An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of our Ideas of Beauty, etc. eBook

An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of our Ideas of Beauty, etc.

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The Augustan Reprint Society

Frances Reynolds

An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty, etc. (1785)

With an Introduction by James L. Clifford

Publication 27

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University of California
1951

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early nineteenth century it has been known that Frances Reynolds, the sister of Sir Joshua, was the author of an essay on taste, which she had printed but did not publish. Yet persistent search failed to turn up a single copy. It remained one of those lost pieces which every research scholar hoped someday to discover.

In 1935 it appeared that the search was over. Among some manuscripts of Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi, long hidden in Wales, was found a printed copy of an anonymous *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Taste, and of the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty*, which seemed to be the lost essay. The date was correct; the *Enquiry* was dedicated to Mrs. Montagu; it contained a quotation from Dr. Johnson; and, best of all, there was attached to the pamphlet a copy (in an unidentified handwriting) of Johnson?s well-known letter to Miss Reynolds concerning her essay.

Only one thing stood squarely in the way of the identification. James Northcote in his *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, published in 1818 (II, 116-19), after describing Johnson?s connection with the manuscript, gives two pages of short excerpts. Most of the quotations are general statements such as ?Dress is the strong indication of the moral character? or ?The fine arts comprehend all that is excellent in the moral system, and, at the same time, open every path that tends to the corruption of moral excellence.? Unfortunately none of these excerpts appears directly in the *Enquiry*. Although some of the ideas are similar, the wording and specific details are different. By no stretch of the imagination could they be considered to come from the same piece. Thus Northcote blocked the solution of the mystery for nearly fifteen years.

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Recently, however, evidence has turned up which makes the attribution a certainty. It is now obvious that Northcote must have been mistaken in the source of his quotations. Writing as he did many years after the events he was describing, Northcote either had found a copy of the first draft of Miss Reynolds? essay, or erroneously quoted from another anonymous piece which he assumed was by Miss Reynolds. In any event he was not quoting from the final version which she wished the world to see.

The story of Miss Reynolds? attempts to publish her essay can at last be pieced together from various bits of evidence, some hitherto unpublished. Just when the essay was written is uncertain. All that we know is that a preliminary version was submitted to the rigorous criticism of Dr. Johnson in 1781. Johnson, who had corrected some of her verses in red ink the year before, commented on 21 July 1781:

> There is in these such force of comprehension, and such nicety of observation as Locke or Pascal might be proud of. This I say with intention to have you think that I speak my opinion.

They cannot however be printed in their present state. Many of your notions seem not very clear in your own mind, many are not sufficiently developed and expanded for the common reader; the expression almost every where wants to be made clearer and smoother. You may by revisal and improvement make it a very elegant and curious work.[1]

But Miss Reynolds was not easily discouraged, and Johnson wrote again on 8 April 1782:

Your work is full of very penetrating meditation, and very forcible sentiment. I read it with a full perception of the sublime, with wonder and terrour, but I cannot think of any profit from it; it seems not born to be popular.

Your system of the mental fabric is exceedingly obscure, and without more attention than will be willingly bestowed, is unintelligible. The Ideas of Beauty will be more easily understood, and are often charming. I was delighted with the different beauty of different ages.

I would make it produce something if I could but I have indeed no hope. If a Bookseller would buy it at all, as it must be published without a name, he would give nothing for it worth your acceptance.[2]

In passing it might be pointed out that this letter has previously not been associated with Miss Reynolds? essay on taste, largely because the available text of the letter has been so faulty. Where Johnson wrote ?The Ideas of Beauty,? obviously referring to the second section of the *Enquiry*, Croker, followed by G.B. Hill, printed ?The plans of Burnaby.? To this Hill added a note; ?Burnaby, I conjecture, was a character in the

book,? with the result that scholars have fruitlessly been searching ever since for the fictitious Mr. Burnaby, One more example of the dangers of using nineteenth-century transcripts!

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Evidently Johnson?s stringent objections temporarily halted her plans, for we hear nothing more about the essay for two years. Meanwhile, as appears from a later letter, she showed it to Bennett Langton, hoping in vain for his help. Nevertheless, she was determined to go ahead and print the work, even at her own expense. Johnson, still counted upon for aid, wrote to her on 12 April 1784:

I am not yet able to wait on you, but I can do your business commodiously enough. You must send me the copy to show the printer. If you will come to tea this afternoon we will talk together about it.[3]

On 30 April he commented further: ?Mr. Allen has looked over the papers and thinks one hundred copies will come to five pounds.? Something, however, made her suspicious of his advice, and on 28 May there came an end to Johnson?s connection with the matter. He wrote: ?I have returned your papers, and am glad that you laid aside the thought of printing them.?

But Miss Reynolds had no intention of permanently giving up her project. Instead she rewrote parts of the essay which had displeased her critics, and shortly after Johnson?s death proceeded to have 250 copies privately printed, with a dedication to Mrs. Montagu. With Johnson gone, ?The Queen of the Bluestockings? must have appeared the next best patron. That Mrs. Montagu, while no doubt flattered by the dedication, was herself not overly enthusiastic about the essay may be gathered from a letter written to her by Miss Reynolds on 12 July 1785. Miss Reynolds began by insisting that ?the slightest hint? of disapprobation on the part of Mrs. Montagu would ?consign the work to oblivion?; then continued:

I never did entertain any desire to publish it, tho I might to sell it. And my desire of printing it, originated from a motive which tho? vain I allow, is an natural vanity I wishd to leave behind me a respectable memorial of my existence, which I then flatterd myself this would be. Ten impressions or twenty at the most, were all I wishd to have taken off. Why I had so many as 250 was because Dr. Johnson advised me to print that number, and to sell them, to stand the sale of them was his expression, but I must do Dr. Johnson the justice to say, that, that advice was given me with a proviso that no person was in the secret but himself, for on my informing him to the contrary, he declined or seemd to decline the affair of getting them printed for me, which I perceiving sent to him for the manuscript, foolishly entertaining a slight suspicion which I much reproach myself for, that some other motives besides the want of merit in the work had influenced this change of behaviour. Unluckily from the beginning I made too great allowance in its favour, from an opinion I had con too of Dr. Johnsons being strongly prejudiced against womens literary productions. But I deceived myself. He was sincere, he judged justly of the work, and his opinion exactly corresponded with yours! [4]

Not that she regretted the cost of printing the 250 copies. That was a minor consideration. She concluded:

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If I ever should shew it to any person it will be to Mr. Langton, from a motive of wishing him to see the alteration I have made in it for the better, since he saw it, and as it is also since Dr. Johnson saw it, and particularly that part he most objected to, my belief that I had obviated that objection, is another apology for my printing it.

To this Mrs. Montagu returned a wordy and diffuse reply, commenting that ?having for many years past left off all metaphysical studies,? she was ?not a competent judge of any work on subjects of that nature,? yet insisting that she doubted if contemporary readers would like it. It was obvious that Mrs. Montagu refused to be a party to further dissemination of the printed copies. And there the matter rested for almost three more years.

