

Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*

Si c'est la raison, qui fait l'homme,
c'est le sentiment, qui le conduit.
—Rousseau

First Letter

I have, then, your gracious permission to submit the results of my inquiry *concerning art and beauty* in the form of a series of letters. Sensible as I am of the gravity of such an undertaking, I am also alive to its attraction and its worth. I shall be treating of a subject that has a direct connection with all that is best in human happiness, and no very distant connection with what is noblest in our moral nature. I shall be pleading the cause of beauty before a heart that is as fully sensible of her power as it is prompt to act upon it, a heart that, in an inquiry where one is bound to invoke feelings

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no less often than principles, will relieve me of the heaviest part of my labors.

What I would have asked of you as a favor, you in your largesse impose upon me as a duty, thus leaving me the appearance of merit where I am in fact only yielding to inclination. The free mode of procedure you prescribe implies for me no constraint; on the contrary, it answers to a need of my own. Little practiced in the use of scholastic modes, I am scarcely in danger of offending against good taste by their abuse. My ideas, derived from constant communing with myself rather than from any rich experience of the world or from reading, will be unable to deny their origin: the last reproach they are likely to incur is that of sectarianism, and they are more liable to collapse out of inherent weakness than to maintain themselves with the support of authority and borrowed strength.

True, I shall not attempt to hide from you that it is for the most part Kantian principles on which the following theses will be based. But you must ascribe it to my ineptitude rather than to those principles if in the course of this inquiry you should be reminded of any particular philosophical school. No, the freedom of your mind shall, I can promise you, remain inviolable. Your own feeling will provide me with the material on which to build, your own free powers of thought dictate the laws according to which we are to proceed.

Concerning those ideas that prevail in the practical part of the Kantian system only the philosophers are at variance; the rest of mankind, I believe I can show, have always been agreed. Once divested of their technical form, they stand revealed as the immemorial pronouncements of common reason, and as data of that moral instinct that nature in her wisdom appointed man's guardian until, through the enlightenment of his understanding, he should have arrived at years of discretion. But it is precisely this technical form, whereby truth is made manifest to the intellect, which veils it again from our feeling. For alas! intellect must first destroy the object of inner sense if it would make it *its own*. Like the analytical chemist, the philosopher can only discover how things are combined by analyzing them, only lay bare the workings of spontaneous nature by subjecting them to the torment of his own techniques. In order to lay hold of the fleeting phenomenon, he

must first bind it in the fetters of rule, tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words. Is it any wonder that natural feeling cannot find itself again in such an image, or that in the account of the analytical thinker truth should appear as paradox?

I too, therefore, would crave some measure of forbearance if the following investigations, in trying to bring the subject of inquiry closer to the understanding, were to transport it beyond reach of the senses. What was asserted above of moral experience, must hold even more of the phenomenon we call beauty. For its whole magic resides in its mystery, and in dissolving the essential amalgam of its elements we find we have dissolved its very being.

Second Letter

But should it not be possible to make better use of the freedom you accord me than by keeping your attention fixed upon the domain of the fine arts? Is it not, to say the least, untimely to be casting around for a code of laws for the aesthetic world at a moment when the affairs of the moral offer interest of so much more urgent concern, and when the spirit of philosophical inquiry is being expressly challenged by present circumstances to concern itself with that most perfect of all the works to be achieved by the art of man: the construction of true political freedom?

I would not wish to live in a century other than my own, or to have worked for any other. We are citizens of our own age no less than of our own state. And if it is deemed unseemly, or even inadmissible, to exempt ourselves from the morals and customs of the circle in which we live, why should it be less of a duty to allow the needs and taste of our own epoch some voice in our choice of activity?

But the verdict of this epoch does not, by any means, seem to be going in favor of art, not at least of the kind of art to which alone my inquiry will be directed. The course of events has given the spirit of the age a direction that threatens to remove it even further from the art of the ideal. This kind of art must abandon actuality, and soar with becoming boldness above our wants and needs; for art is a daughter of freedom, and takes her orders from the necessity inherent in minds, not from the exigencies of matter.

But at the present time material needs reign supreme and bend a degraded humanity beneath their tyrannical yoke. Utility is the great idol of our age, to which all powers are in thrall and to which all talent must pay homage. Weighed in this crude balance, the insubstantial merits of art scarce tip the scale, and, bereft of all encouragement, she shuns the noisy marketplace of our century. The spirit of philosophical inquiry itself is wresting from the imagination one province after another, and the frontiers of art contract the more the boundaries of science expand.

Expectantly the gaze of philosopher and man of the world alike is fixed on the political scene, where now, so it is believed, the very fate of mankind is being debated. Does it not betray a culpable indifference to the common weal not to take part in this general debate? If this great action is, by reason of its cause and its consequences, of urgent concern to everyone who calls himself man, it must, by virtue of its method of procedure, be of quite special interest to everyone who has learned to think for himself. For a question that has hitherto always been decided by the blind right of might, is now, so it seems, being brought before the tribunal of pure reason itself, and anyone who is at all capable of putting himself at the center of things, and of raising himself from an individual into a representative of the species, may consider himself at once a member of this tribunal, and at the same time, in his capacity of human being and citizen of the world, an interested party who finds himself more or less closely involved in the outcome of the case. It is, therefore, not merely his own cause that is being decided in this great action; judgment is to be passed according to laws that he, as a reasonable being, is himself competent and entitled to dictate.

How tempting it would be for me to investigate such a subject in company with one who is as acute a thinker as he is a liberal citizen of the world! And to leave the decision to a heart that has dedicated itself with such noble enthusiasm to the weal of humanity. What an agreeable surprise if, despite all difference in station, and the vast distance that the circumstances of the actual world make inevitable, I were, in the realm of ideas, to find my conclusions identical with those of a mind as unprejudiced as your own! That I resist this seductive temptation, and put beauty before freedom, can, I believe, not only be excused on the score of personal

inclination, but also justified on principle. I hope to convince you that the theme I have chosen is far less alien to the needs of our age than to its taste. More than this: if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom. But this cannot be demonstrated without my first reminding you of the principles by which reason is in any case guided in matters of political legislation:

Third Letter

Nature deals no better with man than with the rest of her works: she acts for him as long as he is as yet incapable of acting for himself as a free intelligence. But what makes him man is precisely this: that he does not stop short at what nature herself made of him, but has the power of retracing by means of reason the steps she took on his behalf, of transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity.

Out of the long slumber of the senses he awakens to consciousness and knows himself for a human being; he looks about him, and finds himself—in the state. The force of his needs threw him into this situation before he was as yet capable of exercising his freedom to choose it; compulsion organized it according to purely natural laws before *he* could do so according to the laws of reason. But with this state of compulsion, born of what nature destined him to be, and designed to this end alone, he neither could nor can rest content as a moral being. And woe to him if he could! With that same right, therefore, by virtue of which he is man, he withdraws from the dominion of blind necessity, even as in so many other respects he parts company from it by means of his freedom; even as, to take but *one* example, he obliterates by means of morality, and ennobles by means of beauty, the crude character imposed by physical need upon sexual love. And even thus does he, in his maturity, retrieve by means of a fiction the childhood of the race: he conceives, as idea, a *state of nature*, a state not indeed given him by any experience, but a necessary result of what reason destined him to be; attributes to himself in this idealized natural state a purpose of which in his actual natural state he was entirely igno-

rant, and a power of free choice of which he was at that time wholly incapable; and now proceeds exactly as if he were starting from scratch, and were, from sheer insight and free resolve, exchanging a state of complete independence for a state of social contracts. However skillfully, and however firmly, blind caprice may have laid the foundations of her work, however arrogantly she may maintain it, and with whatever appearance of venerability she may surround it—man is fully entitled in the course of these operations to treat it all as though it had never happened. For the work of blind forces possesses no authority before which freedom need bow, and everything must accommodate itself to the highest end that reason now decrees in him as person. This is the origin and justification of any attempt on the part of a people grown to maturity to transform its natural state into a moral one.

This natural state (as we may term any political body whose organization derives originally from forces and not from laws) is, it is true, at variance with man as moral being, for whom the only law should be to act in conformity with law. But it will just suffice for man as physical being; for he only gives himself laws in order to come to terms with forces. But physical man does in fact exist, whereas the existence of moral man is as yet problematic. If, then, reason does away with the natural state (as she of necessity must if she would put her own in its place), she jeopardizes the physical man who actually exists for the sake of a moral man who is as yet problematic, risks the very existence of society for a merely hypothetical (even though morally necessary) ideal of society. She takes from man something he actually possesses, and without which he possesses nothing, and refers him instead to something that he could and should possess. And if in so doing she should have counted on him for more than he can perform, then she would, for the sake of a humanity that he still lacks—and can without prejudice to his mere existence go on lacking—have deprived him of the means of that animal existence that is the very condition of his being human at all. Before he has had time to cleave unto the law with the full force of his moral will, she would have drawn from under his feet the ladder of nature.

What we must chiefly bear in mind, then, is that physical society *in time* must never for a moment cease to exist while moral society *as idea* is in the process of being formed; that for the sake of man's

moral dignity his actual existence must never be jeopardized. When the craftsman has a timepiece to repair, he can let its wheels run down; but the living clockwork of the state must be repaired while it is still striking, and it is a question of changing the revolving wheel while it still revolves. For this reason a support must be looked for that will ensure the continuance of society, and make it independent of the natural state that is to be abolished.

This support is not to be found in the natural character of man that, selfish and violent as it is, aims at the destruction of society rather than at its preservation. Neither is it to be found in his moral character that has, *ex hypothesi*, first to be fashioned, and upon which, just because it is free, and *because it never becomes manifest*, the lawgiver could never exert influence, nor with any certainty depend. It would, therefore, be a question of abstracting from man's physical character its arbitrariness, and from his moral character its freedom; of making the first conformable to laws, and the second dependent upon sense impressions; of removing the former somewhat further from matter, and bringing the latter somewhat closer to it; and all this with the aim of bringing into being a third character that, kin to both the others, might prepare the way for a transition from the rule of mere force to the rule of law, and that, without in any way impeding the development of moral character, might on the contrary serve as a pledge in the sensible world of a morality as yet unseen.

Fourth Letter

This much is certain: only the predominance of such a character among a people makes it safe to undertake the transformation of a state in accordance with moral principles. And only such a character can guarantee that this transformation will endure. The setting up of a moral state involves being able to count on the moral law as an effective force, and free will is thereby drawn into the realm of cause and effect, where everything follows from everything else in a chain of strict necessity. But we know that the modes of determination of the human will must always remain contingent, and that it is only in absolute being that physical necessity coincides with moral necessity. If, therefore, we are to be able to count on man's moral behavior with as much certainty as we do on *natural*

effects, it will itself have to *be* nature, and he will have to be led by his very impulses to the kind of conduct that is bound to proceed from a moral character. But the will of man stands completely free between duty and inclination, and no physical compulsion can, or should, encroach upon this sovereign right of his personality. If, then, man is to retain his power of choice and yet, at the same time, be a reliable link in the chain of causality, this can only be brought about through both these motive forces, inclination and duty, producing completely identical results in the world of phenomena; through the content of his volition remaining the same whatever the difference in form; that is to say, through impulse being sufficiently in harmony with reason to qualify as universal legislator.

Every individual human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal.* This archetype, which is to be discerned more or less clearly in every individual, is represented by the state, the objective and, as it were, canonical form in which all the diversity of individual subjects strive to unite. One can, however, imagine two different ways in which man existing in time can coincide with man as idea, and, in consequence, just as many ways in which the state can assert itself in individuals; either by the ideal man suppressing empirical man, and the state annulling individuals; or else by the individual himself becoming the state, and man in time being ennobled to the stature of man as idea.

It is true that from a one-sided moral point of view this difference disappears. For reason is satisfied as long as her law obtains unconditionally. But in the complete anthropological view, where content counts no less than form, and living feeling too has a voice, the difference becomes all the more relevant. Reason does indeed demand unity; but nature demands multiplicity; and both these kinds of law make their claim upon man. The law of reason is imprinted upon him by an incorruptible consciousness; the law of nature by

*I refer to a recent publication by my friend Fichte, *Lectures on the Vocation of a Scholar*, in which illuminating deductions are drawn from this proposition in a way not hitherto attempted.

an ineradicable feeling. Hence it will always argue a still defective education if the moral character is able to assert itself only by sacrificing the natural. And a political constitution will still be very imperfect if it is able to achieve unity only by suppressing variety. The state should not only respect the objective and generic character in its individual subjects; it should also honor their subjective and specific character, and in extending the invisible realm of morals take care not to depopulate the sensible realm of appearance.

When the artisan lays hands upon the formless mass in order to shape it to his ends, he has no scruple in doing it violence; for the natural material he is working merits no respect for itself, and his concern is not with the whole for the sake of the parts, but with the parts for the sake of the whole. When the artist lays hands upon the same mass, he has just as little scruple in doing it violence; but he avoids showing it. For the material he is handling he has not a whit more respect than has the artisan; but the eye that would seek to protect the freedom of the material he will endeavor to deceive by a show of yielding to this latter. With the pedagogic or the political artist things are very different indeed. For him man is at once the material on which he works and the goal toward which he strives. In this case the end turns back upon itself and becomes identical with the medium; and it is only inasmuch as the whole serves the parts that the parts are in any way bound to submit to the whole. The statesman-artist must approach his material with a quite different kind of respect from that which the maker of beauty feigns toward his. The consideration he must accord to its uniqueness and individuality is not merely subjective, and aimed at creating an illusion for the senses, but objective and directed to its innermost being.

But just because the state is to be an organization formed by itself and for itself, it can only become a reality inasmuch as its parts have been tuned up to the idea of the whole. Because the state serves to represent that ideal and objective humanity that exists in the heart of each of its citizens, it will have to observe toward those citizens the same relationship as each has to himself, and will be able to honor their subjective humanity only to the extent that this has been ennobled in the direction of objective humanity. Once man is inwardly at one with himself, he will be able to preserve his individuality however much he may universal-

ize his conduct, and the state will be merely the interpreter of his own finest instinct, a clearer formulation of his own sense of what is right. If, on the other hand, in the character of a whole people, subjective man sets his face against objective man with such vehemence of contradiction that the victory of the latter can only be ensured by the suppression of the former, then the state too will have to adopt toward its citizens the solemn rigor of the law, and ruthlessly trample underfoot such powerfully seditious individualism in order not to fall a victim to it.

But man can be at odds with himself in two ways: either as savage, when feeling predominates over principle; or as barbarian, when principle destroys feeling. The savage despises civilization, and acknowledges nature as his sovereign mistress. The barbarian derides and dishonors nature, but, more contemptible than the savage, as often as not continues to be the slave of his slave. The man of culture makes a friend of nature, and honors her freedom while curbing only her caprice.

Consequently, whenever reason starts to introduce the unity of the moral law into any actually existing society, she must beware of damaging the variety of nature. And whenever nature endeavors to maintain her variety within the moral framework of society, moral unity must not suffer any infringement thereby. Removed alike from uniformity and from confusion, there abides the triumph of form. *Wholeness* of character must therefore be present in any people capable, and worthy, of exchanging a state of compulsion for a state of freedom.

Fifth Letter 1795; 1801

Is this the character that the present age, that contemporary events, present to us? Let me turn my attention at once to the object most in evidence on this enormous canvas.

True, the authority of received opinion has declined, arbitrary rule is unmasked and, though still armed with power, can no longer, even by devious means, maintain the appearance of dignity. Man has roused himself from his long indolence and self-deception and, by an impressive majority, is demanding restitution of his inalienable rights. But he is not just demanding this; over there, and over here, he is rising up to seize by force what, in his opinion,

has been wrongfully denied him. The fabric of the natural state is tottering, its rotting foundations giving way, and there seems to be a *physical* possibility of setting law upon the throne, of honoring man at last as an end in himself, and making true freedom the basis of political associations. Vain hope! The *moral* possibility is lacking, and a moment so prodigal of opportunity finds a generation unprepared to receive it.

