out of radicalism and was not designed as an antidote to it"
and has further noted the appeal that the bible of this creed, Samuel
Smiles’s *Self-Help*, had for at least one socialist reader. Indeed, despite
the ideological purposes that these ideas were made to serve, they
seem to have contained the same subversive potential toward capital-
ism that the feminine ideal of self-denial did toward patriarchy.
Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated how an institution like the Victo-
rian Sunday school, for all its tendency to promote the “moral hege-
mony” of the middle class, could, through its very “culture of disci-
pline, self-respect, and improvement” and its emphasis on “learning,
self-improvement, and respectability,” ironically help the working class
“wage the battle for social justice and political equality.”

The connection between self-respect and economic individualism is
thus only historical, not theoretical. It would be harder to say the same
of the tie binding self-respect to a central assumption of political liberal-
amism, the assumption that individuals are capable of making moral
choices through the exercise of “self-responsible reason” and are enti-
tled to broad freedom in using this capacity. The concept of self-
respect has meaning only if we regard the self as a possible object of
knowledge and a genuine cause of action, and only if its ability to act is
not unduly hindered by external authority. It must exist to be
respected, and there is no point in respecting it if it lacks the power to
choose. Yet Adam Smith’s moral thought and Jane Eyre’s plight cer-
tainly raise questions about the liberal assumption that this self exists
prior to and distinct from the various communities of which it forms a
part; for self-knowledge, self-judgment, and self-respect, as both por-
tray them, are acts that point toward the essential continuity between
private experience and our life together in society—that life which,
through collective determinations of value, supplies the possibility of
self-awareness.

In Charlotte Brontë’s England, of course, women were denied not
only the exercise of self-responsible reason but a significant voice in the
collective determinations of value that shaped their very sense of who
they were. The ever-debated, always shifting public consensus that dis-
criminates the respect-worthy from the contemptible in our assump-
tions and behavior, setting the terms for the individual’s self-respect,
was only beginning to feel the pressure of their arguments and to be set, in consequence, on a more rational course. In such a society as this, the "strange contrasts" of Jane Eyre should not seem strange at all.

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