The wish to have some of the copies read by the general public proved too strong, and on 15 April 1788 Miss Reynolds wrote again to Mrs. Montagu, asking her aid in recovering a letter, or transcription of a letter, of Johnson?s:

It is of great importance to me the recovery of this letter particularly so as I perceive I must not presume to hope for the only patronage that could countervail the loss of Dr. Johnsons, should I ever be induced to publish the work. I do not mean that I would publish the letter, but that the testimony it conveys of Dr. Johnsons approbation, would be highly advantageous to me in the disposal of the copy to a Bookseller, indeed *approbation* is an improper Word, inadequate to the praises he bestows on the work, I durst not repeat his expressions tho I well remember them. Some friendly strictures also the letter contained, all these I remember I transcribed verbatim in a letter I sent to you in the beginning of the year 82. they begin

> Many of your notions seem not to be very clear in your own imagination....[5]

It was not until the next year that with the help of James Northcote she finally made active preparations to have the work published. As Miss Reynolds wrote to Mrs. Montagu on 5 February,

I forgot to say that Mr. Nurse recommended Mr. Northcote to a Mr. Bladen in Paternoster Row for a Publisher, but I sent in the utmost haste to him to prevent his taking any steps towards so disgraceful a place as I imagine that to be so incongruous. [6]

In preparation for the new printing, Miss Reynolds had further revised her essay, and in order to enhance the value of the piece for general readers she decided to add three letters from Johnson of which she chanced to have copies. Totally unconnected with the essay, one was to Sir Joseph Banks concerning the motto for his goat?s collar; the others concerned the unfortunate Dr. Dodd. But before going ahead she again asked the advice of her patroness. Mrs. Montagu replied:

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I do not see that there is any objection to publishing the 3 letters, but I own I think Dr Johnson judges too lightly of the crime of forgery ... I believe the tenderness of sentiment Dr Johnson expresses for Dr Dodd in his afflictions will do him honour in the eyes of the Publick, & therefore as his friend you may with propriety publish the letters. [7]

Mrs. Montagu concluded, ?I wish some name that would do more honour to your work was to appear in the dedication, but to be presented to the publick with such a mark of Mrs Reynolds? friendly regard, will certainly be esteemed an honour....?

Sometime between February and July 1789 the *Enquiry* was reprinted, this time by J. Smeeton (copies of this version may be found in the Bodleian Library and the Library of Congress). The terminal date for the reprinting is established by the fact that the three letters of Johnson which were appended to the essay were reprinted without comment in the July issue of the *European Magazine*.

Just where Miss Reynolds secured copies of the Johnson letters is not certain. It is suggestive, however, that the letter to Banks had originally been sent under cover to Sir Joshua Reynolds and that Sir Joshua?s copy is now among the Boswell papers at Yale University. There would have been ample opportunity for Frances Reynolds also to have secured a copy. And the letter to Charles Jenkinson of 20 June 1777 and to Dr. Dodd of 26 June were of the sort that an enterprising lady might well have wheedled copies from the Doctor. The important point is that the inclusion of the letters in the 1789 printing of the *Enquiry* provides incontrovertible proof of Miss Reynolds? connection with the piece.

For this second printing the entire pamphlet was reset, with numerous minor changes of wording and punctuation, but with no major alterations in meaning. In general the textual improvements are such as a bluestocking lady might well wish to make. It will be noted that on pages 25 and 49 of the copy here reproduced someone has made minor changes in wording in ink. These corrections are made in the later printing. Moreover, at the end of the 1789 version there is an errata list, indicating three alterations from the 1785 text which were mistakes. The Dedication remained unchanged, but the geometrical illustration was now placed facing the beginning of Chapter I.

The *Enquiry* was written in what is now recognized as one of the most exciting periods in the history of aesthetics, the late eighteenth century being a crucial point in the gradual shift from absolute classical standards to the relative approaches of the next age. Most of the important thinkers of the day?Hume, Burke, Lord Kames, Adam Smith, among others?were thinking deeply about the problem of taste. And if Miss Reynolds? essay is not one of the most perceptive of the discussions, it is at least one of the liveliest.

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In brief, the *Enquiry* is what one might expect from an intelligent amateur, from one not a professional writer, yet one who has given much thought to the problems of aesthetics. Of course, many of the ideas are derivative, with echoes of the ?moral sense? of Hutcheson, the ?line of grace? of Hogarth, and the terrible sublime of Burke. The three divisions of the essay?the development of a mental system, the origin of our ideas of Beauty, and the analysis of taste?follow the customary pattern of eighteenth-century discussions. Yet the piece is no slavish refurbishing of old phrases. It is packed with fresh arguments and novel suggestions. If these are not always completely coherent or logical, they do represent original thinking.

Twentieth-century readers may be astonished by some of the ideas: witness the claim that Negroes could never arrive at true taste, because their eyes were so accustomed to objects diametrically opposite to taste. As a further example of Miss Reynolds? occasionally muddled thinking there is the development of her initial assumption. While the groundwork of man is perfection, this perfection has been blemished and man is impelled to recapture it in the sublime. Yet instead of analyzing this impulse, Miss Reynolds appears to take it for granted. Nor does she consider how perfection is to be achieved in taste, preferring to conclude with a diatribe in the manner of Rousseau on the depravity of the times and the corrupting effect of the arts. (For this and many of the following comments I am indebted to Mr. Ralph Cohen of the College of the City of New York.)

The cause of some of the ambiguities in her discussion may perhaps be traced to a rather careless use of terms. At one time ?instinct? or ?impulsion,? the moral force driving man toward perfection, is a potentiality developed by cultivation, and at another a force that is created by cultivation. Although the sublime is the apex of her mathematically-definite program and is a moral quality attained by the few, every human being has his point of sublimity in the idea of a Supreme Being. On the one hand, beauty is a preconceived idea in the human species; on the other it is not preconceived, but developed. Finally, the rules of art are perceptions of moral virtue, yet art which exhibits these rules can corrupt.

It is easy to pick flaws in Miss Reynolds? thinking, for the lack of sustained logic which Johnson early recognized is apparent at every turn. Yet for students of the history of ideas the *Enquiry* contains much of interest. As a painter, Miss Reynolds throughout stresses the visual, a concentration which leads her to several valuable insights. She divides form into two categories, masculine and feminine, but makes a novel use of these Ciceronian divisions. All non-human objects?flowers, animals, *etc*.?are seen as exhibiting male or female attributes. It might almost be said that with this anthropomorphic approach she is attempting to develop a ?philosophical? basis for the pathetic fallacy. Furthermore, if the human is used to measure beauty in the non-human, the implication is that man, not God, is the measure of beauty. By setting up man as the mediator between the material and the divine, she points to the concentration in the next century on human values.

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When discussing the *Enquiry* in his book on the *Sublime*, Samuel Monk pointed out certain other tendencies which fore-shadow the coming Romantic revolt. This shift may also be noted in Miss Reynolds? extension of countenance, the reflection of internal virtue, to mean ?form,? and the extension of internal virtue to mean ?disposition,? ? object,? or content. In developing this form-content division, she stumbles on a key criticism of associationism: ?From association of ideas, any object may be pleasing, though absolutely devoid of beauty, and displeasing with it. The form is *then* out of the question; it is some *real* good or evil, with which the object, but not its form, is associated.? This notion that associationism leads away from the work of art as such is a perceptive comment. Her notion that form and disposition (or content) must correspond in order to give aesthetic pleasure suggests, though the terms are different, certain of Coleridge?s basic ideas.