Man portrays himself in his actions. And what a figure he cuts in the drama of the present time! On the one hand, a return to the savage state; on the other, to complete lethargy: in other words, to the two extremes of human depravity, and both united in a single epoch!

Among the lower and more numerous classes we are confronted with crude, lawless instincts, unleashed with the loosening of the bonds of civil order, and hastening with ungovernable fury to their animal satisfactions. It may well be that objective humanity had cause for complaint against the state; subjective humanity must respect its institutions. Can the state be blamed for having disregarded the dignity of human beings as long as it was still a question of ensuring their very existence? Or for having hastened to divide and unite by the [mechanical] forces of gravity and cohesion, while there could as yet be no thought of any [organic] formative principle from within? Its very dissolution provides the justification of its existence. For society, released from its controls, is falling back into the kingdom of the elements, instead of hastening upwards into the realm of organic life.

The cultivated classes, on the other hand, offer the even more repugnant spectacle of lethargy, and of a depravation of character that offends the more because culture itself is its source. I no longer recall which of the ancient or modern philosophers it was who remarked that the nobler a thing is, the more repulsive it is when it decays; but we shall find that this is no less true in the moral sphere. The child of nature, when he breaks loose, turns into a madman; the creature of civilization into a knave. That enlightenment of the mind, which is the not altogether groundless boast of our refined classes, has had on the whole so little of an ennobling influence on feeling and character that it has tended rather to bolster up depravity by providing it with the support of precepts. We disown nature in her rightful sphere only to submit to her tyranny

in the moral, and while resisting the impact she makes upon our senses are content to take over her principles. The sham propriety of our manners refuses her the *first* say—which would be pardonable—only to concede to her in our materialistic ethics the *final* and decisive one. In the very bosom of the most exquisitely developed social life egotism has founded its system, and without ever acquiring therefrom a heart that is truly sociable, we suffer all the contagions and afflictions of society. We subject our free judgment to its despotic opinion, our feeling to its fantastic customs, our will to its seductions; only our caprice we do uphold against its sacred rights. Proud self-sufficiency contracts the heart of the man of the world, a heart that in natural man still often beats in sympathy; and as from a city in flames each man seeks only to save from the general destruction his own wretched belongings. Only by completely abjuring sensibility can we, so it is thought, be safe from its aberrations; and the ridicule that often acts as a salutary chaster of the enthusiast is equally unsparing in its desecration of the noblest feeling. Civilization, far from setting us free, in fact creates some new need with every new power it develops in us. The fetters of the physical tighten ever more alarmingly, so that fear of losing what we have stifles even the most burning impulse toward improvement, and the maxim of passive obedience passes for the supreme wisdom of life. Thus do we see the spirit of the age wavering between perversity and brutality, between unnaturalness and mere nature, between superstition and moral unbelief; and it is only through an equilibrium of evils that it is still sometimes kept within bounds.

Sixth Letter

Have I not perhaps been too hard on our age in the picture I have just drawn? That is scarcely the reproach I anticipate. Rather a different one: that I have tried to make it prove too much. Such a portrait, you will tell me, does indeed resemble mankind as it is today; but does it not also resemble any people caught up in the process of civilization, since all of them, without exception, must fall away from nature by the abuse of reason before they can return to her by the use of reason?

Closer attention to the character of our age will, however, reveal

an astonishing contrast between contemporary forms of humanity and earlier ones, especially the Greek. The reputation for culture and refinement, on which we otherwise rightly pride ourselves vis-à-vis humanity in its *merely* natural state, can avail us nothing against the natural humanity of the Greeks. For they were wedded to all the delights of art and all the dignity of wisdom, without however, like us, falling a prey to their seduction. The Greeks put us to shame not only by a simplicity to which our age is a stranger; they are at the same time our rivals, indeed often our models, in those very excellences with which we are wont to console ourselves for the unnaturalness of our manners. In fullness of form no less than of content, at once philosophic and creative, sensitive and energetic, the Greeks combined the first youth of imagination with the manhood of reason in a glorious manifestation of humanity.

At that first fair awakening of the powers of the mind, sense and intellect did not as yet rule over strictly separate domains; for no dissension had as yet provoked them into hostile partition and mutual demarcation of their frontiers. Poetry had not as yet coquetted with wit, nor speculation prostituted itself to sophistry. Both of them could, when need arose, exchange functions, since each in its own fashion paid honor to truth. However high the mind might soar, it always drew matter lovingly along with it; and however fine and sharp the distinctions it might make, it never proceeded to mutilate. It did indeed divide human nature into its several aspects, and project these in magnified form into the divinities of its glorious pantheon; but not by tearing it to pieces; rather by combining its aspects in different proportions, for in no single one of their deities was humanity in its entirety ever lacking. How different with us moderns! With us too the image of the human species is projected in magnified form into separate individuals—but as fragments, not in different combinations, with the result that one has to go the rounds from one individual to another in order to be able to piece together a complete image of the species. With us, one might almost be tempted to assert, the various faculties appear as separate in practice as they are distinguished by the psychologist in theory, and we see not merely individuals, but whole classes of men, developing but one part of their potentialities, while of the rest, as in stunted growths, only vestigial traces remain.

I do not underrate the advantages that the human race today,

considered as a whole and weighed in the balance of intellect, can boast in the face of what is best in the ancient world. But it has to take up the challenge in serried ranks, and let whole measure itself against whole. What individual modern could sally forth and engage, man against man, with an individual Athenian for the prize of humanity?

Whence this disadvantage among individuals when the species as a whole is at such an advantage? Why was the individual Greek qualified to be the representative of his age, and why can no single modern venture as much? Because it was from all-unifying nature that the former, and from the all-dividing intellect that the latter, received their respective forms.

It was civilization itself that inflicted this wound upon modern man. Once the increase of empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable, and once the increasingly complex machinery of state necessitated a more rigorous separation of ranks and occupations, then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. The intuitive and the speculative understanding now withdrew in hostility to take up positions in their respective fields, whose frontiers they now began to guard with jealous mistrust; and with this confining of our activity to a particular sphere we have given ourselves a master within, who not infrequently ends by suppressing the rest of our potentialities. While in the one a riotous imagination ravages the hard-won fruits of the intellect, in another the spirit of abstraction stifles the fire at which the heart should have warmed itself and the imagination been kindled.

This disorganization, which was first started within man by civilization and learning, was made complete and universal by the new spirit of government. It was scarcely to be expected that the simple organization of the early republics should have survived the simplicity of early manners and conditions; but instead of rising to a higher form of organic existence it degenerated into a crude and clumsy mechanism. That polypoid character of the Greek states, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into the whole organism, now made way for an ingenious clockwork, in which, out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical kind of col-

lective life ensued. State and church, laws and customs, were now torn asunder; enjoyment was divorced from labor, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge. But even that meager, fragmentary participation, by which individual members of the state are still linked to the whole, does not depend upon forms that they spontaneously prescribe for themselves (for how could one entrust to their freedom of action a mechanism so intricate and so fearful of light and enlightenment?); it is dictated to them with meticulous exactitude by means of a formulary that inhibits all freedom of thought. The dead letter takes the place of living understanding, and a good memory is a safer guide than imagination and feeling.

When the community makes his office the measure of the man; when in one of its citizens it prizes nothing but memory, in another a mere tabularizing intelligence, in a third only mechanical skill; when, in the one case, indifferent to character, it insists exclusively on knowledge, yet is, in another, ready to condone any amount of obscurantist thinking as long as it is accompanied by a spirit of order and law-abiding behavior; when, moreover, it insists on special skills being developed with a degree of intensity that is only commensurate with its readiness to absolve the individual citizen from developing himself in extensivity—can we wonder that the remaining aptitudes of the psyche are neglected in order to give undivided attention to the one that will bring honor and profit? True, we know that the outstanding individual will never let the limits of his occupation dictate the limits of his activity. But a mediocre talent will consume in the office assigned him the whole meager sum of his powers, and a man has to have a mind above the ordinary if, without detriment to his calling, he is still to have time for the chosen pursuits of his leisure. Moreover, it is rarely a recommendation in the eyes of the state if a man's powers exceed the tasks he is set, or if the higher needs of the man of parts constitute a rival to the duties of his office. So jealously does the state insist on being the sole proprietor of its servants that it will more easily

bring itself (and who can blame it?) to share its man with the Cytherean, than with the Uranian, Venus.

Thus little by little the concrete life of the individual is destroyed in order that the abstract idea of the whole may drag out its sorry existence, and the state remains forever a stranger to its citizens since at no point does it ever make contact with their feeling. Forced to resort to classification in order to cope with the variety of its citizens, and never to get an impression of humanity except through representation at second hand, the governing section ends up by losing sight of them altogether, confusing their concrete reality with a mere construct of the intellect; while the governed cannot but receive with indifference laws that are scarcely, if at all, directed to them as persons. Weary at last of sustaining bonds that the state does so little to facilitate, positive society begins (this has long been the fate of most European states) to disintegrate into a state of primitive morality, in which public authority has become but one party *more*, to be hated and circumvented by those who make authority necessary, and only obeyed by such as are capable of doing without it.

With this twofold pressure upon it, from within and from without, could humanity well have taken any other course than the one it actually took? In its striving after inalienable possessions in the realm of ideas, the spirit of speculation could do no other than become a stranger to the world of sense, and lose sight of matter for the sake of form. The practical spirit, by contrast, enclosed within a monotonous sphere of material objects, and within this uniformity still further confined by formulas, was bound to find the idea of an unconditioned whole receding from sight, and to become just as impoverished as its own poor sphere of activity. If the former was tempted to model the actual world on a world conceivable by the mind, and to exalt the subjective conditions of its own perceptual and conceptual faculty into laws constitutive of the existence of things, the latter plunged into the opposite extreme of judging all experience whatsoever by one particular fragment of experience, and of wanting to make the rules of its *own* occupation apply indiscriminately to all others. The one was bound to become the victim of empty subtleties, the other of narrow pedantry; for the former stood too high to discern the particular, the latter too low to survey the whole. But the damaging effects of the turn that

mind thus took were not confined to knowledge and production; it affected feeling and action no less. We know that the sensibility of the psyche depends for its intensity upon the liveliness, for its scope upon the richness, of the imagination. The preponderance of the analytical faculty must, however, of necessity, deprive the imagination of its energy and warmth, while a more restricted sphere of objects must reduce its wealth. Hence the abstract thinker very often has a *cold* heart, since he dissects his impressions, and impressions can move the soul only as long as they remain whole; while the man of practical affairs often has a *narrow* heart, since his imagination, imprisoned within the unvarying confines of his own calling, is incapable of extending itself to appreciate other ways of seeing and knowing.

It was part of my procedure to uncover the disadvantageous trends in the character of our age and the reasons for them, not to point out the advantages that nature offers by way of compensation. I readily concede that, little as individuals might benefit from this fragmentation of their being, there was no other way in which the species as a whole could have progressed. With the Greeks, humanity undoubtedly reached a maximum of excellence, which could neither be maintained at that level nor rise any higher. Not maintained, because the intellect was unavoidably compelled by the store of knowledge it already possessed to dissociate itself from feeling and intuition in an attempt to arrive at exact discursive understanding; not rise any higher, because only a specific degree of clarity is compatible with a specific fullness and warmth. This degree the Greeks had attained; and had they wished to proceed to a higher stage of development, they would, like us, have had to surrender their wholeness of being and pursue truth along separate paths.

If the manifold potentialities in man were ever to be developed, there was no other way but to pit them one against the other. This antagonism of faculties and functions is the great instrument of civilization—but it is only the instrument; for as long as it persists, we are only on the way to becoming civilized. Only through individual powers in man becoming isolated, and arrogating to themselves exclusive authority, do they come into conflict with the truth of things, and force the common sense, which is otherwise content to linger with indolent complacency on outward appearance, to penetrate phenomena in depth. By pure thought usurping author-

ity in the world of sense, while empirical thought is concerned to subject the usurper to the conditions of experience, both these powers develop to their fullest potential, and exhaust the whole range of their proper sphere. And by the very boldness with which, in the one case, imagination allows her caprice to dissolve the existing world order, she does in the other, compel reason to rise to the ultimate sources of knowing, and invoke the law of necessity against her.

One-sidedness in the exercise of his powers must, it is true, inevitably lead the individual into error; but the species as a whole to truth. Only by concentrating the whole energy of our mind into a single focal point, contracting our whole being into a single power, do we, as it were, lend wings to this individual power and lead it, by artificial means, far beyond the limits that nature seems to have assigned to it. Even as it is certain that all individuals taken together would never, with the powers of vision granted them by nature alone, have managed to detect a satellite of Jupiter that the telescope reveals to the astronomer, so it is beyond question that human powers of reflection would never have produced an analysis of the infinite or a critique of pure reason, unless, in the individuals called to perform such feats, reason had separated itself off, disentangled itself, as it were, from all matter, and by the most intense effort of abstraction armed their eyes with a glass for peering into the absolute. But will such a mind, dissolved as it were into pure intellect and pure contemplation, ever be capable of exchanging the rigorous bonds of logic for the free movement of the poetic faculty, or of grasping the concrete individuality of things with a sense innocent of preconceptions and faithful to the object? At this point nature sets limits even to the most universal genius, limits he cannot transcend; and as long as philosophy has to make its prime business the provision of safeguards against error, truth will be bound to have its martyrs.

Thus, however much the world as a whole may benefit through this fragmentary specialization of human powers, it cannot be denied that the individuals affected by it suffer under the curse of this cosmic purpose. Athletic bodies can, it is true, be developed by gymnastic exercises; beauty only through the free and harmonious play of the limbs. In the same way the keying up of individual functions of the mind can indeed produce extraordinary human

beings; but only the equal tempering of them all, happy and complete human beings. And in what kind of relation would we stand to either past or future ages, if the development of human nature were to make such sacrifice necessary? We would have been the serfs of mankind; for several millenia we would have done slaves' work for them, and our mutilated nature would bear impressed upon it the shameful marks of this servitude. And all this in order that a future generation might in blissful indolence attend to the care of its moral health, and foster the free growth of its humanity!

But can man really be destined to miss himself for the sake of any purpose whatsoever? Should nature, for the sake of her own purposes, be able to rob us of a completeness that reason, for the sake of hers, enjoins upon us? It must, therefore, be wrong if the cultivation of individual powers involves the sacrifice of wholeness. Or rather, however much the law of nature tends in that direction, it must be open to us to restore by means of a higher art the totality of our nature that the arts themselves have destroyed.

Seventh Letter

Can we perhaps look for such action from the state? That is out of the question. For the state as at present constituted has been the cause of the evil, while the state as reason conceives it, far from being able to lay the foundations of this better humanity, would itself have to be founded upon it. Thus the course of my inquiry would seem to have brought me back to the point from which for a time it had deflected me. The present age, far from exhibiting that form of humanity we have recognized as the necessary condition of any moral reform of the state, shows us rather the exact opposite. If, therefore, the principles I have laid down are correct, and if experience confirms my portrayal of the present age, we must continue to regard every attempt at political reform as untimely, and every hope based upon it as chimerical, as long as the split within man is not healed, and his nature so restored to wholeness that it can itself become the artificer of the state, and guarantee the reality of this political creation of reason.

