



Title	Elinor's Moral Code in Barton-Delaford Community
Author(s)	Yoshino, Asako
Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 2006, 45, p. 55-68
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/25323
rights	
Note	

The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

Elinor's Moral Code in Barton-Delaforde Community

Asako Yoshino

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is a story about two sisters, Elinor and Marianne, who do not have any prospects to inherit properties except 1,000 pounds each from their father. After their father's death, Elinor and Marianne have to move out from their original residence, and their future will change, depending on the choices of their future husbands because of their limited financial resource and unstable social positions.

The story starts from the decisive change of sisters' lives by the death of their father; they lose the legal right to live in their original house when their brother's family moves in. Therefore, Elinor, Marianne, and other family members have to move to Barton and start new lives there. The plot, therefore, focuses on the process of choosing their husband after Barton becomes the main stage. At the same time, the sisters' behaviors which come from their contrastive perspectives also take a significant role in the story.

Being away from Norland Park, Elinor and Marianne have to abandon the environment which they were familiar with and leave the respected position as members of an upper middle class family. In Barton, however, they cultivate relationships with people who belong to middle or high social class: Sir John Middleton and his wife, Mrs. Jennings, and Colonel Brandon. In other words, Elinor and Marianne participate in a new community which can be called Barton-Delaforde community. Despite the fact that they are originally from upper middle class and have

connection with that class in Barton-Delaforde community, they are in an ambiguous position because they have no properties other than humble inheritance.

Barton-Delaforde community looks stable but social order within it has fluidity. Not a few people come from outside of the community, such as Dashwood family, John Willoughby, Steele sisters, and Palmer family. These people from outside of Barton-Delaforde community change human relationships and social order of the community. The change of the community does not happen preferably; Barton-Delaforde community has possibility to have its social order disturbed. John Willoughby comes to Barton-Delaforde community from outside and breaks its moral code and social order, taking careless attitude toward Marianne and others. In addition, Lucy Steele ignores the morality of the community, trying to climb up the social ladder ambitiously.

From the first part of *Sense and Sensibility*, readers can recognize that Elinor and Marianne are characters who are contrastive because the narrator introduced them, comparing both characters at the same time. In addition, their same financial conditions and abilities show that their different characters and behavior bring them into comparative results:

Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding and coolness of judgment which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counselor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them . . . Marianne's abilities were in many respects quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever,

but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. (6)

Moreover, because of their same sex, they share the condition which they have no option for making their lives by taking special occupations. Accordingly, their choices of the spouses are significant for their lives. Elinor and Marianne depend on their future husband to leave their unstable financial situation.

Although Elinor and Marianne the characters which can be contrasted throughout the story, I regard Elinor as the main character who takes a central position. Although the story focuses on both Elinor and Marianne, Elinor takes a more significant role. In Dashwood family, Elinor is the one whom the mother asks opinions and mentally depends on after Mr. Dashwood dies. In addition, Elinor is always taking a role to observe and analyze critically others' remarks and behaviors. Other than that, Elinor's central role is proved by the fact that her estimations are correct in most of the cases.

Marilyn Butler points out that Elinor is taking the most significant role in *Sense and Sensibility*, and that she governs the story. Also, Butler calls this novel the "introspective novel" because of a lot of descriptions from Elinor's insight without being absorbed in self consciousness.

Sense and Sensibility is, like *Mansfield Park* after it, an introspective novel. And yet it is clearly important to recognize that both are introspective only within closely defined limits. The inner life led by Elinor, and later by Fanny, is the dominant medium of the novel, but it is entirely distinct from the irrational and emotional states which the post-Romantic reader thinks of as 'consciousness.' (Butler 190)

Elinor has moral code which requires conscious and careful

attitude to live in the public society, and she brings her moral code into Barton-Delaforde community. Though Elinor comes from outside and does not take action aggressively, she gets central role as a supervisor to maintain moral code. She is conscious of whether others follow her moral code; she gives advices to take thoughtful behavior considering others to Marianne and watches over Marianne and Willoughby's careless attitude. Also, she tries to figure out what happened to others if they have hidden secrets.

Being self reflective, furthermore, Elinor pays careful attention to others and tries to understand their intentions. While considering others, Elinor draws the line between her inner self and outer society and does not cling to the former one. Elinor takes objective point of view to watch others; she does not forget to be objective even toward Edward, her lover. Furthermore, it is noticeable that Elinor's estimation is correct throughout the story. Even if her idea looks wrong at once, it finally appears that her decision was correct at the end of the story. In other words, Elinor's perspective, estimation, and way of thinking are equal to the whole plot; she is the character whose position is the most close to the author. Although Elinor takes unstable position, financially and socially, her perspective toward other characters is stable and trustful. As the story goes on, readers can recognize that Elinor sets the trustworthy moral code within Barton-Delaforde community. Therefore, people who do not follow Elinor's moral code can be regarded as traitors. There are three people who resist Elinor's moral code: Marianne, Willoughby, and Lucy.