One other point might be stressed: Miss Reynolds takes an extreme moralistic position toward the arts. Again and again it is insisted that taste and beauty are moral attributes, not purely aesthetic concepts. Chapter II ends with the ringing statement: ?Of this I am certain, that true refinement is the effect of true virtue; that virtue is truth, and good; and that beauty dwells in them, and they in her.? And the next chapter begins: ?Taste seems to be an inherent impulsive tendency of the soul towards true good.? On the other hand, she sees that the arts are not to be encouraged because such encouragement is apt to lead to the destruction of moral virtue?the desire for fame and wealth. The value of art as education is dismissed as of importance only to the few; the dangers of encouragement will imperil the many. ?Though the arts are thus beneficial to the growing principles of taste, respecting a few individuals, it is well known that their establishment in every nation has had a contrary effect on the community in general....?

To conclude: despite its many deficiencies Frances Reynolds? *Enquiry* is worth reading. It serves admirably to mirror the conflicting eighteenth-century theories out of which our own aesthetic concepts have been formed.

James L. Clifford
Columbia University

Notes to the Introduction

1. *Letters*, II, 223-24; corrected from original letter in possession of Professor F.W. Hilles of Yale University, who has given invaluable aid in the present investigation.

2. *Letters*, II, 249-50, corrected from the original by Dr. R.W. Chapman.

3. Copy in possession of Mrs. Doreen Ashworth, Windlesham, Surrey.

4. Original in Huntington Library.

5. Original in possession of Mrs. Ashworth.
6. Rough draft in possession of Mrs. Ashworth.
7. Original in possession of Professor F.W. Hilles.

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AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES of TASTE, AND OF THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS of BEAUTY, &c.

Sunt certi denique fines,
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum.
HOR.

To Mrs. MONTAGU.

MADAM,

Were I not prompted by gratitude, admiration, and affection, to dedicate to you the best produce of my abilities, which I imagine this to be, yet, as the subject, of which it particularly treats, is moral excellence, the universal voice of mankind, with whom your very name is synonymous with virtue itself, must plead my apology for taking this liberty. Besides, madam, it was natural for me, as an author, to with to avail myself of the advantage, which this address affords me, of prepossessing the minds of my readers with an example of that perfection to which all my arguments tend, as a preparative, or aid, to their better comprehending my meaning.

The influence of virtue is every way beneficial! Your character, not only secures me from all imputation of flattery, but this public avowal of my admiration of its excellence conveys an honourable testimony of the consistency of my principles; having endeavoured to inculcate, that the love and esteem of true virtue is true honour. And I may add, that the sweet gratification I feel, in the indulging the strongest and best propension of my nature, in thus expatiating in its praise, is true pleasure, true happiness.

I am, Madam,

Your obliged,

Most obedient,

And most humble, servant,

The AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I.

A SKETCH of the MENTAL SYSTEM respecting our Perceptions of Taste, &c.

The mind of man, introspecting itself, seems, as it were, (in conjunction with the inscrutable principles of nature,) placed in the central point of the creation: from whence, impelled by her energetic powers and illumined by her light, the intellectual faculties, like rays, shoot forth in direct tendency to their ultimate point of perfection; and, as they advance, each individual mind imperceptibly imbibes the influence and light of each, and is by this imbibition alone enabled to approach it.

But, though the light of nature and of reason direct the human mind to perfection, or true good, yet, being in its progress perpetually impeded by adventitious causes, casual occurrences, &c. &c. which induce false opinions of good and evil, its progressive powers generally stop at a middle point between mere uncultivated nature and perfection, a medium which constitutes what we call common sense, and which, in degree, seems as distant from the perfection of the mental faculties as common form is from the perfection of form, *beauty*.

[Illustration:

SUBLIMITY.
|
GRACE
|
BEAUTY | TRUTH
|
COMMON SENSE | COMMON FORM
|
NATURE]

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On meditating on this subject, and marking the progressive stages or degrees of human excellence, the great leading general truths, or mental rests, as I may call them, *the common, the beautiful, the graceful, and the sublime*, I have been naturally led to form a kind of diagrammatic representation of their respective distances, &c. &c. which I present to my reader on the opposite page, requesting him to refer to it now and then as he goes on, in order to facilitate his comprehension of my meaning.

And here it may be necessary to premise, that, however whimsical and absurd this delineation may appear to my reader, something analogous to the thought may be found in the works of many eminent philosophers, particularly in those of Bacon[A] and of Locke:[B] the latter suggesting that the whole system of morality might be reduced to mathematical demonstration; and the former, in his treatise on the Advancement of Learning, gives a description of the stages of science very much resembling my delineation of the stages of intellectual perfection, or taste.

[Footnote A: Advancement of Learning, Book 2d.]

[Footnote B: Essay on human Understanding, Chap. 3d, Book the 4th, and Chap. 12th, same Book, Sect. 8th.]

It could have been no dishonour to me to have been led by such conductors! Yet, as the truth cannot dishonour me neither, I must aver, that my little system was projected, and brought to the exact state it now is in, without my having the least apprehension that any thing similar had been suggested before by any person whatever; nor have I, in consequence of the discovery I have lately made of the opinions of these respectable authors, added or omitted a single thought in my treatise. But to return from my digression.

In the exact center of my circle of humanity, I have placed nature, or the springs of the intellectual powers, which tend, in a straight line, to its boundary; and, on its boundary, I have placed demonstrable beauty and truth, and the utmost power of rules; and, midway; I have placed common sense and common form, half deriving their existence from pure nature, and half from its highest cultivation, as far as art or rules can teach. A conjunction which would itself be the perfection of humanity, but that it is mixed with all that is not nature, and all that is not art, and thereby made mediocrity, *i.e*. *common sense*.

The intellectual powers, arriving at the limit of my common circle, *i.e*. at the limit of the basis of my pyramidical system, where I have placed the fixed proportions of beauty and of truth, (if they progress,) mount up as a flame, with undulating[A] motion, refining as they advance, and terminate in the pinnacle, or ultimate point, *sublimity*; forming in the imagination the figure of a pyramid, or cone, from the limit of whose base, (on which, as I have before observed, I have placed demonstrable truth and beauty, the utmost power of rules, &c.)

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from that limit up to the ultimate point of sublimity, I call the region of intellectual pleasure, genius, or taste; and in its center I place grace, whose influence pervades, cheers, and nourishes, every part of it, an object which, in this ideal region, is similar in its situation and degree to that of common sense in the common or fundamental region. Grace seems to partake of the perception both of beauty and of sublimity, as common sense partakes of nature and of art. Grace is the characteristic object or general form of the ideal region, and its perception is the general limit of the powers of imagination or taste. Few, very few, attain to the point of sublimity; the *ne plus ultra* of human conception! the alpha and omega. The sentiment of sublimity sinks into the source of nature, and that of the source of nature mounts to the sentiment of sublimity, each point seeming to each the cause and the effect; the origin and the end!

[Footnote A: I use that expression, because it is the peculiar motion of grace as well as of a flame.]