Nature in her physical creation points the way we have to take in the moral. Not until the strife of elemental forces in the lower organisms has been assuaged does she turn to the nobler creation of physical man. In the same way, the strife of elements in moral

man, the conflict of blind impulse, has first to be appeased, and crude antagonisms first have ceased within him, before we can take the risk of promoting diversity. On the other hand, the independence of his character must first have become secure, and submission to external forms of authority have given way to a becoming liberty, before the diversity within him can be subjected to any ideal unity. As long as natural man still makes a lawless misuse of his license, one can scarcely run the risk of letting him glimpse his liberty; and as long as civilized man as yet makes so little use of his liberty, one can hardly deprive him of his license. The gift of liberal principles becomes a betrayal of society as a whole when it allies itself with forces still in ferment, and reinforces an already too powerful nature. The law of conformity turns into tyranny vis-à-vis the individual when it is allied with an already prevailing weakness and physical limitation, and so extinguishes the last glimmering spark of independence and individuality.

The character of the age must therefore first lift itself out of its deep degradation: on the one hand, emancipate itself from the blind forces of nature; on the other, return to her simplicity, truth, and fullness—a task for more than one century. Meanwhile I readily admit that isolated attempts may succeed. But no improvement in the body politic as a whole will thereby ensue, and discrepancies in practice will continue to belie unanimity of precepts. In other continents we shall honor humanity in the Negro; in Europe profane it in the thinker. The old principles will remain; but they will wear the dress of the century, and philosophy now lend her name to a repression formerly authorized by the Church. Fearful of freedom, which in its first tentative ventures always comes in the guise of an enemy, we shall either cast ourselves into the arms of an easy servitude or, driven to despair by a pedantic tutelage, escape into the wild libertinism of the natural state. Usurpation will invoke the weakness of human nature, insurrection its dignity; until finally blind force, that great imperatrix of human affairs, steps in and decides this pretended conflict of principles as though it were a common brawl.

Eighth Letter

Is philosophy then to retire, dejected and despairing, from this field? While the dominion of forms is being extended in every other

direction, is this, the most important good of all, to remain the prey of formless chance? Is the conflict of blind forces to endure forever in the political world, and the law of sociality never to triumph over hostile self-interest?

By no means! Reason herself, it is true, will not join battle directly with this savage force that resists her weapons. No more than the son of Saturn in the *Iliad* will she descend to personal combat in this gloomy arena. But from the midst of the warriors she chooses the most worthy, equips him, as Zeus did his grandson, with divine weapons, and through his victorious strength decides the great issue.

Reason has accomplished all that she can accomplish by discovering the law and establishing it. Its execution demands a resolute will and ardor of feeling. If truth is to be victorious in her conflict with forces, she must herself first become a *force* and appoint some *drive* to be her champion in the realm of phenomena; for drives are the only motive forces in the sensible world. If she has hitherto displayed so little of her conquering power, this was due, not to the intellect that was powerless to unveil her, but to the heart that closed itself against her, and to the drive that refused to act on her behalf.

For whence comes this still so prevalent rule of prejudice, and this obscuring of minds in the face of all the light that philosophy and empirical science have kindled? Our age is enlightened; that is to say, such knowledge has been discovered and publicly disseminated as would suffice to correct at least our practical principles. The spirit of free inquiry has dissipated those false conceptions that for so long barred the approach to truth, and undermined the foundations upon which fanaticism and deception had raised their throne. Reason has purged herself of both the illusions of the senses and the delusions of sophistry, and philosophy itself, which first seduced us from our allegiance to nature, is now in loud and urgent tones calling us back to her bosom. How is it, then, that we still remain barbarians?

There must, therefore, since the cause does not lie in things themselves, be something in the disposition of men that stands in the way of the acceptance of truth, however brightly it may shine, and of the adoption of truth, however forcibly it may convince. A Sage of old felt what it was, and it lies concealed in that pregnant utterance: *sapere aude*.

Dare to be wise! It is energy and courage that are required to combat the obstacles that both indolence of nature and cowardice of heart put in the way of our true enlightenment. Not for nothing does the ancient myth make the goddess of wisdom emerge fully armed from the head of Jupiter. For her very first action is a warlike one. Even at birth she has to fight a hard battle with the senses, which are loath to be snatched from their sweet repose. The majority of men are far too wearied and exhausted by the struggle for existence to gird themselves for a new and harder struggle against error. Happy to escape the hard labor of thinking for themselves, they are only too glad to resign to others the guardianship of their thoughts. And if it should happen that higher promptings stir within them, they embrace with avid faith the formulas that state and priesthood hold in readiness for such an event. If these unhappy men deserve our compassion, we are rightly contemptuous of those others whom a kindlier fate has freed from the yoke of physical needs, but who by their own choice continue to bow beneath it. Such people prefer the twilight of obscure ideas, where feeling is given full rein, and fancy can fashion at will convenient images, to the rays of truth that put to flight the fond delusions of their dreams. It is on precisely these illusions, which the unwelcome light of knowledge is meant to dissipate, that they have founded the whole edifice of their happiness—how can they be expected to pay so dearly for a truth that begins by depriving them of all they hold dear? They would first have to be wise in order to love wisdom: a truth already felt by him who gave philosophy her name.

It is not, then, enough to say that all enlightenment of the understanding is worthy of respect only inasmuch as it reacts upon character. To a certain extent it also proceeds from character, since the way to the head must be opened through the heart. The development of man's capacity for feeling is, therefore, the more urgent need of our age, not merely because it can be a means of making better insights effective for living, but precisely because it provides the impulse for bettering our insights.

Ninth Letter

But is this not, perhaps, to argue in a circle? Intellectual education is to bring about moral education, and yet moral education is to be the condition of intellectual education? All improvement in the

political sphere is to proceed from the ennobling of character—but how under the influence of a barbarous constitution is character ever to become ennobled? To this end we should, presumably, have to seek out some instrument not provided by the state, and to open up living springs that, whatever the political corruption, would remain clear and pure.

I have now reached the point to which all my preceding reflections have been tending. This instrument is fine art; such living springs are opened up in its immortal exemplars.

Art, like science, is absolved from all positive constraint and from all conventions introduced by man; both rejoice in absolute *immunity* from human arbitrariness. The political legislator may put their territory out of bounds; he cannot rule within it. He can proscribe the lover of truth; truth itself will prevail. He can humiliate the artist; but art he cannot falsify. True, nothing is more common than for both, science as well as art, to pay homage to the spirit of the age, or for creative minds to accept the critical standards of prevailing taste. In epochs where character becomes rigid and obdurate, we find science keeping a strict watch over its frontiers, and art moving in the heavy shackles of rules; in those where it becomes enervated and flabby, science will strive to please, and art to gratify. For whole centuries thinkers and artists will do their best to submerge truth and beauty in the depths of a degraded humanity; it is they themselves who are drowned there, while truth and beauty, with their own indestructible vitality, struggle triumphantly to the surface.

The artist is indeed the child of his age; but woe to him if he is at the same time its ward or, worse still, its minion! Let some beneficent deity snatch the suckling betimes from his mother's breast, nourish him with the milk of a better age, and suffer him to come to maturity under a distant Grecian sky. Then, when he has become a man, let him return, a stranger, to his own century; not, however, to gladden it by his appearance, but rather, terrible like Agamemnon's son, to cleanse and to purify it. His theme he will, indeed, take from the present; but his form he will borrow from a nobler time, nay, from beyond time altogether, from the absolute, unchanging, unity of his being. Here, from the pure ether of his genius, the living source of beauty flows down, untainted by the corruption of the generations and ages wallowing in the dark

eddies below. The theme of his work may be degraded by vagaries of the public mood, even as this has been known to ennoble it; but its form, inviolate, will remain immune from such vicissitudes. The Roman of the first century had long been bowing the knee before his emperors when statues still portrayed him erect; temples continued to be sacred to the eye long after the gods had become objects of derision; and the infamous crimes of a Nero or a Commodus were put to shame by the noble style of the building whose frame lent them cover. Humanity has lost its dignity; but art has rescued it and preserved it in significant stone. Truth lives on in the illusion of art, and it is from this copy, or afterimage, that the original image will once again be restored. Just as the nobility of art *survived* the nobility of nature, so now art goes before her, a voice rousing from slumber and preparing the shape of things to come. Even before truth's triumphant light can penetrate the recesses of the human heart, the poet's imagination will intercept its rays, and the peaks of humanity will be radiant while the dews of night still linger in the valley.

But how is the artist to protect himself against the corruption of the age that besets him on all sides? By disdaining its opinion. Let him direct his gaze upwards, to the dignity of his calling and the universal law, not downwards toward fortune and the needs of daily life. Free alike from the futile busyness that would fain set its mark upon the fleeting moment, and from the impatient spirit of enthusiasm that applies the measure of the absolute to the sorry products of time, let him leave the sphere of the actual to the intellect, which is at home there, while he strives to produce the ideal out of the union of what is possible with what is necessary. Let him express this ideal both in semblance and in truth, set the stamp of it upon the play of his imagination as upon the seriousness of his conduct, let him express it in all sensuous and spiritual forms, and silently project it into the infinity of time.

But not everyone whose soul glows with this ideal was granted either the creative tranquillity or the spirit of long patience required to imprint it upon the silent stone, or pour it into the sober mould of words, and so entrust it to the executory hands of time. Far too impetuous to proceed by such unobtrusive means, the divine impulse to form often hurls itself directly upon present-day reality and upon the life of action, and undertakes to fashion anew the

formless material presented by the moral world. The misfortunes of the human race speak urgently to the man of feeling; its degradation more urgently still; enthusiasm is kindled, and in vigorous souls ardent longing drives impatiently on toward action. But did he ever ask himself whether those disorders in the moral world offend his reason, or whether they do not rather wound his self-love? If he does not yet know the answer, he will detect it by the zeal with which he insists upon specific and prompt results. The pure moral impulse is directed towards the absolute. For such an impulse time does not exist, and the future turns into the present from the moment that it is seen to develop with inevitable necessity out of the present. In the eyes of a reason that knows no limits, the direction is at once the destination, and the way is completed from the moment it is trodden.

To the young friend of truth and beauty who would inquire of me how, despite all the opposition of his century, he is to satisfy the noble impulses of his heart, I would make answer: impart to the world you would influence a *direction* toward the good, and the quiet rhythm of time will bring it to fulfillment. You will have given it this direction: if, by your teaching, you have elevated its thoughts to the necessary and the eternal, if, by your actions and your creations, you have transformed the necessary and the eternal into an object of the heart's desire. The edifice of error and caprice will fall—it must fall, indeed it has already fallen—from the moment you are certain that it is on the point of giving way. But it is in man's inner being that it must give way, not just in the externals he presents to the world. It is in the modest sanctuary of your heart that you must rear victorious truth, and project it out of yourself in the form of beauty, so that not only thought can pay it homage, but sense, too, lay loving hold on its appearance. And lest you should find yourself receiving from the world as it is the model you yourself should be providing, do not venture into its equivocal company without first being sure that you bear within your own heart an escort from the world of the ideal. Live with your century; but do not be its creature. Work for your contemporaries; but create what they need, not what they praise. Without sharing their guilt, yet share with noble resignation in their punishment, and bow your head freely beneath the yoke that they find as difficult to dispense with as to bear. By the steadfast courage with which

you disdain their good fortune, you will show them that it is not through cowardice that you consent to share their sufferings. Think of them as they ought to be, when called upon to influence them; think of them as they are, when tempted to act on their behalf. In seeking their approval appeal to what is best in them, but in devising their happiness recall them as they are at their worst; then your own nobility will awaken theirs, and their unworthiness not defeat your purpose. The seriousness of your principles will frighten them away, but in the play of your semblance they will be prepared to tolerate them; for their taste is purer than their heart, and it is here that you must lay hold of the timorous fugitive. In vain will you assail their precepts, in vain condemn their practice; but on their leisure hours you can try your shaping hand. Banish from their pleasures caprice, frivolity, and coarseness, and imperceptibly you will banish these from their actions and, eventually, from their inclinations too. Surround them, wherever you meet them, with the great and noble forms of genius, and encompass them about with the symbols of perfection, until semblance conquer reality, and art triumph over nature.

Tenth Letter

You are, then, in agreement with me, and persuaded by the content of my previous letters, that man can deviate from his destiny in two quite different ways; that our own age is, in fact, moving along both these false roads, and has fallen a prey, on the one hand, to coarseness, on the other, to enervation and perversity. From this twofold straying it is to be brought back by means of beauty. But how can education through beauty counter both these opposite failings at one and the same time, and unite within itself two quite incompatible qualities? Can it enchain nature in the savage, and set it free in the barbarian? Can it at the same time tense and release? And if it does not really manage to do both, how can we reasonably expect it to effect anything so important as the education of mankind?

True, we are always being told, ad nauseam, that a developed feeling for beauty refines morals, so that this would not seem to stand in need of any further proof. People base this assumption on everyday experience, which almost always shows that clarity of

mind, liveliness of feeling, graciousness, yes even dignity, of conduct, are linked with a cultivated taste, and their opposite for the most part with an uncultivated one. People invoke confidently enough the example of the most civilized of all the nations of antiquity, in whom the feeling for beauty at the same time reached its highest development, and the opposite example of those partly savage, partly barbaric, peoples, who paid for their insensitivity to beauty by a coarse, or at least austere, character. Nevertheless, it sometimes occurs to thinking minds either to deny this fact or at least to doubt the legitimacy of the conclusions drawn from it. They do not think quite so ill of that savagery with which primitive peoples are usually reproached, nor quite so well of that refinement for which the cultivated are commended. Even in antiquity there were men who were by no means so convinced that aesthetic culture is a boon and a blessing, and were hence more than inclined to refuse the arts of the imagination admission to their republic.

I do not refer to those who despise the Graces because they have never experienced their favor. Those who know no other criterion of value than the effort of earning or the tangible profit, how should they be capable of appreciating the unobtrusive effect of taste on the outward appearance and on the mind and character of men? How can they help shutting their eyes to the essential advantages of an aesthetic education in view of its incidental disadvantages? A man who has himself no form will despise any grace of speech as bribery and corruption, any elegance in social intercourse as hypocrisy, any delicacy or distinction of bearing as exaggeration and affectation. He cannot forgive the darling of the Graces for brightening every circle by his company, for swaying all minds to his purpose in the world of affairs, for perhaps, through his writings, leaving the impress of his mind upon the whole century—while he, poor victim of sheer application, can with all his knowledge command no interest, nor move so much as a stone from its place. Since he cannot learn from his fortunate rival the blessed secret of pleasing, he has no choice but to bewail the perversity of human nature that honors the appearance rather than the substance.

But there are voices worthy of respect raised against the effects of beauty, and armed against it with formidable arguments drawn from experience. "It cannot be denied," they say, "that the delights

of the beautiful can, in the right hands, be made to serve laudable ends. But it is by no means contrary to its nature for it to have, in the wrong hands, quite the opposite effect, and to put its soul-seducing power at the service of error and injustice. Just because taste is always concerned with form, and never with content, it finally induces in the mind a dangerous tendency to neglect reality altogether, and to sacrifice truth and morality to the alluring dress in which they appear. All substantial difference between things is lost, and appearance alone determines their worth. How many men of talent," they continue, "are not deflected by the seductive power of beauty from serious and strenuous effort, or at least misled into treating it lightly? How many of feeble intelligence are not in conflict with the social order just because the fancy of poets was pleased to present a world in which everything proceeds quite differently, in which no conventions fetter opinion, and no artifice suppresses nature? What dangerous dialectics have the passions not learned since, in the portrayals of the poets, they have been made to flaunt themselves in brilliant colors and, when in conflict with laws and duties, usually been left masters of the field? What has society profited from letting beauty prescribe the laws of social intercourse, which formerly were regulated by truth, or outward impression determine the respect that should attach to merit alone? It is true we now see all those virtues flourishing whose appearance creates a pleasing impression and confers social prestige; but, as against this, every kind of excess, too, is rampant, and every vice in vogue that is compatible with a fair exterior." And indeed it must give pause for reflection that in almost every historical epoch, in which the arts flourish, and taste prevails, we find humanity at a low ebb, and cannot point to a single instance of a high degree and wide diffusion of aesthetic culture going hand in hand with political freedom and civic virtue, fine manners with good morals, refinement of conduct with truth of conduct.