Elinor criticizes behaviors and thoughts which are going extreme without consideration of others because selfishness is not admitted in her moral code. However, Marianne ignores Elinor's advice to restrain herself from being selfish. As a result,

Marianne withdraws critical comments from Elinor:

There are inconveniences attending such feelings as Marianne's which all the charms of enthusiasm and ignorance of the world cannot atone for. Her systems have all the unfortunate tendency of setting propriety at nought; and a better acquaintance with the world is what I look forward to as her greatest possible advantage. (56)

Elinor, as a moral keeper, is apprehensive about Marianne's "enthusiasm" because her moral code values moderation and careful attitude toward others.

Like Marianne, Willoughby does not care about others although his situation does not allow him to do; Willoughby's prospect of having upper class life relies heavily on the decision of Mrs. Smith, his aunt, to give property to him. Willoughby does not confirm whether he can inherit his aunt's fortune so he has to be cautious of his behavior. However, Willoughby does not stop his selfish attitude and follow Elinor's moral code, hiding his problems with an amiable manner.

Since Willoughby takes cheerful attitude, he is welcomed by Barton-Delaforde community and regarded by community members as Marianne's prospective fiancé. Among all, Dashwood family welcomes him as a family member. Being often with Willoughby and attracted to him, Marianne is affected by him. Marianne did not have any opinion of Colonel Brandon, but she criticizes him after she is in an intimate relationship with Willoughby:

"Brandon is just the kind of man," said Willoughby one day when they were talking of him together, "whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to."

"That is exactly what I think of him," cried Marianne. (50)

Willoughby and Marianne do not have preferable opinions of Colonel Brandon, although there are no episodes which give the Willoughby and Marianne the reasons to have ill remarks about Colonel Brandon:

"I (Willoughby) do not dislike him. I consider him, on the contrary, as a very respectable man, who has everybody's good word and nobody's notice; who has more money than he spend, more time than he knows how to employ, and two new coats every year."

"Add to which," cried Marianne, "that he has neither genius, taste, nor spirit. (51)

Elinor, on the contrary, respects Colonel Brandon and sympathizes with him who has desperate admiration toward Marianne. Moreover, Elinor regards the character of Colonel Brandon as trustworthy: "The comfort of such a friend at that moment as Colonel Brandon . . . a companion whose judgment would guide, whose attendance must relieve, and whose friendship might soothe her" (311-12).

People are divided into two groups: one agrees what Colonel Brandon says and behaves and the other disagrees with Colonel Brandon. There is a confrontation between two groups, although their disagreement does not show up clearly because Elinor avoids dispute. Because Elinor always agrees Colonel Brandon's remarks and sympathizes with him, Colonel Brandon follows Elinor's moral code. Oppositely, Marianne and Willoughby, who do not follow Elinor's perspective, become traitors of her moral code.

Colonel Brandon is the one who has an estate at Delaford,

getting respected from neighbors. Particularly, in Barton-Delaforde community, he is trusted by Sir John Middleton, who is also an owner of estate in the community. Like Sir John Middleton, as an owner of estate, Colonel Brandon also has responsibility for taking care of others, and his strong leadership appears as a form of paternity in Barton-Delaforde community. Colonel Brandon's paternity shows up typically when people go to Whitwell for picnic: the group from Barton-Delaforde community cannot enter the park without Colonel Brandon himself, and after he left the group for rescuing Eliza, the group is not organized.

On the other hand, having no dependable home and guardian, Willoughby is almost an orphan, and his social position is unstable. As an orphan, Willoughby has special interest toward a house. He goes to see Mrs. Smith's house with Marianne after they canceled going to Whitwell. Marianne, who is influenced by Willoughby, sees the house with a lot of interests and reports Elinor what she saw:

... but Mr. Willoughby wanted particularly to show me the place; and it is a charming house I assure you. There is one remarkably pretty sitting-room upstairs of a nice comfortable size for constant use, and with modern furniture it would be delightful. It is a corner room, and has windows on two sides. On one side you look across the bowling-green, behind the house to a beautiful hanging wood and on the other you have a view of the church and village, and beyond them, of those fine bold hills that we have so often admired. (69)

Though Marianne is strongly impressed by Mrs. Smith's house, the act of seeing the house only with Willoughby is out of common sense and selfish attitude without careful consideration of others. The fact that Marianne and Willoughby do not follow

Elinor's moral code shows up in their behavior.