Having thus drawn the outline of my pyramidical mental system, I propose to expatiate a little on each point or stage throughout the great characteristic line of intellectual power.

The first point The exact center, *nature*, or the origin of our intellectual faculties, admits of no investigation, its idea, as I have observed before, loses itself in the sentiment of sublimity, and we see nothing; and therefore I pass on to an object which is perceptible, *the common general character of humanity*, *exterior and inferior*. I have placed them on a line, because their ideas are so analogous, that they unite in one.

Section 1. *Common Sense and common Form*.

Perfection seems to be the ground-work both of common sense and of common form; and, what prevents each from being perfect, is the adventitious blemishes, the additions to, and the diminutions from, what is perfect, making the too little and the too large. But, these defects being distributed in, small portions throughout the general common form and common mind, they constitute an object, whether visible or intellectual, between perfection and imperfection, namely, that of mediocrity, neither exciting admiration nor disgust. And, as experience gives the general idea of the common and true appearance of the human form, as well to the rustic as to the most enlightened philosopher, so consequently does it enable him to see deformity, or what is an unusual appearance in that form.

But, though unusual defects seem to be evident to every eye, it is only to the man of taste and nice discernment that the same degree of unusual beauties are equally perceptible; which corresponds with my opinion, that the ground-work of humanity is perfection, and that its blemishes only tinge its pure white, not discolour it so much, but, when held at a distance, *i.e*. in abstract idea, it is still a white, like

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a sheet of paper, or cloth of the most perfect white, regularly checkered over with a variety of figures of every colour, and placed at a distance, appearing to the eye a white, a mezzo common white; and, as any unusual figure, I mean unusually large and opaque, on this mezzo ground, would be more conspicuous than any of a greater degree of transparency or a more perfect white could be by an absence of any of the figures; so any degree of deformity is, more opposite to the general common form than beauty, and any degree of insanity is more opposite to common sense than intellectual excellence.

And, (to continue my allusion,) as those tints, or blemishes, which obscure the ground, must be discharged to make a perfect white, so must the artist, in creating beauty, discharge the blemishes that tinge and obscure the human form, and which give it the character of mediocrity, till the perfect white, or total absence of defect, or beauty, result.

Common sense seems to be diffusive truth, and common form diffusive beauty; and, as this diffusion is always existing with us, externally and internally, it is no wonder that we should more easily perceive what is in opposition to it, *evil*, than what is in unison with it, *good*.

On a line with common form and common sense I place common ease of body and of mind: unfelt health, unfelt good, or that arising to the degree of *satisfaction* and *content*; in fine, whatever we call *commonly* good, and requisite for the well-being of humanity.

Section 2. *Beauty and Truth*.

I mean that beauty which is demonstrable truth, and that truth which is demonstrable beauty. *Exactitude. Completion. The just medium. The satisfactory rest of the mind. Perfection*. A point, indeed, in which the mind cannot rest! It must go forward or backward. If the latter, it relapses into the dominion of error; if the former, if assumes the charms of *design*, or *intention*. The artist, arrived at the ultimate limit of rules, or demonstrable truth, stands, as it were, between the visible and invisible world; between that of sense and intellect; the common and the uncommon; and his productions will be a conjunction of both. He looks back through all the variety of common nature, and reviews, through the medium of truth and beauty, the various objects it exhibits; and on its spotless ground, *i.e*. the abstract idea of nature without defects, can only exist in idea, he arranges those objects, objects, so as they may best produce the effects he aims at in his art. He does not attempt to obliterate any character in the common circle of nature; but, following her own oeconomy, he endeavours, by juxtaposition, &c. to make each subservient to each in creating delight, and giving beauty to the *whole*. But, to descend from the abstract general idea to the particular idea of beauty, or idea of a particular form:

We discard every thing, that is not beauty, to compose beauty; but every thing that is not beauty is not therefore deformity. The wrong we see in each individual we do not call

deformity: when it is so, it stands on the limit of the common circle, in opposition to beauty.

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From common form seem to originate beauty and deformity; and, as they recede from each other in opposite directions, they become less and less like their parent, *common form*, but never totally unlike; for it is their likeness to that form that constitutes the one beauty, and the other deformity; for, were there no resemblance in deformity to the common form, it would be a different species, and no longer disgust; and none in beauty, it would no longer please.

There is no particular common form, but which, to create beauty, an artist, who studies the perfection of the human form, must improve in some, if not in every part; to effect which, considered as mere form only, rules will suffice, but, considered as grace, it must express a sentiment that no rules can give!

That all feel the same sentiment of admiration for that which they think the most perfect, however the objects may differ, has induced some to believe that beauty is an arbitrary idea, and that it exists only in the imagination! But does it follow, that, because it is not possible for the savage or the man of taste to judge of any object but as experience enables him to judge, that therefore there is no preeminence in that form which is beauty to the one above that which is beauty to the other?

Somewhere there must exist, whether perceived or not, the perfection, or highest point of excellence of the human form respecting proportion; and somewhere there must exist, or does at times exist, the highest excellence of its expression, *i.e*. the moral charm of the human countenance, *grace*.

The artist, who has only seen the beauty of his own nation, will from that form his standard of perfection. But, when he comes to extend his enquiry, when he has viewed the beauty of other nations, particularly that form and that expression which the Grecian artists (who were probably on a line with the Grecian philosophers) modelled from their ideas of beauty! he will quit his partiality for the beauty of his own country, and prefer that of the Grecian, which I imagine is preferable to that of the whole world! The only criterion to prove it so, I mean its form, would be to select from every nation the most perfect in it, and from that number to choose the most perfect, were this possible to be done, respecting the external form of beauty: it could not respecting the internal expression of beauty, *grace*; for who shall be the world?s arbiter of the ne plus ultra of grace!

That the artists of all ages and of all nations have terminated their enquiries after beauty in that of the Grecian form is the highest proof that can be given of its superior excellence to that of all the world!

Common form, as I have observed before, is so much nearer beauty than deformity, that it is, in abstract idea, the model to compose beauty of form from. The *universal* appearance of nature is, to every eye, right, fit, faultless, &c. therefore, if every part of

the copy be the same, particularly, I mean, in the *human* form, beauty of form must result.

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The beauty of every part of the human body, forming a *perfect* whole, is analogous to an instrument of music in perfect concord, and mere exactitude of proportion in its parts, exclusive of the idea of mind, would, I imagine, have no more effect upon the spectator than the mere concord of the strings of an instrument has on the hearer; it amounts to no more than blameless right, nor, till influenced by sentiment, can it go farther.

But, as we are incapable of separating the idea of the human form from the human mind, and as the touch of an instrument in perfect concord gives a presentiment of harmony, so does the perception of the concordance of the parts of a beautiful form give a perception of grace. The mind, as I have observed before, cannot rest in fixed perfection, the *Spotless white*; and its natural transition from beauty must be into the region of grace.

Section 3. *Grace*.

The principles, which constitute grace, genius, or taste, are one; which is denominated grace in the object, genius in the production of the object, and taste in the perception of it.