As long as Athens and Sparta maintained their independence, and respect for laws served as the basis of their constitution, taste was as yet immature, art still in its infancy, and beauty far from ruling over the hearts of men. It is true that the art of poetry had already soared to sublime heights; but only on the wings of that kind of genius that we know to be closely akin to the primitive, a light wont to shine in the darkness, and evidence, therefore, against

the taste of the time rather than for it. When, under Pericles and Alexander, the golden age of the arts arrived, and the rule of taste extended its sway, the strength and freedom of Greece are no longer to be found. Rhetoric falsified truth, wisdom gave offense in the mouth of a Socrates, and virtue in the life of a Phocion. The Romans, as we know, had first to exhaust their strength in the civil wars and, enervated by oriental luxury, to bow beneath the yoke of a successful ruler, before Greek art can be seen triumphing over the rigidity of their character. Nor did the light of culture dawn among the Arabs until the vigor of their warlike spirit had languished under the scepter of the Abbassids. In modern Italy the fine arts did not appear until after the glorious Lombard League was destroyed, Florence subjected to the Medicis, and in all the vigorous city-states the spirit of independence had made way for an inglorious submission. It is almost superfluous to recall the example of modern nations whose refinement increased as their independence declined. Wherever we turn our eyes in past history we find taste and freedom shunning each other, and beauty founding her sway solely upon the decline and fall of heroic virtues.

And yet it is precisely this energy of character, at whose expense aesthetic culture is commonly purchased, which is the mainspring of all that is great and excellent in man, and the lack of which no other advantage, however great, can repair. If, then, we only heed what past experience has to teach us about the influence of beauty, there is certainly no encouragement to develop feelings that are so much of a threat to the true civilization of man; and even at the risk of coarseness and harshness we shall prefer to dispense with the melting power of beauty, rather than see ourselves, with all the advantages of refinement, delivered up to her enervating influence. But perhaps *experience* is not the judgement seat before which such an issue as this can be decided. And before any weight can be attached to her evidence, it would first have to be established beyond all doubt that the beauty of which we are speaking, and the beauty against which those examples from history testify, are one and the same. But this seems to presuppose a concept of beauty derived from a source other than experience, since by means of it we are to decide whether that which in experience we call beautiful is justly entitled to the name.

This pure *rational concept* of beauty, if such could be found,

would therefore—since it cannot be derived from any actual case, but rather itself corrects and regulates our judgment of every actual case—have to be discovered by a process of abstraction, and deduced from the sheer potentialities of our sensuo-rational nature. In a single word, beauty would have to be shown to be a necessary condition of human being. From now on, then, we must lift our thoughts to the pure concept of human nature; and since experience never shows us human nature as such, but only individual human beings in individual situations, we must endeavor to discover from all these individual and changing manifestations that which is absolute and unchanging, and, by the rejection of all contingent limitations, apprehend the necessary conditions of their existence. True, this transcendental way will lead us out of the familiar circle of phenomenal existence, away from the living presence of things, and cause us to tarry for a while upon the barren and naked land of abstractions. But we are, after all, struggling for a firm basis of knowledge that nothing shall shake. And he who never ventures beyond actuality will never win the prize of truth.

Eleventh Letter

When abstraction rises to the highest level it can possibly attain, it arrives at two ultimate concepts before which it must halt and recognize that here it has reached its limits. It distinguishes in man something that endures and something that constantly changes. That which endures it calls his *person*, that which changes, his *condition*.

Person and condition—the self and its determining attributes—which in the absolute being we think of as one and the same, are in the finite being eternally two. Amid all persistence of the person, the condition changes; amid all the changes of condition, the person persists. We pass from rest to activity, from passion to indifference, from agreement to contradiction; but *we* remain, and what proceeds directly from *us* remains too. In the absolute subject alone do all its determining attributes persist *with* the personality, since all of them proceed *from* the personality. *What* the Godhead is, and all that it is, it is just *because* it is. It is consequently everything for all eternity, because it is eternal.

Since in man, as finite being, person and condition are distinct,

the condition can neither be grounded upon the person, nor the person upon the condition. Were the latter the case, the person would have to change; were the former the case, the condition would have to persist; hence, in each case, either the personality or the finiteness cease to be. Not because we think, will, or feel, do we exist; and not because we exist, do we think, will, or feel. We are because we are; we feel, think, and will, because outside of ourselves something other than ourselves exists too.

The person therefore must be its own ground; for what persists cannot proceed from what changes. And so we would, in the first place, have the idea of absolute being grounded upon itself, that is to say, *freedom*. The condition, on the other hand, must have a ground other than itself; it must, since it does not owe its existence to the person, i.e., is not absolute, *proceed from* something. And so we would, in the second place, have the condition of all contingent being or becoming, that is to say, *time*. "Time is the condition of all becoming" is an identical proposition, for it does nothing but assert that "succession is the condition of things succeeding one upon another."

The person, which manifests itself in the eternally persisting "I," and only in this, cannot become, cannot have a beginning in time. The reverse is rather the case; time must have its beginning in the person, since something constant must form the basis of change. For change to take place, there must be something that changes; this something cannot therefore itself be change. If we say "the flower blooms and fades," we make the flower the constant in this transformation, and endow it, as it were, with a person, in which these two conditions become manifest. To say that man has first to become, is no objection; for man is not just person pure and simple, but person situated in a particular condition. Every condition, however, every determinate existence, has its origins in time; and so man, as a phenomenal being, must also have a beginning, although the pure intelligence within him is eternal. Without time, that is to say, without becoming, he would never be a determinate being; his personality would indeed exist potentially, but not in fact. It is only through the succession of its perceptions that the enduring "I" ever becomes aware of itself as a phenomenon.

The material of activity, therefore, or the reality which the supreme intelligence creates out of itself, man has first to *receive*;

and he does in fact receive it, by way of perception, as something existing outside of him in space, and as something changing within him in time. This changing material within him is accompanied by his never-changing "I"—and to remain perpetually himself throughout all change, to convert all that he apprehends into experience, i.e., to organize it into a unity that has significance, and to transform all his modes of existence in time into a law for all times: this is the injunction laid upon him by his rational nature. Only inasmuch as he changes does he *exist*; only inasmuch as he remains unchangeable does *he* exist. Man, imagined in his perfection, would therefore be the constant unity that remains eternally itself amidst the floods of change.

Now although an infinite being, a Godhead, cannot *become*, we must surely call divine any tendency that has as its unending task the realization of that most characteristic attribute of Godhead, viz., absolute manifestation of potential (the actualization of all that is possible), and absolute unity of manifestation (the necessity of all that is made actual). A disposition to the divine man, does indubitably carry within him, in his personality; the way to the divine (if we can call a way that which never leads to the goal) is opened up to him through the *senses*.

His personality, considered for itself alone, and independently of all sense material, is merely the predisposition to a possible expression of his infinite nature; and as long as he has neither perceptions nor sensations, he is nothing but form and empty potential. His sensuous nature, considered for itself alone, and apart from any spontaneous activity of the mind, can do no more than reduce him, who without it is nothing but form, into matter, but can in no wise bring it about that he becomes conjoined with matter. As long as he merely feels, merely desires and acts upon mere desire, he is as yet nothing but *world*, if by this term we understand nothing but the formless content of time. True, it is his sensuous nature alone that can turn this potential into actual power; but it is only his personality that makes all his actual activity into something that is inalienably his own. In order, therefore, not to be mere world, he must impart form to matter; in order not to be mere form, he must give reality to the predisposition he carries within him. He gives reality to form when he brings time into being, when he confronts changelessness with change, the eternal unity of his own

self with the manifold variety of the world. He gives form to matter when he annuls time again, when he affirms persistence within change, and subjugates the manifold variety of the world to the unity of his own self.

From this there proceed two contrary challenges to man, the two fundamental laws of his sensuo-rational nature. The first insists upon absolute *reality*: he is to turn everything that is mere form into world, and make all his potentialities fully manifest. The second insists upon absolute *formality*: he is to destroy everything in himself that is mere world, and bring harmony into all his changes. In other words, he is to externalize all that is within him, and give form to all that is outside him. Both these tasks, conceived in their highest fulfillment, lead us back to that concept of Godhead from which I started.

Twelfth Letter

Toward the accomplishment of this twofold task—of giving reality to the necessity *within*, and subjecting to the law of necessity the reality *without*—we are impelled by two opposing forces which, since they drive us to the realization of their object, may aptly be termed drives. The first of these, which I will call the *sensuous* drive, proceeds from the physical existence of man, or his sensuous nature. Its business is to set him within the limits of time, and to turn him into matter—not to provide him with matter, since that, of course, would presuppose a free activity of the person capable of receiving such matter, and distinguishing it from the self as from that which persists. By matter in this context we understand nothing more than change, or reality that occupies time. Consequently this drive demands that there shall be change, that time shall have a content. This state, which is nothing but time occupied by content, is called sensation, and it is through this alone that physical existence makes itself known.

Since everything that exists in time exists as a *succession*, the very fact of something existing at all means that everything else is excluded. When we strike a note on an instrument, only this single

note, of all those it is capable of emitting, is actually realized; when man is sensible of the present, the whole infinitude of his possible determinations is confined to this single mode of his being. Wherever, therefore, this drive functions exclusively, we inevitably find the highest degree of limitation. Man in this state is nothing but a unit of quantity, an occupied moment of time—or rather, *he* is not at all, for his personality is suspended as long as he is ruled by sensation, and swept along by the flux of time.*

The domain of this drive embraces the whole extent of man's finite being. And since form is never made manifest except in some material, nor the absolute except through the medium of limitation, it is indeed to this sensuous drive that the whole of man's phenomenal existence is ultimately tied. But although it is this drive alone that awakens and develops the potentialities of man, it is also this drive alone that makes their complete fulfillment impossible. With indestructible chains it binds the ever-soaring spirit to the world of sense, and summons abstraction from its most unfettered excursions into the infinite back to the limitations of the present. Thought may indeed escape it for the moment, and a firm will triumphantly resist its demands; but suppressed nature soon resumes her rights, and presses for reality of existence, for some content to our knowing and some purpose for our doing.

The second of the two drives, which we may call the *formal* drive, proceeds from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and is intent on giving him the freedom to bring harmony into the diversity of his manifestations, and to affirm his person among all his changes of condition. Since this person, being an absolute and indivisible unity, can never be at variance with

* For this condition of self-loss under the dominion of feeling linguistic usage has the very appropriate expression: *to be beside oneself*, i.e., to be outside of one's own self. Although this turn of phrase is only used when sensation is intensified into passion, and the condition becomes more marked by being prolonged, it can nevertheless be said that everyone is beside himself as long as he does nothing but feel. To return from this condition to self-possession is termed, equally aptly: *to be oneself again*, i.e., to return into one's own self, to restore one's person. Of someone who has fainted, by contrast, we do not say that he is beside himself, but that he is *away from himself*, i.e., he has been rapt away from his self, whereas in the former case he is merely not in his self. Consequently, someone who has come out of a faint has merely *come to himself*, which state is perfectly compatible with being beside oneself.

itself, *since we are to all eternity we ourselves*, that drive that insists on affirming the personality can never demand anything but that which is binding upon it to all eternity; hence it decides forever as it decides for this moment, and commands for this moment what it commands for ever. Consequently it embraces the whole sequence of time, which is as much as to say: it annuls time and annuls change. It wants the real to be necessary and eternal, and the eternal and the necessary to be real. In other words, it insists on truth and on the right.

If the first drive only furnishes *cases*, this second one gives *laws*—laws for every judgment, where it is a question of knowledge, laws for every will, where it is a question of action. Whether it is a case of knowing an object, i.e., of attributing objective validity to a condition of our subject, or of acting upon knowledge, i.e., of making an objective principle the determining motive of our condition—in both cases we wrest this our condition from the jurisdiction of time, and endow it with reality for all men and all times, that is with universality and necessity. Feeling can only say: this is true *for this individual* and *at this moment*, and another moment, another individual, can come along and revoke assertions made thus under the impact of momentary sensation. But once thought pronounces; *that is*, it decides for ever and aye, and the validity of its verdict is guaranteed by the personality itself, which defies all change. Inclination can only say: this is good *for you as an individual* and *for your present need*; but your individuality and your present need will be swept away by change, and what you now so ardently desire will one day become the object of your aversion. But once the moral feeling says: *this shall be*, it decides forever and aye—once you confess truth because it is truth, and practice justice because it is justice, then you have made an individual case into a law for all cases, and treated one moment of your life as if it were eternity.

Where, then, the formal drive holds sway, and the pure object acts within us, we experience the greatest enlargement of being: all limitations disappear, and from the mere unit of quantity to which the poverty of his senses reduced him, man has raised himself to a *unity of ideas* embracing the whole realm of phenomena. During this operation we are no longer in time; time, with its whole never-ending succession, is in us. We are no longer individuals; we are

species. The judgment of all minds is expressed through our own, the choice of all hearts is represented by our action.

Thirteenth Letter

At first sight nothing could seem more diametrically opposed than the tendencies of these two drives, the one pressing for change, the other for changelessness. And yet it is these two drives that between them, exhaust our concept of humanity, and make a third *fundamental drive* that might possibly reconcile the two a completely unthinkable concept. How, then, are we to restore the unity of human nature that seems to be utterly destroyed by this primary and radical opposition?

It is true that their *tendencies* do indeed conflict with each other, but—and this is the point to note—not in *the same objectives*, and things that never make contact cannot collide. The sensuous drive does indeed demand change; but it does not demand the extension of this to the person and its domain, does not demand a change of principles. The formal drive insists on unity and persistence—but it does not require the condition to be stabilized as well as the person, does not require identity of sensation. The two are, therefore, not by nature opposed; and if they nevertheless seem to be so, it is because they have become opposed through a wanton transgression of nature, through mistaking their nature and function, and confusing their spheres of operation.* To watch over these,

* 1. Once you postulate a primary, and therefore necessary, antagonism between these two drives, there is, of course, no other means of maintaining unity in man than by unconditionally *subordinating* the sensuous drive to the rational. From this, however, only uniformity can result, never harmony, and man goes on forever being divided. Subordination there must, of course, be; but it must be reciprocal. For even though it is true that limitation can never be the source of the absolute, and hence freedom never be dependent upon time, it is no less certain that the absolute can of itself never be the source of limitation, or a condition in time be dependent upon freedom. Both principles are, therefore, at once subordinated to each other and coordinated with each other, that is to say, they stand in reciprocal relation to one another: without form no matter, and without matter no form. (This concept of reciprocal action, and its fundamental importance, is admirably set forth in Fichte's *Fundamentals of the Theory of Knowledge*, Leipzig, 1794). How things stand with the person in the realm of ideas we frankly do not know; but that it can never become manifest in the realm of time without taking on matter, of that we are certain. In this realm, therefore, matter will have some say, and not merely in a role *subordinate* to form, but also *coordinate* with it and independently of it. Neces-

and secure for each of these two drives its proper frontiers, is the task of *culture*, which is, therefore, in duty bound to do justice to both drives equally: not simply to maintain the rational against the sensuous, but the sensuous against the rational too. Hence its business is twofold: *first*, to preserve the life of sense against the encroachments of freedom; and *second*, to secure the personality against the forces of sensation. The former it achieves by developing our capacity for feeling, the latter by developing our capacity for reason.