Ignoring social practice, Willoughby does not follow Elinor's moral code; he does not engage with Marianne despite showing off their intimate relationship without paying attention to others. People thought that Willoughby and Marianne should be engaged because of their intimacy, but they were not engaged actually. As Elinor mentioned to Marianne, showing extreme intimacy is not appropriate in Elinor's moral code. Accordingly, taking Marianne's hair is beyond Elinor's moral code and it exceeds the social practice of Barton-Delaforde community.

Although Marianne is originally emotional, her extreme attitude appears when she is with Willoughby, that is, Marianne's problematical attitudes are triggered by her intimate relationship with him. With Willoughby, Marianne despises Colonel Brandon without clear reasons, gives her hair to unengaged partner, goes to see Mrs. Smith's house. Also, it is noticeable that Marianne does her problematical attitude, hiding from Elinor, the keeper of firm moral code.

Lucy Steele is also a character who ignores Elinor's moral code and disturbs the social order of Barton-Delaforde community. Lucy has neither a social position nor property as Mrs. Jennings says "She has next to nothing herself" (260). However, Lucy is not satisfied with her social class. She tries to climb the social ladder and find a family with large property to depend on. Therefore, she has an interest in Norland as a place she might be related to and asks Elinor about it when they meet for the first time. Although Lucy insists that her engagement with Edward comes from her affection, it is clear that she will get advantages by marrying a man from higher social class. Also, Lucy's flattery toward Edward's mother and sister comes from her ambition to be admitted into their class. What she concerns about her marriage is, therefore, whether she is accepted by his

family.

Elinor does not have good impression about Lucy even before Elinor gets to know the engagement between Lucy and Edward: "Elinor was not blinded by the beauty of the shrewd look of the youngest to her want of real elegance and artlessness, she left the house without any wish of knowing them better" (124). Elinor thinks that Lucy is blamable because of her shrewd attitude without thoughtfulness. She is sympathetic to Edward when the engagement looks unavoidable rather than being depressed: "Edward will marry Lucy; he will marry a woman superior in person and understanding to half her sex; and time and habit will teach him to forget that he ever thought another superior to her" (263). Lucy never gets a favor from Elinor. Because of her flattery and ambition, Lucy is out of Elinor's moral code.

Willoughby, Marianne, and Lucy resist the Barton-Delaforde community which Elinor governs spiritually. All of three oppose Elinor's moral code and try to act differently from it. Marianne, however, admits her thoughtless attitude after she had disease which brought her into a crisis of death.

"Do not, my dearest Elinor, let your kindness defend what I know your judgment must censure. My illness has made me think. It has given me leisure and calmness for serious recollection. Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I was perfectly able to reflect. . . 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." (345)

Although Marianne did not listen to Elinor's opinion at first, Marianne admits her faults and declares her intention to follow Elinor's moral code. Marianne's change of thought comes from her recognition that her faults are caused by not following Elinor's advice; Elinor suggests that Marianne and Willoughby

should not behave as they wish without paying attention to others, but they ignore Elinor's opinion. After having serious disease, Marianne admits that her behavior went extreme with no concerns for conventions and others' responses.

Willoughby chose to leave Marianne to marry Mrs. Gray who has large fortune. Willoughby does not follow Elinor's moral code, not only showing off his intimate relationship with Marianne without engagement but also behaving selfishly to leave Eliza in the past. However, Willoughby regrets his decision for choosing prosperity rather than moderate living with Marianne. Willoughby's repentance and agony for leaving Marianne and continuing harsh married life can be regarded as punishment for not following Elinor's moral code.

On the other hand, Barton-Delaforde community is kept safe after Willoughby left there. Once the community faces the emergent situation, its order is collapsed by Willoughby who breaks the community's implied moral code and degrades community's authority, Colonel Brandon. However, the community is saved when Willoughby left, and the social order is recovered.