The existence of grace *seems* to depend more upon the character of mental than of corporeal beauty. All its motions seem to indicate and, to be regulated by the utmost delicacy of sentiment! I have placed it between the highest sentiment of the human mind, *sublmity*, that no rules can teach, and the highest sentiment that rules can teach, *exact beauty*, the two extremes of the vrai reel and the vrai ideal. Grace seems, as it were, to hang between the influence of both; the irregular sublime giving character and relief to the negative and determined qualities of beauty; and beauty, *i.e*. truth, confining within due bounds the eccentric qualities of sublimity, forming, both to sight and in idea, orderly variety, *the waving line*, neither straight nor crooked. The waving line is the symbol, or memento, as I may say, of grace, wherever it is seen in whatever form, animate or inanimate; and may be justly styled the line of taste or grace!

The perception of grace seems not to be intirely new nor intirely familiar to us; but is, as it were, what we have had a presentiment of in the mind, without examining it, and which the graceful object, or action, &c. calls forth to our view. Being so much our own idea, we like to behold it, to dwell upon it; and yet, not being a familiar idea, it creates a pleasing mild degree of admiration.

Grace seems half celestial; for all the virtues accompany, indeed compose, the perception; for none, I imagine, can have a perception of grace that has none of the charms of virtue.

The sentiment of grace, caused by the motion of beauty, music, poetry, beneficence, compassion, &c. may be ranked as the highest intellectual pleasure the mind is capable of perceiving, and brings with it a sort of undetermined consciousness of the delicacy of

our own perceptions in making the discovery, a degree of that glorying that Longinus observes always accompanies the perception of the sublime.

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You can no more define grace than you can happiness. The mind cannot so stedfastly behold it as to investigate its real properties. Grace is indeed the point of happiness in the ideal region, both because it arises spontaneously, without effort, &c. and because it seems partly *within* our own power, and partly *without* it.

As common sense, in my fundamental circle, seems diffusive truth, so grace, in my ideal circle, seems diffusive sublimity; every perception of the former seems to be tinged, as it were, with the colour of the latter.

Section 4. *Sublimity*.

Where pure grace ends, the awe of the sublime begins, composed of the influence of pain, of pleasure, of grace, and deformity, playing into each other, that the mind is unable to determine which to call it, pain, pleasure, or terror. Without a conjunction of these powers there could be no sublimity.

Those only who have passed through the degrees, *common sense, truth* and *grace*, *i.e*. the sentiment of grace, can have a sentiment of sublimity. It is the mild admiration of grace raised to *wonder* and *astonishment*; to a sentiment of *power* out of *our power* to produce or control. Grace must have been as familiar to the intellect, in order to discover sublimity, as common sense in the common region must have been to the discovery of truth and beauty. In fine, genius, or taste, which is the sentiment of grace, and which I have called the common sense of the ideal region, can alone discover the true sublime.

It is a pinnacle of beatitude bordering upon horror, deformity, madness! an eminence from whence the mind, that dares to look farther, is lost! It seems to stand, or rather to waver, between certainty and uncertainty, between security and destruction. It is the point of terror, of undetermined fear, of undetermined power!

The idea of the supreme Being is, I imagine, in every breast, from the clown to the greatest philosopher, his point of sublimity!

CHAPTER II.

On the ORIGIN of our IDEAS of BEAUTY.

In proportion as the principles of beauty exist in the common form, undetermined to the common eye, so do they exist in common sense, undetermined to the common mind. It is cultivation that calls them into view, gives them a determined form, creates the object, and the perception, that

?Truth and good are one,
And beauty dwells in them, and they in her.?
AKENSIDE.

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But, though all truth resolves into one truth, one beauty, one good, as all colours resolve into one light; though the scientifical intellectual colours, classes, or leading principles of science, the *physical*, the *moral*, the *metaphysical*, &c. &c. resolve into intellectual light, beauty, or good; it is, I imagine, the moral truth, that is the characteristic truth of beauty: for, were we to analyse the pleasing emotions we feel at the sight of beauty, we should, I imagine, find them composed of our most refined moral affections; and hence the universal interesting charm of beauty. And, as those affections refine by culture, hence the different degrees of the sentiments which beauty creates in the rustic, and in the man of taste. The former perceives only the physical charm of beauty, the freshness of colour, the bloom of youth, &c. but, to the man of taste, the physical pleases only through the medium of the moral: *the body charms because the soul is seen*; beauty, in his breast, is the source from whence *endless streams of fair ideas flow*, extending throughout the whole region of taste, no object of which but is more or less related to the principles of human beauty. But taste, though a subject almost inseparable from that of beauty, I must forbear to enlarge upon in this chapter, as I propose to make it the particular subject of my next.

It is but at that period, at which we begin to perceive the charms of moral virtue, that we begin to perceive the real charms of beauty. It is true, a man may attain, by experience, the knowledge of its just proportions; without that concomitant sentiment. He may be unconscious of the characteristic moral charm resulting from the whole. And an artist, I imagine, by the habitual practice of the rules which constitute beauty, may produce forms which charm the moral sense of others, without being conscious of it himself; the utmost limit of the rules of the imitative arts being so intimately united with the intuitive principles of taste, or refined moral sense, that the mind in general cannot distinguish where the one ends or the other begins. The artist, who separates them, *leans on the second cause* instead of the first.

As the strongest proof that the moral sense is the governing principle of beauty, we may remark, that the human form, from infancy to old age, has its peculiar beauty annexed to it from the virtue or affection that nature gives it, and which it exhibits in the countenance. The negative virtue, innocence, is the beauty of the child. The more formed virtues, benevolence, generosity, compassion, &c. are the virtues of youth, and its beauty. The fixed and determined virtues, justice, temperance, fortitude, &c. compose the beauty of manhood. The philosophic and religious cast of countenance is the beauty of old age. Now, were any of these expressions misapplied, *i.e*. commuted, they would disgust rather than please: without congruity there could be no virtue; without virtue, no beauty, no sentiment of taste.

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And thus the beauty of each sex is seen only through the medium of the virtues belonging to each. The beauty of the masculine sex is seen only through the medium of the masculine virtues; the beauty of the feminine only through the medium of the feminine. The moral sense gives each its distinct portion of the same virtues, but draws a line which neither can pass without a diminution of their specific beauty. The softness and mildness of the feminine expression would be displeasing in a man. The robust and determined expression of the rigid virtues, justice, fortitude, &c. would be displeasing in a woman. However perfect the Form, if an incongruity that touches the well-being of humanity mingles with the idea, the Form will not afford the pleasing perception of beauty: though the eye may be capable of seeing its regularity, &c. so far is it from pleasing, that it is the more disgusting from its semblance to virtue, because that that semblance is a contradiction to her laws.

May it not be owing to these expressions, so familiar to every eye, that the general sense of good taste eternally exists? They are the legible characters of human excellence, no where visible but in the human countenance, every observation of which improves and confirms the moral sentiment, or image of beauty, implanted by nature in the mind of man.

The origin of the idea of beauty is the same in every breast, savage and civilized. Every nation?s characteristic Form or expression of beauty will be a representation, or portrait, of their characteristic virtue, their happiness, their good. Thus, in the opinion of the wild savage, that face or form will be the most beautiful that assimilates with his idea of savage virtues, corporeal strength, courage, &c. *perfections that are placed in bones and nerves*: as that of the most cultivated nations, witness the Grecians, will indicate or portray the most refined mental virtues. And hence we may conclude, if there be any dignity, any truth, any beauty, in virtue, there must be a *real* difference, *superior* and *inferior* characteristic power of pleasing in the exterior of the human form.