Since the world is extension in time, i.e., change, the perfection of that faculty that connects man with the world will have to consist in maximum changeability and maximum extensity. Since the person is persistence within change, the perfection of that faculty that is to oppose change will have to be maximum autonomy and maximum intensity. The more facets his receptivity develops, the more labile it is, and the more surface it presents to phenomena, so much more world does man *apprehend*, and all the more potentialities does he develop in himself. The more power and depth the personality achieves, and the more freedom reason attains, so much more world does man *comprehend*, and all the more form does he create outside of himself. His education will therefore consist, *firstly*, in procuring for the receptive faculty the most manifold contacts with the world, and, within the purview of feeling, intensifying passivity to the utmost; *secondly*, in securing for the determining faculty the highest degree of independence from the receptive, and, within the purview of reason, intensifying activity to the utmost. Where both these aptitudes are conjoined, man will combine the greatest fullness of existence with the highest auton-

sary as it may be, therefore, that feeling should have no say in the realm of reason, it is no less necessary that reason should not presume to have a say in the realm of feeling. Just by assigning to each of them its own sphere, we are by that very fact excluding the other from it, and setting bounds to each, bounds that can only be transgressed *at the risk of detriment to both*.

2. In the transcendental method of philosophizing, where everything depends on clearing form of content, and obtaining necessity in its pure state, free of all admixture with the contingent, one easily falls into thinking of material things as nothing but an obstacle, and of imagining that our sensuous nature, just because it happens to be a hindrance in *this* operation, must of necessity be in conflict with reason. Such a way of thinking is, it is true, wholly alien to the *spirit* of the Kantian system, but it may very well be found in the *letter* of it.

omy and freedom, and instead of losing himself to the world, will rather draw the latter into himself in all its infinitude of phenomena, and subject it to the unity of his reason.

But man can turn these relations *upside down*, and thus miss his destiny in two different ways. He can transfer the intensity required by the active function to the passive, let his sensuous drive encroach upon the formal, and make the receptive faculty do the work of the determining one. Or he can assign to the active function that extensity that is proper to the passive, let the formal drive encroach upon the sensuous, and substitute the determining faculty for the receptive one. In the first case he will never be *himself*; in the second he will never be *anything else*; and for that very reason, therefore, he will in both cases be *neither the one nor the other*, consequently—a nonentity.*

* 1. The pernicious effect, upon both thought and action, of an undue surrender to our sensual nature will be evident to all. Not quite so evident, although just as common, and no less important, is the nefarious influence exerted upon our knowledge and upon our conduct by a preponderance of rationality. Permit me therefore to recall, from the great number of relevant instances, just two that may serve to throw light upon the damage caused when the functions of thought and will encroach upon those of intuition and feeling.

2. One of the chief reasons why our natural sciences make such slow progress is obviously the universal, and almost uncontrollable, propensity to teleological judgments, in which, once they are used constitutively, the determining faculty is substituted for the receptive. However strong and however varied the impact made upon our organs by nature, all her manifold variety is then entirely lost upon us, because we are seeking nothing in her but what we have put into her; because, instead of letting her come *in upon us*, we are thrusting ourselves *out upon her* with all the impatient anticipations of our reason. If, then, in the course of centuries, it should happen that a man tries to approach her with his sense organs untroubled, innocent and wide open, and, thanks to this, should chance upon a multitude of phenomena that we, with our tendency to prejudge the issue, have overlooked, then we are mightily astonished that so many eyes in such broad daylight should have noticed nothing. This premature hankering after harmony before we have even got together the individual sounds that are to go to its making, this violent usurping of authority by ratiocination in a field where its right to give orders is by no means unconditional, is the reason why so many thinking minds fail to have any fruitful effect upon the advancement of science; and it would be difficult to say which has done more harm to the progress of knowledge: a sense faculty unamenable to form, or a reasoning faculty that will not stay for a content.

3. It would be no less difficult to determine which does more to impede the practice of brotherly love: the violence of our passions, which disturbs it, or the rigidity of our principles, which chills it—the egotism of our senses or the egotism of our reason. If we are to become compassionate, helpful, effective human beings, feeling and character must unite, even as wide-open senses must combine with vigor

For if the sensuous drive becomes the determining one, that is to say, if the senses assume the role of legislator and the world suppresses the person, then the world ceases to be an object precisely to the extent that it becomes a force. From the moment that man is merely a content of time, he ceases to exist, and *has* in consequence no content either. With his personality his condition, too, is annulled, because these two concepts are reciprocally related—because change demands a principle of permanence, and finite reality an infinite reality. If, on the other hand, the formal drive becomes receptive, that is to say, if thought forestalls feeling and the person supplants the world, then the person ceases to be autonomous force and subject precisely to the extent that it forces its way into the place of the object—because, in order to become manifest, the principle of permanence requires change, and absolute reality has need of limitation. From the moment that man is only form, he ceases to *have* a form; the annulling of his condition, consequently, involves that of his person too. In a single word, only

of intellect if we are to acquire experience. How can we, however laudable our precepts, how can we be just, kindly, and human toward others, if we lack the power of receiving into ourselves, faithfully and truly, natures unlike ours, of feeling our way into the situation of others, of making other people's feelings our own? But in the education we receive, no less than in that we give ourselves, this power gets repressed in exactly the measure that we seek to break the force of passions, and strengthen character by means of principles. Since it costs effort to remain true to one's principles when feeling is easily stirred, we take the easier way out and try to make character secure by blunting feeling; for it is, of course, infinitely easier to have peace and quiet from an adversary you have disarmed than to master a spirited and active foe. And this, for the most part, is the operation that is meant when people speak of *forming character*; and that, even in the best sense of the word, where it implies the cultivation of the inner, and not merely of the outer man. A man so formed will, without doubt, be immune from the danger of being crude nature or of appearing as such; but he will at the same time be armored by principle against all natural feeling, and be equally inaccessible to the claims of humanity *from without* as he is to those of humanity *from within*.

4. It is a most pernicious abuse of the ideal of perfection, to apply it in all its rigor, either in our judgments of other people, or in those cases where we have to act on their behalf. The former leads to sentimental idealism; the latter to hardness and coldness of heart. We certainly make our duty to society uncommonly easy for ourselves by mentally substituting for the *actual* man who claims our help the *ideal* man who could in all probability help himself. Severity with one's self combined with leniency toward others is a sign of the truly excellent character. But mostly the man who is lenient to others will also be lenient to himself; and he who is severe with himself will be the same with others. To be lenient to oneself and severe toward others is the most contemptible character of all.

inasmuch as he is autonomous, is there reality outside him and is he receptive to it; and only inasmuch as he is receptive, is there reality within him and is he a thinking force.

Both drives, therefore, need to have limits set to them and, inasmuch as they can be thought of as energies, need to be relaxed; the sense drive so that it does not encroach upon the domain of law, the formal drive so that it does not encroach on that of feeling. But the relaxing of the sense drive must in no wise be the result of physical impotence or blunted feeling, which never merits anything but contempt. It must be an act of free choice, an activity of the person that, by its moral intensity, moderates that of the senses and, by mastering impressions, robs them of their depth only in order to give them increased surface. It is character that must set bounds to temperament, for it is *only to profit the mind* that sense may go short. In the same way the relaxing of the formal drive must not be the result of spiritual impotence or flabbiness of thought or will; for this would only degrade man. It must, if it is to be at all praiseworthy, spring from abundance of feeling and sensation. Sense herself must, with triumphant power, remain mistress of her own domain, and resist the violence that the mind, by its usurping tactics, would fain inflict upon her. In a single word: personality must keep the sensuous drive within its proper bounds, and receptivity, or nature, must do the same with the formal drive.

Fourteenth Letter

We have now been led to the notion of a reciprocal action between the two drives, reciprocal action of such a kind that the activity of the one both gives rise to, and sets limits to, the activity of the other, and in which each in itself achieves its highest manifestation precisely by reason of the other being active.

Such reciprocal relation between the two drives is, admittedly, but a task enjoined upon us by reason, a problem that man is only capable of solving completely in the perfect consummation of his existence. It is, in the most precise sense of the word, *the idea of his human nature*, hence something infinite, to which in the course of time he can approximate ever more closely, but without ever being able to reach it. "He is not to strive for form at the cost of reality, nor for reality at the cost of form; rather is he to seek

absolute being by means of a determinate being, and a determinate being by means of infinite being. He is to set up a world over against himself because he is person, and he is to be person because a world stands over against him. He is to feel because he is conscious of himself, and be conscious of himself because he feels."— That he does actually conform to this idea, that he is consequently, in the fullest sense of the word, a human being, is never brought home to him as long as he satisfies only one of these two drives to the exclusion of the other, or only satisfies them one after the other. For as long as he only feels, his person, or his absolute existence, remains a mystery to him; and as long as he only thinks, his existence in time, or his condition, does likewise. Should there, however, be cases in which he were to have this twofold experience *simultaneously*, in which he were to be at once conscious of his freedom and sensible of his existence, were, at one and the same time, to feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind, then he would in such cases, and in such cases only, have a complete intuition of his human nature, and the object that afforded him this vision would become for him a symbol of his *accomplished destiny* and, in consequence (since that is only to be attained in the totality of time), serve him as a manifestation of the infinite.

Assuming that cases of this sort could actually occur in experience, they would awaken in him a new drive that, precisely because the other two drives cooperate within it, would be opposed to each of them considered separately and could justifiably count as a new drive. The sense drive demands that there shall be change and that time shall have a content; the form drive demands that time shall be annulled and that there shall be no change. That drive, therefore, in which both the others work in concert (permit me for the time being, until I have justified the term, to call it the *play drive*), the play drive, therefore, would be directed toward annulling time *within time*, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity.

The sense drive wants to *be* determined, wants to receive its object; the form drive wants *itself* to determine, wants to bring forth its object. The play drive, therefore, will endeavor so to receive as if it had itself brought forth, and so to bring forth as the intuitive sense aspires to receive.

The sense drive excludes from its subject all autonomy and free-

dom; the form drive excludes from its subject all dependence, all passivity. Exclusion of freedom, however, implies physical necessity, exclusion of passivity moral necessity. Both drives, therefore, exert constraint upon the psyche; the former through the laws of nature, the latter through the laws of reason. The play drive, in consequence, as the one in which both the others act in concert, will exert upon the psyche at once a moral and a physical constraint; it will, therefore, since it annuls all contingency, annul all constraint too, and set man free both physically and morally. When we embrace with passion someone who deserves our contempt, we are painfully aware of the *compulsion of nature*. When we feel hostile toward another who compels our esteem, we are painfully aware of the *compulsion of reason*. But once he has at the same time engaged our affection and won our esteem, then both the compulsion of feeling and the compulsion of reason disappear and we begin to love him, i.e., we begin to play with both our affection and our esteem.

Since, moreover, the sense drive exerts a physical, the form drive a moral constraint, the first will leave our formal, the second our material disposition at the mercy of the contingent; that is to say, it is a matter of chance whether our happiness will coincide with our perfection or our perfection with our happiness. The play drive, in consequence, in which both work in concert, will make our formal as well as our material disposition, our perfection as well as our happiness, contingent. It will therefore, just because it makes *both* contingent and because with all constraint all contingency too disappears, abolish contingency in both, and, as a result, introduce form into matter and reality into form. To the extent that it deprives feelings and passions of their dynamic power, it will bring them into harmony with the ideas of reason; and to the extent that it deprives the laws of reason of their moral compulsion, it will reconcile them with the interests of the senses.

Fifteenth Letter

I am drawing ever nearer the goal toward which I have been leading you by a not exactly encouraging path. If you will consent to follow me a few steps further along it, horizons all the wider will unfold

and a pleasing prospect perhaps requite you for the labor of the journey.

The object of the sense drive, expressed in a general concept, we call *life*, in the widest sense of the term: a concept designating all material being and all that is immediately present to the senses. The object of the form drive, expressed in a general concept, we call *form*, both in the figurative and in the literal sense of this word: a concept that includes all the formal qualities of things and all the relations of these to our thinking faculties. The object of the play drive, represented in a general schema, may therefore be called *living-form*: a concept serving to designate all the aesthetic qualities of phenomena and, in a word, what in the widest sense of the term we call *beauty*.

According to this explanation, if such it be, the term *beauty* is neither extended to cover the whole realm of living things nor is it merely confined to this realm. A block of marble, though it is and remains lifeless, can nevertheless, thanks to the architect or the sculptor, become living form; and a human being, though he may live and have form, is far from being on that account a living form. In order to be so, his form would have to be life, and his life form. As long as we merely think about his form, it is lifeless, a mere abstraction; as long as we merely feel his life, it is formless, a mere impression. Only when his form lives in our feeling and his life takes on form in our understanding, does he become living form; and this will always be the case whenever we adjudge him beautiful.

But because we know how to specify the elements that when combined produce beauty, this does not mean that its genesis has as yet in any way been explained; for that would require us to understand *the actual manner of their combining*, and this, like all reciprocal action between finite and infinite, remains for ever inaccessible to our probing. Reason, on transcendental grounds, makes the following demand: let there be a bond of union between the form drive and the material drive; that is to say, let there be a play drive, since only the union of reality with form, contingency with necessity, passivity with freedom, makes the concept of human nature complete. Reason must make this demand because it is reason—because it is its nature to insist on perfection and on the abolition of all limitation, and because any exclusive activity on

the part of either the one drive or the other leaves human nature incomplete and gives rise to some limitation within it. Consequently, as soon as reason utters the pronouncement: let humanity exist, it has by that very pronouncement also promulgated the law: let there be beauty. Experience can provide an answer to the question *whether* there is such a thing as beauty, and we shall know the answer once experience has taught us whether there is such a thing as humanity. But *how* there can be beauty, and how humanity is possible, neither reason nor experience can tell us.

Man, as we know, is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively mind. Beauty, as the consummation of his humanity, can therefore be neither exclusively life nor exclusively form. Not mere life, as acute observers, adhering too closely to the testimony of experience, have maintained, and to which the taste of our age would fain degrade it; not mere form, as it has been adjudged by philosophers whose speculations led them too far away from experience, or by artists who, philosophizing on beauty, let themselves be too exclusively guided by the needs of their craft.* It is the object common to both drives, that is to say, the object of the play-drive. This term is fully justified by linguistic usage, which is wont to designate as “play” everything that is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes no kind of constraint either from within or from without. Since, in contemplation of the beautiful, the psyche finds itself in a happy medium between the realm of law and the sphere of physical exigency, it is, precisely because it is divided between the two, removed from the constraint of the one as of the other. The material drive, like the formal drive, is wholly *earnest* in its demands; for, in the sphere of knowledge, the former is concerned with the reality, the latter with the necessity of things; while in the sphere of action, the first is directed toward the preservation of life, the second toward the maintenance of dignity: both, therefore, toward truth and toward perfection. But

* Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, makes beauty into mere life. As far as I know, every adherent of dogmatic philosophy, who has ever confessed his belief on this subject, makes it into mere form: among artists, Raphael Mengs, in his *Reflections on Taste in Painting*, not to speak of others. In this, as in everything else, critical philosophy has opened up the way whereby empiricism can be led back to principles, and speculation back to experience.

life becomes of less consequence once human dignity enters in, and duty ceases to be a constraint once inclination exerts its pull; similarly our psyche accepts the reality of things, or material truth, with greater freedom and serenity once this latter encounters formal truth, or the law of necessity, and no longer feels constrained by abstraction once this can be accompanied by the immediacy of intuition. In a word: by entering into association with ideas all reality loses its earnestness because it then becomes of *small account*; and by coinciding with feeling necessity divests itself of its earnestness because it then becomes of *light weight*.