In addition, Lucy leaves Barton-Delaforde community and Edward, marrying Edward's brother, Robert, whose personality is inferior to Edward. By marrying Robert, she succeeds in getting into high class and finds a house which she can depend on:

Lucy became as necessary to Mrs. Ferrars as either Robert or Fanny; and while Edward was never cordially forgiven for having once intended to marry her, and Elinor, though superior to her in fortune and birth, was spoken of as an intruder, she was in everything considered, and always openly acknowledged, to be a favourite child. (377)

Except Edward, Ferrars family members are depicted as selfish and arrogant whose characters oppose Elinor's value; the policy

of Ferrars family and Elinor's moral do not share anything. Therefore, Ferrars family does not accept Elinor and her moral code, but it accepts Lucy instead and admits her as a member of the family. Regardless of little property and low social position, Lucy was admitted because of her flattering attitude which Elinor refuses based on her moral code. Instead of getting married to Edward and living in Delaford, Lucy chose Ferrars's family which is more suitable to fulfill her ambition of a person from socially unstable family. Because of Lucy's choice of another community, therefore, Barton-Delaford community and Elinor's moral code is saved after Lucy left there. Moreover, Elinor's moral code is strengthened when she married Edward whose personality Elinor highly evaluates. Although Edward and Elinor had social and economical instabilities, they can solve the problem by accepting the offer from Colonel Brandon, who agrees Elinor's moral code, to live in the rectory of Delaford. Then the rectory becomes the place where Elinor strengthens her moral code, supervising morality of neighbors. Furthermore, Elinor's moral code is strengthened also by marriage between Marianne and Colonel Brandon and living in the same community, sharing the moral code.

Finally, both Elinor and Marianne can gain stability after they experienced unstable social position and economical condition. Raymond Williams points out the distribution of property which Austen will do for her main characters at the end of the stories:

She (Austen) makes settlements, alone, against all the odds, like some supernatural lawyer, in terms of that exact proportion to moral worth which could assure the continuity of the general formula. (Williams 57)

As Williams insists, Austen's heroines can gain social and economical stabilities as rewards for keeping or acquiring moral

codes which Austen expects them to have. So, Marianne can have a reward as a result of her reflection and change of mind, and Elinor can have it as a result of her consistent attitude of maintaining the high moral value.

Moreover, Tony Tanner insists that the main theme of *Sense and Sensibility* is socially unstable characters and the stability of society:

Indeed, the drama precipitated by the tension between the potential instability of the individual and the required stabilities of society is in some ways as much the subject of this novel as it is of more celebrated fictions concerned with the opposition between individual energy and social structures. (Tanner 214)

Considering Tanner's insistence, it is important to focus on how unstable characters are related to social structure. In *Sense and Sensibility*, therefore, the mainstream of story is how socially unstable Elinor and Marianne gain stability through making efforts to polish and maintain their morality. As a result of their efforts, then, they finally can be involved in the ideal society by marriage.

Also, *Sense and Sensibility* contains the story plot which Elinor who has admirable personality gets the reward of the ideal husband and a right to be officially involved in society. Gary Kelly writes about the interrelationship between characters' personality and the plot in Austen's works:

The turning point also discloses that merit and will alone cannot guarantee happiness, however; circumstances must also be propitious. This linking of character and plot could be read as an optimistic belief in the ultimate defeat of the selfish and self-serving and the ultimate triumph of the

selfless and self-sacrificing. (Kelly 164)

As Kelly says, therefore, the characters who meet Austen's moral standard are finally saved even though they face crisis by story plots. Austen gives her characters hardships but she never fails to give them rewards at the end.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the characters are saved by plot at the final part of the story; Elinor and Edward are united, though it once looked totally impossible when the secret of past engagement between Lucy and Edward is disclosed. Elinor's future is saved when Lucy's elopement with other person and Edward becomes free. Elinor flees from unstable social position and gets a reward of her thoughtful attitude at the end. Barton-Delaforde community is also saved to be left by Lucy.

After all, Elinor governs the inner world of the story, being protected by the writer Austen. In addition, the wedding of two couples reformats Barton-Delaforde community and leads the community into stable condition. Finally, Elinor succeeds in setting her moral code as a standard of the community.

Works Cited

- Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. Ed. R. W. Chapman. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1933.
- Butler, Marilyn. *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Edgecombe, Rodney. "Change and Fixity in *Sense and Sensibility*." *Studies in English Literature* 41 (2001): 605-622.
- Kelly, Gary. "Religion and Politics." *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Ed. Juliet McMaster. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 149-169.
- Poobey, Mary. "*Sense and Sensibility*." *Jane Austen Critical Assessments*. Vol. 3. Ed. Ian Littlewood. Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998. 222-238.
- Tanner, Tony. "From 'Introduction' to *Sense and Sensibility*." *Jane Austen Critical Assessments*. Vol. 3. Ed. Ian Littlewood. Mountfield: Helm

Information, 1998. 212-221.

Williams, Raymond. "From 'Jane Austen and Social History.'" *Jane Austen Critical Assessments*. Vol. 2. Ed. Ian Littlewood. Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998. 54-58.

Zimmerman, Everett. "Admiring Pope No More Than Is Proper: *Sense and Sensibility*." *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*. Ed. John Halperin. Cambridge; Cambridge UP, 1975. 112-122.