It is cultivation that gives birth to beauty as well as to virtue, by calling forth the visible object to correspond with the invisible intellectual object. In the face or form of an idiot, or the lowest rustic, there is no beauty; and, supposing a nation of idiots, and that they never could improve in mental beauty, they never could, I imagine, improve in corporeal, even though their natural form was upon an equality with the rest of mankind; for, without sentiment, they could not only be incapable of expressing any sentiment analogous to beauty, but, wanting the surrounding influence of a moral system, *i.e*. of the general influence of education on the exterior, they could not suppress or veil a semblance incongruous with beauty. What no person felt no person could teach.

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In cultivated nations, every precept for exterior appearance, from the first rudiments of the dancing-master to the motion of grace, has for its object *mind*, that is, a desire to impress upon the spectator a favourable idea of our mental character; but, passed the true point of cultivation, they lose with the sentiment of mental excellence that of true beauty; witness the exterior artificial appearance of humanity in a neighbouring nation, which probably is on a par with the most uncultivated rustic. The one does not enough for nature, the other too much. But, as the former has an object before him, to which nature herself directs him, the other is receding from it; and, as it is more agreeable, more easy, and more natural, to the human mind, to learn than to unlearn, I should sooner expect the most uncultivated nation, the negro excepted, to arrive at taste in true beauty than them. The negro-race seems to be the farthest removed from the line of true cultivation of any of the human species; their defect of form and complexion being, I imagine, as strong an obstacle to their acquiring true taste (the produce of mental cultivation) as any natural defect they may have in their intellectual faculties. For if, as I have observed, the total want of cultivation would preclude external beauty, the total want of external beauty would preclude the power of cultivation. It appears to me inconceivable, that the negro-race supposing their mental powers were upon a level with other nations, could ever arrive at true taste, when their eye is accustomed *only* to objects so diametrically opposite to taste as the face and form of negroes are! Our being used or not used to the object cannot make us perceive any similarity in the lineaments of their countenance to the lineaments, if I may so say, of our refined virtues and affections, which alone constitute beauty; and therefore I am induced to believe that they are a lower order of human beings than the Europeans.

Beauty is an assemblage of every human charm; yet what we call the *agreeable* is often more captivating.

The agreeable, in person, is composed of beauties and defects, as is the common form, but differently composed. The beauties and defects of the latter are blended into the idea of mediocrity; those of the former are always distinct and perceptible, contrasting each other, they engage the attention, and create a kind of pleasing *re-creation* to the mental faculties; and, in proportion as we can bring them to unite with our governing principles of pleasure, they create affection, which gives the person a more fascinating charm than beauty itself.

It is the mental character that is the moving principle of affection; and any strong peculiarity, that contradicts not the moral sense, *i.e*. that is not *unnatural*, gives the object an accessary charm, and raises the affection to passion. The object is at once the common and the uncommon; an union, which constitutes all we call excellent, all we admire!

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The perception of the charms of the agreeable seem to be wrought up to excellence by the operation of our own powers. We ourselves have blended its beauties and defects into the sentiment of beauty, *pleasure*; and hence, probably, the strength and durability of the passion which it creates. Beauty, on the contrary, is composed to our hands, *full*, *perfect*, and *intire*; its idea is also a compound of the common and the uncommon, being at once like and unlike the general form; but inherently it has no contrast, and therefore affords no recreation, no pleasing exercise, to the mental faculties; there is nothing to re-create, nothing to wish; and hence the instability of the passion which it inspires. Perfect beauty is, like perfect happiness, lost as soon as it is attained.

It is, I imagine, to the principles of the masculine and the feminine character, that we owe the perception of beauty or taste, in any object whatever, throughout all nature and all art that imitates nature; and, in objects which differ from the human form, the principles must be in the extreme, because the object is then merely symbolical. Thus, the meekness of the lamb, and the high-spirited prancing steed; the gentle dove, and the impetuous eagle; the placid lake, and the swelling ocean; the lowly valley, and the aspiring mountain. It is the feminine character that is the sweetest, the most interesting, image of beauty; the masculine partakes of the sublime. Thus it will be found, that, in every object that is universally pleasing, there exist principles which are analogous to those that constitute beauty in the human species; and that its appearance does always, in some degree, move the affections, though the mind may be unconscious of its similitude to any idea in which the affections are concerned. But the test of the object?s possessing the principles of beauty is when we are able to assimilate its appearance with some amiable interesting affection; and, according as that affection prevails in the breast of the spectator, it will appear with an additional power of pleasing.

From association of ideas, any object may be pleasing, though absolutely devoid of beauty, and displeasing with it. The form is *then* out of the question; it is some *real* good or evil, with which the object, but not its form, is associated.

It is observable, that those animals I have mentioned (and I imagine all animals that are symbolical of our affections have the same) have a double character of beauty, or reference to the affection that is moved: *i.e*. their form and their disposition, exactly corresponding with each other. Probably on that union depends their power of pleasing; their *form alone*, so different from human beauty, could not sufficiently engage the attention, or afford the interesting perception, which the consistency of truth does, in the *intire* of an object.

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Every object of taste has *at least* a double reference to mental pleasure, whether the object, in the philosophical scale of our perceptions, belongs to those of *sense* or *intellect*. Thus, the beauty of the rose would not certainly be so perceptible to us, wanting its fragrance, and, with a nauseous smell, would not probably be admitted, as I may say, into the rank of *agreeableness*, though it is in reality a beautiful and pleasing object; nor, supposing the thistle, or any other ugly flower, possessed of the fragrance of the rose, should we therefore think it an object of taste, any more than we can think the form of an elephant beautiful, though endued with almost intellectual beauty.

In the form and colour of flowers, there appears to me a striking analogy to the character of human beauty. They afford an ocular demonstration, in the pleasure with which we contemplate their particular forms, that the pleasure, we receive from the beauty of the human form, originates from mental character: witness the charm of the infant, innocence of the snow-drop, of the soft elegance of the hyacinth, &c. and, on the contrary, our dis-relish of the gaudy tulip, the robust, unmeaning, masculine, piony, hollyhock, &c. &c.

It is, I imagine, from a resemblance to some pre-conceived idea of beauty in the human species, that we are particularly pleased with the sight of one flower more than with another, though the mind is unconscious of the cause. And thus the pleasure, caused by the apparent beauty of every object throughout the system of human perception, is, according to my sentiment of that pleasure, the same intellectual principle, *moral good*, however diversified, modified, and diminished, even to an unconsciousness or almost imperceptible degree of relation to it. In fine, the true principles of beauty, in every object, may be all *resolved* into the same principle. But to conclude.

I have no more doubt that the principles of beauty are moral, than that the principles of happiness are moral. It is the perception of true beauty, in its various modifications, that makes up the sum of human happiness; and hence the diversity of opinions concerning beauty, but which, however diverse, are never contradictory, but as mens opinions in morals are so; for every view of beauty assimilates with some good, and of course must be in unison.