But, you may long have been tempted to object, is beauty not degraded by being made to consist of mere play and reduced to the level of those frivolous things that have always borne this name? Does it not belie the rational concept as well as the dignity of beauty—which is, after all, here being considered as an instrument of culture—if we limit it to *mere play*? And does it not belie the empirical concept of play—a concept that is, after all, entirely compatible with the exclusion of all taste—if we limit it merely to beauty?

But how can we speak of *mere play*, when we know that it is precisely play and play *alone*, which of all man's states and conditions is the one that makes him whole and unfolds both sides of his nature at once? What you, according to your idea of the matter, call *limitation*, I, according to mine—which I have justified by proof—call *expansion*. I, therefore, would prefer to put it exactly the opposite way round and say: the agreeable, the good, the perfect, with these man is *merely* in earnest; but with beauty he plays. True, we must not think here of the various forms of play that are in vogue in actual life, and are usually directed to very material objects. But then in actual life we should also seek in vain for the kind of beauty with which we are here concerned. The beauty we find in actual existence is precisely what the play drive we find in actual existence deserves; but with the ideal of beauty that is set up by reason, an ideal of the play drive, too, is enjoined upon man, which he must keep before his eyes in all his forms of play.

We shall not go far wrong when trying to discover a man's ideal of beauty if we inquire how he satisfies his play drive. If at the Olympic Games the peoples of Greece delighted in the bloodless combats of strength, speed, and agility, and in the nobler rivalry

of talents, and if the Roman people regaled themselves with the death throes of a vanquished gladiator or of his Libyan opponent, we can, from this single trait, understand why we seek the ideal forms of a Venus, a Juno, an Apollo, not in Rome, but in Greece.* Reason, however, declares: the beautiful is to be neither mere life, nor mere form, but living form, i.e., beauty; for it imposes upon man the double law of absolute formality and absolute reality. Consequently, reason also makes the pronouncement: with beauty man shall *only play*, and it is *with beauty only* that he shall play.

For, to mince matters no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *he is only fully a human being when he plays*. This proposition, which at the moment may sound like a paradox, will take on both weight and depth of meaning once we have got as far as applying it to the twofold earnestness of duty and of destiny. It will, I promise you, prove capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful, and of the still more difficult art of living. But it is, after all, only in philosophy that the proposition is unexpected; it was long ago alive and operative in the art and in the feeling of the Greeks, the most distinguished exponents of both; only they transferred to Olympus what was meant to be realized on earth. Guided by the truth of that same proposition, they banished from the brow of the blessed gods all the earnestness and efforts that furrow the cheeks of mortals, no less than the empty pleasures that preserve the smoothness of a vacuous face; freed those ever-contented beings from the bonds inseparable from every purpose, every duty, every care, and made *idleness* and *indifference* the enviable portion of divinity—merely a more human name for the freest, most sublime state of being. Both the material constraint of natural laws and the spiritual constraint of moral laws were resolved in their higher concept of necessity, which embraced both worlds at once; and it was only out of the perfect union of those two necessities

* If (to confine ourselves to the modern world) we compare horse racing in London, bullfights in Madrid, *spectacles* in the Paris of former days, the gondola races in Venice, animal baiting in Vienna, and the gay attractive life of the Corso in Rome, it will not be difficult to determine the different nuances of taste among these different peoples. However, there is far less uniformity among the amusements of the common people in these different countries than there is among those of the refined classes in those same countries, a fact that it is easy to account for.

that for them true freedom could proceed. Inspired by this spirit, the Greeks effaced from the features of their ideal physiognomy, together with *inclination*, every trace of *volition* too; or rather they made both indiscernible, for they knew how to fuse them in the most intimate union. It is not grace, nor is it yet dignity, which speaks to us from the superb countenance of a *Juno Ludovisi*; it is neither the one nor the other because it is both at once. While the woman-god demands our veneration, the godlike woman kindles our love; but even as we abandon ourselves in ecstasy to her heavenly grace, her celestial self-sufficiency makes us recoil in terror. The whole figure reposes and dwells in itself, a creation completely self-contained, and, as if existing beyond space, neither yielding nor resisting; here is no force to contend with force, no frailty where temporality might break in. Irresistibly moved and drawn by those former qualities, kept at a distance by these latter, we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for which mind has no concept nor speech any name.

Sixteenth Letter

We have seen how beauty results from the reciprocal action of two opposed drives and from the uniting of two opposed principles. The highest ideal of beauty is, therefore, to be sought in the most perfect possible union and *equilibrium* of reality and form. This equilibrium, however, remains no more than an idea, which can never be fully realized in actuality. For in actuality we shall always be left with a preponderance of the one element over the other, and the utmost that experience can achieve will consist of an *oscillation* between the two principles, in which now reality, now form, will predominate. Beauty as idea, therefore, can never be other than one and indivisible, since there can never be more than one point of equilibrium; whereas beauty in experience will be eternally twofold, because oscillation can disturb the equilibrium in twofold fashion, inclining it now to the one side, now to the other.

I observed in one of the preceding letters—and it follows with strict necessity from the foregoing argument—that we must expect from beauty at once a releasing and a tensing effect: a *releasing* effect in order to keep both the sense drive and the form drive

within proper bounds; a *tensing* effect, in order to keep both at full strength. Ideally speaking, however, these two effects must be reducible to a single effect. Beauty is to release by tensing both natures uniformly, and to tense by releasing both natures uniformly. This already follows from the concept of a reciprocal action, by virtue of which both factors necessarily condition each other and are at the same time conditioned by each other, and the purest product of which is beauty. But experience offers us no single example of such perfect reciprocal action; for here it will always happen that, to a greater or lesser degree, a preponderance entails a deficiency, and a deficiency a preponderance. What, then, in the case of ideal beauty is but a distinction that is *made* in the mind, is in the case of actual beauty a difference that *exists* in fact. Ideal beauty, though one and indivisible, exhibits under different aspects a melting as well as an energizing attribute; but in experience there actually *is* a melting and an energizing type of beauty. So it is, and so it always will be, in all those cases where the absolute is set within the limitations of time, and the ideas of reason have to be realized in and through human action. Thus man, when he reflects, can conceive of virtue, truth, happiness; but man, when he acts, can only practice *virtues*, comprehend *truths*, and enjoy *happy hours*. To refer these experiences back to those abstractions—to replace morals by morality, happy events by happiness, the facts of knowledge by knowledge itself—that is the business of physical and moral education. To make beauty out of a multiplicity of beautiful objects is the task of aesthetic education.

Energizing beauty can no more preserve man from a certain residue of savagery and hardness than melting beauty can protect him from a certain degree of effeminacy and enervation. For since the effect of the former is to brace his nature, both physical and moral, and to increase its elasticity and power of prompt reaction, it can happen all too easily that the increased resistance of temperament and character will bring about a decrease in receptivity to impressions; that our gentler humanity, too, will suffer the kind of repression that ought only to be directed at our brute nature, and our brute nature profit from an increase of strength that should only be available to our free person. That is why in periods of vigor and exuberance we find true grandeur of conception coupled with the gigantic and the extravagant, sublimity of thought with

the most frightening explosions of passion; that is why in epochs of discipline and form we find nature as often suppressed as mastered, as often outraged as transcended. And because the effect of melting beauty is to relax our nature, physical and moral, it happens no less easily that energy of feeling is stifled along with violence of appetite, and that character too shares the loss of power that should only overtake passion. That is why in so-called refined epochs, we see gentleness not infrequently degenerating into softness, plainness into platitude, correctness into emptiness, liberality into arbitrariness, lightness of touch into frivolity, calmness into apathy, and the most despicable caricatures in closest proximity to the most splendid specimens of humanity. The man who lives under the constraint of either matter or forms is, therefore, in need of melting beauty; for he is moved by greatness and power long before he begins to be susceptible to harmony and grace. The man who lives under the indulgent sway of taste is in need of energizing beauty; for he is only too ready, once he has reached a state of sophisticated refinement, to trifle away the strength he brought with him from the state of savagery.

And now, I think, we have explained and resolved the discrepancy commonly met with in the judgments people make about the influence of beauty, and in the value they attach to aesthetic culture. The discrepancy is explained once we remember that, in experience, there are two types of beauty, and that both parties to the argument tend to make assertions about the whole genus that each of them is only in a position to prove about one particular species of it. And the discrepancy is resolved once we distinguish a twofold need in man to which that twofold beauty corresponds. Both parties will probably turn out to be right if they can only first agree among themselves which kind of beauty and which type of humanity each has in mind.

In the rest of my inquiry I shall, therefore, pursue the path that nature herself takes with man in matters aesthetic, and setting out from the two species of beauty move upwards to the generic concept of it. I shall examine the effects of melting beauty on those who are tensed, and the effects of energizing beauty on those who are relaxed, in order finally to dissolve both these contrary modes of beauty in the unity of ideal beauty, even as those two opposing types of human being are merged in the unity of ideal man.

Seventeenth Letter

As long as it was simply a question of deriving the generic idea of beauty from the concept of human nature as such, there was no need to recall any limitations of this latter other than those that derive directly from the essence of it, and are inseparable from the concept of finiteness. Unconcerned with any of the contingent limitations to which human nature may in actual experience be subject, we derived our notion of it directly from reason as the source of all necessity, and with the ideal of human nature the ideal of beauty was automatically given too.

Now, by contrast, we descend from this region of ideas on to the stage of reality, in order to encounter man in a definite and *determinate* state, that is to say, among limitations that are not inherent in the very notion of man but derive from outward circumstance and from the contingent use of his freedom. Yet whatever diversity of limitation the idea of human nature may undergo when made manifest in any particular human being, its components alone are enough to tell us that there are, broadly speaking, only *two*, contrasting, deviations from it that can possibly occur. For if man's perfection resides in the harmonious energy of his sensuous and spiritual powers, he can, in fact, only fall short of this perfection, either through lack of harmony or through lack of energy. So that even before we have heard the testimony of experience on this matter, we are already assured in advance by pure reason that we shall find actual, consequently limited, man either in a state of tension or in a state of relaxation, according as the one-sided activity of certain of his powers is disturbing the harmony of his being, or the unity of his nature is founded upon the uniform enfeeblement of his sensuous and spiritual powers. Both these contrasting types of limitation are, as I now propose to show, removed by beauty, which restores harmony to him who is overtensed, and energy to him who is relaxed, and thus, in accordance with its nature, brings the limited condition back to an absolute condition, and makes of man a whole perfect in itself.

Beauty in the world of reality thus in no way belies the idea we formed of it by way of speculation; only it has here far less of a free hand than it had there, where we were free to apply it to the pure concept of human nature. In man, as presented by experience,

beauty encounters a material already vitiated and recalcitrant, which robs her of her *ideal* perfection precisely to the extent that it interposes its own *individual* characteristics. Beauty will, therefore, in actuality never show herself except as a particular and limited species, never as pure genus; she will in tense natures lay aside something of her freedom and variety, in relaxed natures something of her vivifying power. But we, who have by now become more familiar with her true nature, should not let ourselves be confused by such discrepancies in her appearance. Far from following the ordinary run of critics, who define the concept of beauty from their individual experience of it, and make *her* responsible for the imperfections displayed by man under her influence, we know that it is, on the contrary, man himself who transfers to her the imperfections of his own individuality, who by his subjective limitation perpetually stands in the way of her perfection, and reduces the absolute ideal to two limited types of manifestation.

Melting beauty, so it was maintained, is for natures that are tense; energizing beauty for those that are relaxed. I call a man tense when he is under the compulsion of thought, no less than when he is under the compulsion of feeling. *Exclusive* domination by either of his two basic drives is for him a state of constraint and violence, and freedom lies only in the cooperation of both his natures. The man one-sidedly dominated by feeling, or the sensuously tensed man, will be released and set free by means of form; the man one-sidedly dominated by law, or the spiritually tensed man, will be released and set free by means of matter. In order to be adequate to this twofold task, melting beauty will therefore reveal herself under two different guises. *First*, as tranquil form, she will assuage the violence of life, and pave the way that leads from sensation to thought. *Secondly*, as living image, she will arm abstract form with sensuous power, lead concept back to intuition, and law back to feeling. The first of these services she renders to natural man, the second to civilized man. But since in neither case does she have completely unconditional control over her human material, but is dependent on that offered her by either the formlessness of nature or the unnaturalness of civilization, she will in both cases still bear traces of her origins, and tend to lose herself, in the one case, more in material life, in the other, more in pure and abstract form.

In order to get some idea of how beauty can become a means of putting an end to that twofold tension, we must endeavor to seek its origins in the human psyche. Resign yourself therefore to one more brief sojourn in the sphere of speculation, in order thereafter to leave it for good, and proceed, with steps made all the more sure, over the terrain of experience.

Eighteenth Letter

By means of beauty sensuous man is led to form and thought; by means of beauty spiritual man is brought back to matter and restored to the world of sense.

From this it seems to follow that there must be a state midway between matter and form, passivity and activity, and that it is into this *middle* state that beauty transports us. This is, indeed, the idea of beauty that most people form for themselves once they have begun to reflect upon her operations, and all experience points to the same conclusion. But, on the other hand, nothing is more absurd and contradictory than such an idea, since the distance between matter and form, passivity and activity, feeling and thought, is *infinite*, and there exists nothing that can conceivably mediate between them. How, then, are we to resolve this contradiction? Beauty links the two opposite conditions of feeling and thinking; yet between these two there is absolutely no middle term. The former truth we know from experience; the latter is given to us directly by reason.

This precisely is the point on which the whole question of beauty must eventually turn. And if we succeed in solving this problem satisfactorily, we shall at the same time have found the thread that will guide us through the whole labyrinth of aesthetics.

But everything here depends on two completely distinct operations that, in the investigation we are about to undertake, must of necessity support one another. Beauty, it was said, unites two conditions that are *diametrically opposed* and can never become one. It is from this opposition that we have to start; and we must first grasp it, and acknowledge it, in all its unmitigated rigor, so that these two conditions are distinguished with the utmost precision; otherwise we shall only succeed in confusing but never in uniting them. In the second place, it was said, beauty *unites* these

two opposed conditions and thus destroys the opposition. Since, however, both conditions remain everlastingly opposed to each other, there is no other way of uniting them except by destroying them. Our second task, therefore, is to make this union complete; and to do it with such unmitigated thoroughness that both these conditions totally disappear in a third without leaving any trace of division behind in the new whole that has been made; otherwise we shall only succeed in distinguishing but never in uniting them. All the disputes about the concept of beauty that have ever prevailed in the world of philosophy, and to some extent still prevail today, have no other source than this: either the investigation did not start with a sufficiently strict distinction, or it was not carried through to a pure and complete synthesis. Those among the philosophers who, in reflecting on this matter, entrust themselves blindly to the guidance of their *feeling*, can arrive at no *concept* of beauty, because in the totality of their sensuous impression of it they can distinguish no separate elements. Those others, who take intellect as their exclusive guide, can never arrive at any concept of *beauty*, because in the totality that constitutes it they can discern nothing else but the parts, so that spirit and matter, even when most perfectly fused, remain for them eternally distinct. The former are afraid that by separating what in their feeling is, after all, one and indivisible, they will destroy the *dynamic* of beauty, i.e., beauty as effective force. The latter are afraid that by subsuming under a single category what in their intellect is, after all, distinct, they will destroy the *logic* of beauty, i.e., beauty as concept. The former would like to think of beauty as it actually behaves; the latter would have it behave as it is actually thought. Both, therefore, are bound to miss the truth: the former because they would make the limitations of discursive understanding vie with the infinity of nature; the latter because they would limit the infinity of nature according to the laws of discursive understanding. The first are afraid that by a too rigorous dissection they will rob beauty of some measure of her freedom; the latter are afraid that by too audacious a synthesis they will destroy the precision of their concept. The former do not, however, reflect that the freedom, in which they rightly locate the essence of beauty, is not just lawlessness but rather harmony of laws, not arbitrariness but supreme inner necessity; the latter do not reflect that the exactitude which

they, no less rightly, require of beauty, does not reside in the *exclusion of certain realities*, but in the *absolute inclusion of all realities*; that it is, therefore, not limitation but infinity. We shall avoid the rocks on which both have foundered if we start from the two elements into which beauty can be divided when considered by the intellect, but subsequently ascend to the pure aesthetic unity through which it works upon our feeling, and in which the two conditions previously described completely disappear.*

Nineteenth Letter

We can distinguish in man as such two different states of determinability, the one passive, the other active, and—corresponding to these—two states of passive and active determination. The explanation of this proposition will offer the shortest way of reaching our goal.

The condition of the human mind *before* it is determined by sense impressions at all, is one of unlimited determinability. The infinity of space and time is at the disposal of the imagination to do as it likes with. And since *ex hypothesi* nothing in this whole vast realm of the possible has yet been posited, and consequently nothing as yet excluded either, we may call this condition of complete absence of determination one of *empty infinity*—which is by no means to be confused with infinite emptiness.

Now comes the moment when sense is to be stirred, and out of the endless multiplicity of possible determinations one single one

* It will have occurred to any attentive reader of the comparison I have just made that the *sensationalist* aestheticians, who attach more weight to the testimony of feeling than to that of reasoning, are by no means so far removed from the truth *in practice* as their opponents, although they are no match for them *in perspicacity*. And this is the relation we always find between nature and systematic thought. Nature (sense and intuition) always unites, intellect always divides; but reason unites once more. Before he begins to philosophize, therefore, man is nearer to truth than the philosopher who has not yet completed his investigation. Hence we can, without further examination, declare a philosophical argument to be false if, *in its results*, it has the general feeling against it; but with equal justice we may consider it suspect if, in its form and method, it has this general feeling on its side. This latter consideration may serve to console any writer who finds himself unable to set forth a process of philosophical deduction, as many readers seem to expect, just as if it were a fireside chat; while with the former we may reduce to silence anyone who would fain found new systems at the expense of ordinary common sense.

is to achieve actuality. A perception is to be born in him. What in the preceding state of mere determinability was nothing but empty potential, now becomes an effective force and acquires a content. At the same time, however, as effective force, it has limits set to it, whereas, as mere potential, it was entirely without limits. Thus reality has come into being; but infinity has been lost. In order to describe a figure in space we have to *set limits* to infinite space; in order to imagine a change in time, we have to *divide up* the totality of time. Thus it is only through limits that we attain to reality, only through *negation* or exclusion that we arrive at *position* or real affirmation, only through the surrender of our unconditional determinability that we achieve determination.

But mere exclusion would never in all eternity produce reality, nor mere sensation ever give birth to perception, unless something existed *from which* to exclude, unless through some autonomous act of the mind the negating were referred to something positive, and from no-position or position were to ensue. This activity of the psyche we call judging or thinking; and the result of it we call *thought*.

Before we determine a point in space, space does not exist for us; but without absolute space we should never be able to determine a point at all. It is the same with time. Before we become aware of the moment, time does not exist for us; but without infinite time we should never have any awareness of the moment. We do then, admittedly, only reach the whole through the part, the limitless only through limitation; but it is no less true that we only reach the part through the whole, and limitation only through the limitless.

When, therefore, it is asserted of the beautiful that it provides man with a transition from feeling to thinking, this must in no sense be taken to mean that beauty could ever bridge the gulf separating feeling from thinking, passivity from activity. This gulf is infinite, and without the intervention of some new and independent faculty we shall never in all eternity find a particular becoming a universal, or the merely contingent turning into the necessary. Thought is the spontaneous act of this absolute faculty. The senses, it is true, have to provide the occasion for it to manifest itself; but in its actual manifestation it is so little dependent upon the senses that, on the contrary, it makes itself felt only when it is at odds with them. The autonomy with which it operates excludes all outside influence; and it is not by *providing an aid* to thought (which would imply a manifest contra-

diction), but merely by furnishing the thinking faculty with the freedom to express itself according to its own laws, that beauty can become a means of leading man from matter to form, from feeling to law, from a limited to an absolute existence.

But this presupposes that the freedom of the thinking powers should be inhibited, which seems to contradict the notion of an autonomous faculty. For a faculty receiving from without nothing but the material on which to work can only be impeded in its activity by the withdrawal of that material, i.e., only negatively; and we misconstrue the very nature of mind if we attribute to sensuous passions the power of being able to suppress the freedom of the spirit positively. True, experience offers us examples in plenty of the forces of reason appearing to be suppressed in proportion as the forces of sense wax more ardent. But instead of attributing that weakness of the spirit to the strength of the passions, we ought rather to put this overwhelming strength of the passions down to the weakness of the spirit; for the senses can never set themselves up against a man as a power, unless the spirit has of its own free will renounced all desire to prove itself such.

But in trying by this explanation to counter one objection, I seem to have involved myself in another, and rescued the autonomy of the psyche only at the cost of its unity. For how can the psyche produce *out of itself* at one and the same time the motive for inactivity as well as activity, unless it is itself divided, unless it is at odds with itself?

At this point we must remind ourselves that we are dealing with a finite, not with an infinite, mind. The finite mind is that which cannot become active except through being passive, which only attains to the absolute by means of limitation, and only acts and fashions inasmuch as it receives material to fashion. Such a mind will accordingly combine with the drive toward form, or toward the absolute, a drive toward matter, or toward limitation, these latter being the conditions without which it could neither possess nor satisfy the first of these drives. How far two such opposed tendencies can coexist in the same being is a problem that may well embarrass the metaphysician, but not the transcendental philosopher. The latter does not pretend to explain how things are possible, but contents himself with determining the kind of knowledge that enables us to understand how experience is possible. And since experience would be just as impossible without that

opposition in the psyche as without the absolute unity of the psyche, he is perfectly justified in postulating both these concepts as equally necessary conditions of experience, without troubling himself further as to how they are to be reconciled. More over, the immanence in the mind of two fundamental drives in no way contradicts its absolute unity, as long as we make a distinction between these two drives and the *mind itself*. Both drives exist and operate *within it*; but the mind itself is neither matter nor form, neither sense nor reason—which fact does not always seem to have been taken into account by those who will only allow the human mind to be active when its operations are in accordance with reason, and declare it to be merely passive when they are at odds with reason.

Each of these two primary drives, from the time it is developed, strives inevitably, and according to its nature, toward satisfaction; but just because both are necessary, and yet strive toward opposite ends, these two compulsions cancel each other out, and the will maintains perfect freedom between them. It is, then, the will that acts as a *power* (power being the ground of all reality) vis-à-vis both drives; but neither of these can of itself act as a power against the other. Thus, not even the most positive impulse toward justice, in which he may well not be lacking, will turn the man of violence from doing an injustice; and not even the liveliest temptation to pleasure persuade the man of character to violate his principles. There is in man no other power than his will; and his inner freedom can only be destroyed by that which destroys man himself, namely, death or anything that robs him of consciousness.

It is a necessity *outside of us* that, through the medium of sensation, determines our condition, our existence in time. This life of sensation is quite involuntary, and we have no option but to submit to any impact that is made upon us. And it is no less a necessity *within us* that, at the instance of sensation and in opposition to it, awakens our personality; for self-awareness cannot be dependent upon the will that presupposes it. This original manifestation of personality is not our merit; nor is the lack of it our fault. Only of him who is conscious of himself can we demand reason, that is, absolute consistency and universality of consciousness; prior to that he is not a human being at all, and no act of humanity can be expected of him. Even as the *metaphysicist* is unable to account

for the limitations imposed upon the freedom and autonomy of the mind by sensation, so the *physicist* is unable to comprehend the infinity that, at the instigation of those limitations, manifests itself within the personality. Neither philosophical abstraction nor empirical method can ever take us back to the source from which our concepts of universality and necessity derive: their early manifestation in time veils it from the scrutiny of the empirical observer, their supersensuous origin from that of the metaphysical inquirer. But enough, self-consciousness is there; and once its immutable unity is established, there is also established a law of unity for everything that is there *for* man, and for everything that is to come about *through him*, i.e., for all his knowing and for all his doing. Ineluctable, incorruptible, incomprehensible, the concepts of truth and right make their appearance at an age when we are still little more than a bundle of sensations; and without being able to say whence or how it arose, we acquire an awareness of the eternal in time, and of necessity in the sequence of chance. Thus sensation and self-consciousness both arise entirely without any effort on our part, and the origin of both lies as much beyond the reach of our will as it is beyond the orbit of our understanding.

But once they have come into being, once man has, through the medium of sensation, acquired awareness of a determinate existence, once he has, through self-consciousness, acquired awareness of his absolute existence, then these two basic drives are quickened, together with their objects. The sensuous drive awakens with our experience of life (with the beginning of our individuality); the rational drive, with our experience of law (with the beginning of our personality); and only at this point, when both have come into existence, is the basis of man's humanity established. Until this has happened, everything in him takes place according to the law of necessity. But now the hand of *nature* is withdrawn from him, and it is up to *him* to vindicate the humanity that she implanted and opened up within him. That is to say, as soon as two opposing fundamental drives are active within him, both lose their compulsion, and the opposition of two necessities gives rise to *freedom*.*

* To obviate any possible misunderstanding, I would observe that, whenever there is any mention of freedom here, I do not mean that freedom that necessarily apper-

Twentieth Letter

That freedom cannot be affected by anything whatsoever follows from our very notion of freedom. But that *freedom is itself* an effect of *nature* (this word taken in its widest sense) and not the work of man, that it can, therefore, also be furthered or thwarted by natural means, follows no less inevitably from what has just been said. It arises only when man is a *complete* being, when *both* his fundamental drives are fully developed; it will, therefore, be lacking as long as he is incomplete, as long as one of the two drives is excluded, and it should be capable of being restored by anything that gives him back his completeness.

Now we can, in fact, in the species as a whole as well as in the individual human being, point to a moment in which man is not yet complete, and in which one of his two drives is exclusively active within him. We know that he begins by being nothing but life, in order to end by becoming form; that he is an individual before he is a person, and that he proceeds from limitation to infinity. The sensuous drive, therefore, comes into operation earlier than the rational, because sensation precedes consciousness, and it is this *priority* of the sensuous drive that provides the clue to the whole history of human freedom.

For there is, after all, a moment in which the life impulse, just because the form impulse is not yet running counter to it, operates as nature and as necessity; a moment in which the life of sense is a power because man has not yet begun to be a human being; for in the human being proper there cannot exist any power other than the will. But in the state of reflection into which he is now to pass, it will be precisely the opposite: reason is to be a power, and a logical or moral necessity to take the place of that physical necessity. Hence sensation as a power must first be destroyed before law can be enthroned as such. It is, therefore, not simply a matter of something beginning that was not there before; something that was

tains to man considered as intelligent being, and that can neither be given unto him nor taken from him, but only that freedom that is founded upon his mixed nature. By acting rationally at all man displays freedom of the first order; by acting rationally within the limits of matter, and materially under the laws of reason, he displays freedom of the second order. We might explain the latter quite simply as a natural possibility of the former.

there must first cease to be. Man cannot pass directly from feeling to thought; he must first *take one step backwards*, since only through one determination being annulled again can a contrary determination take its place. In order to exchange passivity for autonomy, a passive determination for an active one, man must therefore be momentarily *free of all determination whatsoever*, and pass through a state of pure determinability. He must consequently, in a certain sense, return to that negative state of complete absence of determination in which he found himself before anything at all had made an impression upon his senses. But that former condition was completely devoid of content; and now it is a question of combining such sheer absence of determination, and an equally unlimited determinability, with the greatest possible content, since directly from this condition something positive is to result. The determination he has received through sensation must therefore be preserved, because there must be no loss of reality; but at the same time it must, inasmuch as it is limitation, be annulled, since an unlimited determinability is to come into existence. The problem is, therefore, at one and the same time to destroy and to maintain the determination of the condition—and this is possible in one way only: *by confronting it with another determination*. The scales of the balance stand level when they are empty; but they also stand level when they contain equal weights.

Our psyche passes, then, from sensation to thought *via* a middle disposition in which sense and reason are both active *at the same time*. Precisely for this reason, however, they cancel each other out as determining forces, and bring about a negation by means of an opposition. This middle disposition, in which the psyche is subject neither to physical nor to moral constraint, and yet is active in both these ways, preeminently deserves to be called a free disposition; and if we are to call the condition of sensuous determination the physical, and the condition of rational determination the logical or moral, then we must call this condition of real and active determinability the *aesthetic*.*

*For readers not altogether familiar with the precise meaning of this word, which is so much abused through ignorance, the following may serve as an explanation. Every thing which is capable of phenomenal manifestation may be thought of under four different aspects. A thing can relate directly to our sensual condition (to our being and well-being): that is its *physical* character. Or it can relate to our intellect,

Twenty-First Letter

There is, as I observed at the beginning of the last letter, a twofold condition of determinability and a twofold condition of determination. I can now clarify this statement.

The psyche may be said to be determinable simply because it is not determined at all; but it is also determinable inasmuch as it is determined in a way that does not exclude anything, i.e., when the determination it undergoes is of a kind that does not involve limitation. The former is mere indetermination (it is without limits, because it is without reality); the latter is aesthetic determinability (it has no limits, because it embraces all reality).

And the psyche may be said to be determined inasmuch as it is limited at all; but it is also determined inasmuch as it limits itself, by virtue of its own absolute power. It finds itself in the first of these two states whenever it feels; in the second, whenever it thinks. What thought is in respect of determination, therefore, the aesthetic disposition is in respect of determinability; the former is limitation by virtue of the infinite force within it, the latter is negation by virtue of the infinite abundance within it. Even as sensation and thought have one single point of contact—viz., that in both states

and afford us knowledge: that is its *logical* character. Or it can relate to our will, and be considered as an object of choice for a rational being: that is its *moral* character. Or, finally, it can relate to the totality of our various functions without being a definite object for any single one of them: that is its *aesthetic* character. A man can please us through his readiness to oblige; he can, through his discourse, give us food for thought; he can, through his character, fill us with respect; but finally he can also, independently of all this, and without our taking into consideration in judging him any law or any purpose, please us simply as we contemplate him and by the sheer manner of his being. Under this last named quality of being we are judging him aesthetically. Thus there is an education to health, an education to understanding, an education to morality, an education to taste and beauty. This last has as its aim the development of the whole complex of our sensual and spiritual powers in the greatest possible harmony. Because, however, misled by false notions of taste and confirmed still further in this error by false reasoning, people are inclined to include in the notion of the aesthetic the notion of the arbitrary too, I add here the superfluous comment (despite the fact that these *Letters on Aesthetic Education* are concerned with virtually nothing else but the refutation of that very error) that our psyche in the aesthetic state does indeed act freely, is in the highest degree free from all compulsion, but is in no wise free from laws; and that this aesthetic freedom is distinguishable from logical necessity in thinking, or moral necessity in willing, only by the fact that the laws according to which the psyche then behaves *do not become apparent as such*, and since they encounter no resistance, never appear as a constraint.

the psyche is determined, and man is something, either individual or person, to the exclusion of all else—but in all other respects are poles apart: so, in like manner, aesthetic determinability has one single point of contact with mere indetermination—viz., that both exclude any determinate mode of existence—while in all other respects they are to each other as nothing is to everything, hence, utterly and entirely different. If, therefore, the latter—indetermination through sheer absence of determination—was thought of as an *empty infinity*, then aesthetic freedom of determination, which is its counterpart in reality, must be regarded as an *infinity filled with content*: an idea that accords completely with the results of the foregoing inquiry.