If, in the human system, there exists a principle which constitutes true pleasure, that principle must be that which constitutes human excellence; and, if the visible object which excites true pleasure must necessarily possess the principles of true pleasure, then must every object, which universally and invariably pleases, be relative to the principle that constitutes human excellence, morality.

Whatever appears, to each individual, the most excellent in the human system, at once constitutes his idea of *happiness*, of *morality*, and of *beauty*; and all mankind, I imagine, would agree in the same idea, had all the same opportunities of seeing and knowing what was excellent.

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As I imagine the difference in national beauty is marked by the difference in national morals, so, of course, must the difference of the opinions of individuals on the subject of beauty be. In fine, as the moral sense of mankind is coarse or refined, so will be their taste of beauty.

Of this I am certain, that true refinement is the effect of true virtue; that virtue is truth, and good; and that beauty dwells in them, and they in her.

CHAPTER III

On TASTE.

Taste seems to be an inherent impulsive tendency of the soul towards true good, given by nature to all alike, and which improves in its sentiment as the reasoning faculties improve in their knowledge of what *is* true good.

All the human faculties are, as one may say, constituents of the principle or faculty of taste. But its perception seems to be shared between the judgement and the imagination: to the former seems to belong the truth, or good, of an object of taste; to the latter its beauty or grace; and the stamina vitae, or radical principles of taste, exist, I imagine, in the natural affections of the soul.

What the impulsive spring is, which moves the affections invariably to perceive pleasure in the perception of good and beauty, and disgust in the perception of evil or deformity, I leave to my metaphysical readers to determine. I am afraid to give it an appellation so incongruous to the general idea of taste, as that of conscience.

Yet, however absurd it may appear, I will venture to say, that, if my readers will give themselves the trouble to analyse the grateful sensation or sentiment, we call *taste i.e*. their sentiment of what is truly good, beautiful, right, just, ornamental, honourable, &c. &c. they will find it to originate from, and end in, some moral or religious principle. Indeed, some objects (the highest in the scale of our perceptions of excellence) bring with them an immediate conviction of the truth of this assertion; witness the devotional sentiment which the view of the main ocean inspires; the rising and setting sun; the contemplation of the celestial orbs, &c. witness the noblest object of the creation, when viewed in his highest character. Does not the perception of human excellence immediately relate to the source of all excellence?

The general diffusion of intellectual light, throughout mankind, constitutes rationality; and the aggregated excellence, or light of rationality, constitutes morality. It is, I imagine, in this second or purified light, that taste begins to exist. It is at this period of cultivation that the mind begins to perceive its true good; that the natural affections

rectify, methodize, and refine, in a word, become moral affections, through whose medium, *i.e*. the *moral sense*, the soul perceives every object of taste.

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Taste is intellectual pleasure, an approving sense of truth, of good, and of beauty. The latter seems the visible or ostensible principle of the two former, and is that in which the universal idea of taste is comprised. All are pleased with the sight of beauty; but all are by no means sensible that the principles that make it pleasing, that constitute a form beautiful, are those, or, to be more intelligible, relate to those, that constitute man?s highest excellence, his first interest, his chief good. Few, indeed, even among those who possess taste, if they have not accustomed themselves to investigate its principles, will readily conceive that they are thus deeply rooted in the mental frame. Indeed, the generality of mankind seem rather to think that taste has no principles at all, or, if any, that they begin and end with the prevailing mode, fashion, &c. of the times; a notion which, though in the highest degree absurd, corroborates my opinion, that the universal perception of taste (the true and the false) exists in the idea of honour.

The compound word, or phrase, *le vrai ideal*, universally adopted to denote an object of taste, is the most exact and literal definition of its sentiment that can be conceived; for it implies the union of the judgement and the imagination, without which there could be no sentiment of taste. The judgement, as I observed, perceives the truth of the object, the imagination its beauty; they may be said to relate to each other, in the perception of an object of taste, as a luminous polish does to the substance from whence it proceeds: the substance can exist without its polish, but the polish cannot exist without its substance. The perception of taste seems to me, if I may so express myself, to be illusive, but not erroneous; in a word, to exist in our idea of true honour, *i.e*. in the polish, lustre, or ornament, of true virtue.

As the universal idea or sentiment of taste is honour, so the universal object of its perception is ornament, from the object, whose excellence we contemplate as an ornament or honour to human nature, to every object which in the slightest degree indicates the influence of that excellence. Take away the idea of that influence in the moral sphere, and taste is annihilated; and, in the natural sphere, take away the idea of divine influence, and taste cannot exist. Every sentiment of taste, as I observed before, ultimately relates to the one or to the other of these principles; indeed, strictly speaking, as the moral relates to the divine, it may be said ultimately to do the same.

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In the progress of civilization, the polishing principle, which I call taste, is chiefly found in the highest sphere of life, highest both for internal and external advantages, wealth accelerates the last degree of cultivation, by giving efficacy to the principles of true honour; but it also accelerates its corruption, by giving efficacy to the principles of false honour, by which the true loses its distinction, becomes less and less apparent, nay, by degrees, less and less real. Wealth becoming the object of honour, every principle of true taste must be reversed. Hence the *dire polish* of the obdurate heart, repelling the force of nature. Hence avarice and profusion, dissipation, luxurious banqueting, &c. supersede the love of oeconomy, domestic comfort, the sweet reciprocation of the natural affections, &c. &c. Hence the greatest evils of society: the sorrows of the virtuous poor, *the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes*, in a word, the general corruption of morals, and, of course, of true taste!

The vulgar, who are strangers to the internal principles of honour, always annex their ideas of taste to the external appearances of the highest rank of life, which being easily acquired, particularly that of dress, the prevalency of modes and fashions, however absurd, is universally adopted. Those of false taste adopt them to attract notice; those of true taste, to avoid it. But, at this present, the difficulty of avoiding singularity in dress is, I imagine, much to be lamented by women of taste and virtue, the prevailing mode of feminine attire being diametrically opposite to every principle of feminine excellence; a melancholy proof of our being arrived at the last stage of depravity!

I could expatiate largely on this subject, but it would be inconsistent with my plan, which the reader may perceive, throughout the whole work, to be a mere outline only.

The three grand co-existing principles of taste, virtue, honour, and ornament, run through all its perceptions. Their triple union cannot be broken; but taste is nominally distinguished by the one or the other, according as its objects, situations, circumstances, &c. vary. Ornament and honour seem the public character of taste; virtue to be the private and domestic, where, though unperceived by the vulgar, to the eye of taste[A] she appears in her highest ornament, highest honour.

[Footnote A: Truth can only judge itself. BACON.]

Taste seems to comprize three orders or degrees in its universal comprehension.

The first is composed of those objects which immediately relate to the divinity, among which man claims the preeminence, when viewed in his highest character: witness the inexpressible charm which the natural virtuous affections of the soul inspire, when moved by some strong impulse, such as parental tenderness, filial piety, friendship, &c. &c. &c. Do they not unite the moral sentiment to the divine?

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The second is in the immediate external effects of true taste, or moral virtue, in the social sphere; the order, beauty, and honour, which every object derives from its influence; and, of course, its sentiment must be intimately related to moral excellence.

The third and last degree is general ornament and honour, appearing in fashions, arts of decoration, &c. &c. objects which seeming not immediately to affect the interests of humanity, the taste they exhibit in this sphere appears as an uncertain light, sometimes bright and sometimes obscured; or rather as refracted rays of taste, broken by the general love of novelty and superfluity; two principles which, though they are, to a certain degree, essential to exterior ornament, and the sentiment of true taste, are those in which taste always begins to corrupt. To illustrate my meaning: true ornament seems equally to partake of the idea of utility and superfluity, and every sentiment of taste seems equally to partake of the idea of novelty and of custom; for, were the object perfectly familiar to us, we should feel no degree of admiration, without which we could feel no sentiment of taste; and, were it totally new, unlike any thing we had ever seen, it would excite wonder instead of admiration, which is a sentiment as distant from taste as the love of fame is from the love of honour.

This sphere, the last in my scale of the perceptions of taste, and which borders upon every thing that is contrary to its laws, is properly the sphere of Fancy, who seems an undisciplined offspring of Taste; sometimes sporting within the bounds of parental authority, and sometimes beyond them. Fancy seems to bear the same affinity to Taste as Pleasure does to Happiness.

Every object of taste is relative to some principle of excellence from which it derives its power of pleasing; of course, the highest sentiment of taste must exist in the relative principle to our highest object of excellence.

True ornament is, to the eye, what eloquence is to the ear: their principles throughout are one, the truth or beauty of which exists in its exact relation or adaptation to the object it adorns, constituting the *just*, the *true*, the *beautiful*, objects, or qualities, which, in the conscious eye of taste, *relate* to moral beauty. The perception of the first relation, *i.e*. the adaptation of any thing ornamental to the object it adorns, may, in a great measure, be learned by habit and general observation; but the higher relation, the second concoction (as one may say) of its principles, the moral relation, is the immediate operation of taste.

Ornament and harmonious sound are pleasing to the corporeal sense, but, when wanting a relative object, please but for a short time; and, if incongruously joined to an object, *i.e*. to one with which it can have no relation, will, as soon as the understanding perceives the incongruity, become a principle of disgust.

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As the virtues differ, in some degree, as the character of the sexes differ,[A] of course so must the sentiment of taste differ. To the man I would give the laws of taste; to the woman, its sensibility. The taste of the former seems more derived from reason; that of the latter from instinct: witness their impulsive maternal affection; that inherent ornament of their sex, modesty; their tender susceptibility of the benevolent virtues, pity, compassion, &c. &c.

[Footnote A: Vide page 23.]

Taste, however, is as far removed from mere instinct as from mere reason. I only mean to say, that the taste of the masculine character is rather on the side of reason, or the understanding; that of the feminine on the side of instinct, and, let me add, imagination. The taste of the one and of the other seems to differ as justice does from mercy, as modesty from virtue, as grace from sublimity, &c. &c. And, as exterior feminine grace is the most perfect visible object of taste, the highest degree of feminine excellence, externally and internally united, must of course constitute woman, the most perfect existing object of taste in the creation.

The cultivation of the social moral affections is the cultivation of taste, and the domestic sphere is the true and almost only one in which it can appear in its highest dignity. It is peculiarly appropriated to feminine taste, and I may say it is *absolutely* the only one in which it can appear in its true lustre. True taste, particularly the feminine, is retired, calm, modest; it is the private honour of the heart, and is, I imagine, incompatible with the love of fame.

In the present state of society, taste seems to be equally excluded from the highest and from the lowest sphere of life. The one seems to be too much encumbered with artificial imaginary necessities; the other too much encumbered with the real and natural necessities of life, to attend to its cultivation. It is in the former that taste is universally thought to reside, which is because the idea of taste is inseparable from that of honour. It is that, indeed, in which the general taste of the nation is exhibited. It is its *face*, as I may say, which expresses the internal character of the heart.

In this sphere, namely, the most exalted station of mankind, what true taste it does exhibit is placed in the strongest point of view; its contrary principles are also the same, particularly so to those who have been rightly educated at a distance from it; to such, the wrong will instruct as much as the right; but sure I am, that it is not, at this *period*, the proper sphere for the infant mind to expand and improve in. The wrong will be too familiar to the mind to disgust; and the right, which I imagine is chiefly confined to the *records* of taste in the fine arts, will be too remote (wanting the preparatory love of nature and virtue) to please.

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It is not, I imagine, from objects of excellence in the arts, that the mind receives the first impressions of taste, though from them the impressions, we have already received, may be strengthened and improved. The truths they exhibit awaken the recollection of what has pleased us in nature; and we exult in the confirmation of our judgement and taste on finding those objects represented, by genius, in their best and fairest light. Of course, the excellence we perceive in the fine arts, which is always relative to moral excellence, must tend to the improvement of taste.[A]

[Footnote A: L?esprit de l?homme est naturellement plein d?un nombre infini d?idees confuses du vrai, que souvent il n?entrevoit qu?a demi; et rien ne lui est plus agreable, que lorsqu?on lui offre quelqu?une de ces idees bien eclaircie et mise dans un beau jour. BOILEAU, Preface.]

But, though the arts are thus beneficial to the growing principles of taste, reflecting a few individuals, it is well known that their establishment in every nation has had a contrary effect on the community in general; for, in proportion to the encouragement given them, as that encouragement immediately promotes two of the most pernicious principles that can affect the human heart, the most destructive of moral virtue, namely, the love of fame and the love of riches, the general diffusion of corruption must ensue, and of course the extinction of the natural principles of taste, or relish of the human soul of what is truly beautiful, truly honourable, truly good.

To conclude. I will not presume to say, that a man without taste is without virtue; but I think I may venture to say, that it is only as he can have virtue without loving virtue, that he can have virtue without having taste; the definition of taste being, according to my apprehension of its perception, the *love* of virtue. And, as that love springs from, and tends to, the source of all virtue, all good, may I not add, that it is but as a man can be religious without devotion, that a man can be religious without taste? the sentiment of devotion seeming to be, an aggregation of our most virtuous, most refined, conscious, energies of soul, in the awful vertical point of sublimity.

?From thee, great God, we spring, to thee we tend,
Path, motive, guide, original, and end!?

JOHNSON.

THE END.

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2. Samuel Cobb?s *Of Poetry* and *Discourse on Criticism* (1707).

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3. *Letter to A.H. Esq.; concerning the Stage* (1698), and Richard Willis? *Occasional Paper No. IX* (1698). (OUT OF PRINT)

4. *Essay on Wit* (1748), together with Characters by Flecknoe, and Joseph Warton?s *Adventurer* Nos. 127 and 133. (OUT OF PRINT)

5. Samuel Wesley?s *Epistle to a Friend Concerning Poetry* (1700) and *Essay on Heroic Poetry* (1693).

6. *Representation of the Impiety and Immorality of the Stage*(1704) and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Stage* (1704).

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7. John Gay?s *The Present State of Wit* (1711); and a section on Wit from *The English Theophrastus* (1702).

8. Rapin?s *De Carmine Pastorali*, translated by Creech (1684).

9. T. Hanmer?s (?) *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet* (1736).

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14. Edward Moore?s *The Gamester* (1753).

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