In the aesthetic state, then, man is *naught*, if we are thinking of any particular result rather than of the totality of his powers, and considering the absence in him of any specific determination. Hence we must allow that those people are entirely right who declare beauty, and the mood it induces in us, to be completely indifferent and unfruitful as regards either *knowledge* or *character*. They are entirely right; for beauty produces no particular result whatsoever, neither for the understanding nor for the will. It accomplishes no particular purpose, neither intellectual nor moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty and is, in short, as unfitted to provide a firm basis for character as to enlighten the understanding. By means of aesthetic culture, therefore, the personal worth of a man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can depend solely upon himself, remains completely indeterminate; and nothing more is achieved by it than that he is henceforth enabled *by the grace of nature* to make of himself what he will—that the freedom to be what he ought to be is completely restored to him.

But precisely thereby something infinite is achieved. For as soon as we recall that it was precisely of this freedom that he was deprived by the one-sided constraint of nature in the field of sensation and by the exclusive authority of reason in the realm of thought, then we are bound to consider the power that is restored to him in the aesthetic mode as the highest of all bounties, as the gift of humanity itself. True, he possesses this humanity *in potentia* before every determinate condition into which he can conceivably enter. But he loses it in practice with every determinate condition into which he does enter. And if he is to pass into a condition of an

opposite nature, this humanity must be restored to him each time anew through the life of the aesthetic.*

It is, then, not just poetic license but philosophical truth when we call beauty our second creatress. For although it only offers us the possibility of becoming human beings, and for the rest leaves it to our own free will to decide how far we wish to make this a reality, it does in this resemble our first creatress, nature, which likewise conferred upon us nothing more than the power of becoming human, leaving the use and practice of that power to our own free will and decision.

Twenty-Second Letter

If, then, in one respect the aesthetic mode of the psyche is to be regarded as *naught*—once, that is, we have an eye to particular and definite effects—it is in another respect to be looked upon as a state of *supreme reality*, once we have due regard to the absence of all limitation and to the sum total of the powers that are conjointly active within it. One cannot, then, say that those people are wrong either who declare the aesthetic state to be the most fruitful of all in respect of knowledge and morality. They are entirely right; for a disposition of the psyche that contains within it the whole of human nature, must necessarily contain within it *in potentia* every individual manifestation of it too; and a disposition of the psyche that removes all limitations from the totality of human nature must necessarily remove them from every individual manifestation of it as well. Precisely on this account, because it takes under its protection no single one of man's faculties to the exclusion of the others, it favors each and all of them without distinction; and it favors no

* Admittedly the rapidity with which certain types pass from sensation to thought or decision scarcely—if indeed at all—allows them to become aware of the aesthetic mode through which they must in that time necessarily pass. Such natures cannot for any length of time tolerate the state of indetermination, but press impatiently for some result that in the state of aesthetic limitlessness they cannot find. In others, by contrast, who find enjoyment more in the feeling of *total capacity* than in any *single* action, the aesthetic state tends to spread itself over a much wider area. Much as the former dread emptiness, just as little are the latter capable of tolerating limitation. I need scarcely say that the former are born for detail and subordinate occupations, the latter, provided they combine this capacity with a sense of reality, destined for wholeness and for great roles.

single one more than another for the simple reason that it is the ground of possibility of them all. Every other way of exercising its functions endows the psyche with some special aptitude—but only at the cost of some special limitation; the aesthetic alone leads to the absence of all limitation. Every other state into which we can enter refers us back to a preceding one, and requires for its termination a subsequent one; the aesthetic alone is a whole in itself, since it comprises within itself all the conditions of both its origin and its continuance. Here alone do we feel reft out of time, and our human nature expresses itself with a purity and *integrity*, as though it had as yet suffered no impairment through the intervention of external forces.

That which flatters our senses in immediate sensation exposes our susceptible and labile psyche to every impression—but only by rendering us proportionately less fitted for exertion. That which tenses our intellectual powers and invites them to form abstract concepts, strengthens our mind for every sort of resistance—but only by hardening it and depriving us of sensibility in proportion as it fosters greater independence of action. Precisely because of this, the one no less than the other must lead to exhaustion, since material cannot for long dispense with shaping power, nor power with material to be shaped. If, by contrast, we have surrendered to the enjoyment of genuine beauty, we are at such a moment master in equal degree of our passive and of our active powers, and we shall with equal ease turn to seriousness or to play, to repose or to movement, to compliance or to resistance, to the discursions of abstract thought or to the direct contemplation of phenomena.

This lofty equanimity and freedom of the spirit, combined with power and vigor, is the mood in which a genuine work of art should release us, and there is no more certain touchstone of true aesthetic excellence. If, after enjoyment of this kind, we find ourselves disposed to prefer some one particular mode of feeling or action, but unfitted or disinclined for another, this may serve as infallible proof that we have not had a *purely aesthetic* experience—whether the cause lies in the object or in our own response or, as is almost always the case, in both at once.

Since in actuality no purely aesthetic effect is ever to be met with (for man can never escape his dependence upon conditioning

forces), the excellence of a work of art can never consist in anything more than a high approximation to that ideal of aesthetic purity; and whatever the degree of freedom to which it may have been sublimated, we shall still leave it in a particular mood and with some definite bias. The more general the mood and the less limited the bias produced in us by any particular art, or by any particular product of the same, then the nobler that art and the more excellent that product will be. One can test this by considering works from different arts and different works from the same art. We leave a beautiful piece of music with our feeling excited, a beautiful poem with our imagination quickened, a beautiful sculpture or building with our understanding awakened. But should anyone invite us, immediately after a sublime musical experience, to abstract thought; or employ us, immediately after a sublime poetic experience, in some routine business of everyday life; or try, immediately after the contemplation of beautiful paintings or sculptures, to inflame our imagination or surprise our feeling—he would certainly be choosing the wrong moment. The reason for this is that even the most ethereal music has, *by virtue of its material*, an even greater affinity with the senses than true aesthetic freedom really allows; that even the most successful poem partakes more of the arbitrary and casual play of the imagination, *as the medium through which it works*, than the inner lawfulness of the truly beautiful really permits; that even the most excellent sculpture—the most excellent, perhaps, most of all—does, *by virtue of its conceptual precision*, border upon the austerity of science. Nevertheless, the greater the degree of excellence attained by a work in any of these three arts, the more these particular affinities will disappear; and it is an inevitable and natural consequence of their approach to perfection that the various arts, without any displacement of their objective frontiers, tend to become ever more like each other *in their effect upon the psyche*. Music, at its most sublime, must become sheer form and affect us with the serene power of antiquity. The plastic arts, at their most perfect, must become music and move us by the immediacy of their sensuous presence. Poetry, when most fully developed, must grip us powerfully as music does, but at the same time, like the plastic arts, surround us with serene clarity. This, precisely, is the mark of perfect style in each and every art: that it is able to remove the specific limitations

of the art in question without thereby destroying its specific qualities, and through a wise use of its individual peculiarities, is able to confer upon it a more general character.

And it is not just the limitations inherent in the specific character of a particular art that the artist must seek to overcome through his handling of it; it is also the limitations inherent in the particular subject matter he is treating. In a truly successful work of art the contents should effect nothing, the form everything; for only through the form is the whole man affected, through the subject matter, by contrast, only one or other of his functions. Subject matter, then, however sublime and all-embracing it may be, always has a limiting effect upon the spirit, and it is only from form that true aesthetic freedom can be looked for. Herein, then, resides the real secret of the master in any art: *that he can make his form consume his material*; and the more pretentious, the more seductive this material is in itself, the more it seeks to impose itself upon us, the more high-handedly it thrusts itself forward with effects of *its own*, or the more the beholder is inclined to get directly involved with it, then the more triumphant the art that forces it back and asserts its own kind of dominion over him. The psyche of the listener or spectator must remain completely free and inviolate; it must go forth from the magic circle of the artist pure and perfect as it came from the hands of the Creator. The most frivolous theme must be so treated that it leaves us ready to proceed directly from it to some matter of the utmost import; the most serious material must be so treated that we remain capable of exchanging it forthwith for the lightest play. Arts that affect the passions, such as tragedy, do not invalidate this: *in the first place*, they are not entirely free arts since they are enlisted in the service of a particular aim (that of pathos); and *in the second*, no true connoisseur of art will deny that works even of this class are the more perfect, the more they respect the freedom of the spirit even amid the most violent storms of passion. There does indeed exist a fine art of passion; but a fine passionate art is a contradiction in terms; for the unfailing effect of beauty is freedom from passion. No less self-contradictory is the notion of a fine art that teaches (didactic) or improves (moral); for nothing is more at variance with the concept of beauty than the notion of giving the psyche any definite bias.

But it is by no means always a proof of formlessness in the work

of art itself if it makes its effect solely through its contents; this may just as often be evidence of a lack of form in him who judges it. If he is either too tensed or too relaxed, if he is used to apprehending either exclusively with the intellect or exclusively with the senses, he will, even in the case of the most successfully realized whole, attend only to the parts, and in the presence of the most beautiful form respond only to the matter. Receptive only to the *raw material*, he has first to destroy the aesthetic organization of a work before he can take pleasure in it, and laboriously scratch away until he has uncovered all those individual details that the master, with infinite skill, had caused to disappear in the harmony of the whole. The interest he takes in it is quite simply either a moral or a material interest; but what precisely it ought to be, namely, aesthetic, that it certainly is not. Such readers will enjoy a serious and moving poem as though it were a sermon, a naïve or humorous one as though it were an intoxicating drink. And if they were sufficiently lacking in taste to demand *edification* of a tragedy or an epic—and were it about the Messiah himself—they will certainly not fail to take exception to a poem in the manner of Anacreon or Catullus.

Twenty-Third Letter

I take up once more the thread of my inquiry, which I broke off only in order to apply to the practice of art, and the judgment of its works, the propositions previously established.

The transition from a passive state of feeling to an active state of thinking and willing cannot, then, take place except via a middle state of aesthetic freedom. And although this state can of itself decide nothing as regards either our insights or our convictions, thus leaving both our intellectual and our moral worth as yet entirely problematic, it is nevertheless the necessary precondition of our attaining to any insight or conviction at all. In a word, there is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic.

But, you will be tempted to object, can such mediation really be indispensable? Should truth and duty not be able, of and by themselves alone, to gain access to sensuous man? To which I must answer: they not only can, they positively must, owe their deter-

mining power to themselves alone; and nothing would be more at variance with my previous assertions than if they should seem to support the opposite view. It has been expressly proved that beauty can produce no result, neither for the understanding nor for the will; that it does not meddle in the business of either thinking or deciding; that it merely imparts the power to do both, but has no say whatsoever in the actual use of that power. In the actual use of it all other aid whatsoever is dispensed with; and the pure logical form, namely, the concept, must speak directly to the understanding, the pure moral form, namely, the law, directly to the will.

But for them to be able to do this at all, for such a thing as a pure form to exist for sensuous man at all, this, I insist, has first to be made possible by the aesthetic modulation of the psyche. Truth is not something that, like actuality or the physical existence of things, can simply be received from without. It is something produced by our thinking faculty, autonomously and by virtue of its freedom. And it is precisely this autonomy, this freedom, that is lacking in sensuous man. Sensuous man is already (physically speaking) determined, and in consequence no longer possesses free determinability. This lost determinability he will first have to recover before he can exchange his passive determination for an active one. But he cannot recover it except by either losing the passive determination that he had or *by already possessing within himself the active determination* toward which he is to proceed. Were he merely to lose the passive determination, he would at the same time lose the possibility of an active one, since thought needs a body, and form can only be realized in some material. He will, therefore, need to have the active determination already within him, need to be at one and the same time passively, and actively, determined; that is to say, he will have to become aesthetic.

Through the aesthetic modulation of the psyche, then, the autonomy of reason is already opened up within the domain of sense itself, the dominion of sensation already broken within its own frontiers, and physical man refined to the point where 'spiritual man only needs to start developing out of the physical according to the laws of freedom. The step from the aesthetic to the logical and moral state (i.e., from beauty to truth and duty) is hence infinitely easier than was the step from the physical state to the aesthetic (i.e., from merely blind living to form). The former step man

can accomplish simply of his own free will, since it merely involves taking from himself, not giving to himself, fragmenting his nature, not enlarging it; the aesthetically tempered man will achieve universally valid judgments and universally valid actions, as soon as he has the will to do so. But the step from brute matter to beauty, in which a completely new kind of activity has to be opened up within him, must first be facilitated by the grace of nature, for his will can exert no sort of compulsion upon a temper of mind that is, after all, the very means of bringing his will into existence. In order to lead aesthetic man to understanding and lofty sentiments, one need do no more than provide him with motives of sufficient weight. To obtain the same results from sensuous man we must first alter his very nature. Aesthetic man often needs no more than the challenge of a sublime situation (which is what acts most directly upon our willpower) to make of him a hero or a sage. Sensuous man must first be transported beneath another clime.

It is, therefore, one of the most important tasks of education to subject man to form even in his purely physical life, and to make him aesthetic in every domain over which beauty is capable of extending her sway; since it is only out of the aesthetic, not out of the physical, state that the moral can develop. If man is, in every single case, to possess the power of enlarging his judgment and his will into the judgment of the species as a whole; if out of his limited existence he is to be able to find the path that will lead him through to an infinite existence, out of every dependent condition be able to wing his way toward autonomy and freedom: then we must see to it that he is in no single moment of his life a mere individual, and merely subservient to the law of nature. If he is to be fit and ready to raise himself out of the restricted cycle of natural ends toward rational purposes, then he must already have prepared himself for the latter *within the limits of the former*, and have realized his physical destiny with a certain freedom of the spirit, that is, in accordance with the laws of beauty.

And this he can indeed accomplish without in the least acting counter to his physical ends. The claims that nature makes upon him are directed merely *to what he does, to the content* of his actions; in the matter of *how* he does it, the form of his actions, the purposes of nature offer no directives whatsoever. The claims of reason, by contrast, are directed strictly toward the form of his

activity. Necessary as it is, then, for his moral destiny that he should be purely moral, and display absolute autonomy, for his physical destiny it is a matter of complete indifference whether he is purely physical, and behaves with absolute passivity. In respect of the latter, it is left entirely to his own discretion whether he realizes it merely as sensuous being and natural force (i.e., as a force that only reacts as it is acted upon), or whether he will at the same time realize it as absolute force and rational being; and there should be no question as to which of these two ways is more in keeping with his human dignity. On the contrary, just as it debases and degrades him to do from physical impulse what he should have decided to do from pure motives of duty, so it dignifies and exalts him to strive for order, harmony, and infinite freedom in those matters where the common man is content merely to satisfy his legitimate desires.* In a word: in the realm of truth and morality,

* 1. This genial and aesthetically free handling of common reality is, wherever it may be found, the mark of a *noble* soul. In general we call noble any nature that possesses the gift of transforming, purely by its manner of handling it, even the most trifling occupation, or the most petty of objects, into something infinite. We call that form noble that impresses the stamp of autonomy upon anything that by its nature merely *serves some purpose* (is a mere means). A noble nature is not content to be itself free; it must also set free everything around it, even the lifeless. Beauty, however, is the only way that freedom has of making itself manifest in appearance. That is why a face, a work of art, or the like, which expresses *intelligence* more than anything else, can never strike us as noble, any more than it is beautiful, since it emphasizes a relation of dependence (which is inseparable from purposefulness) instead of concealing it.

2. The moral philosopher does, it is true, teach us that man can never do *more* than his duty; and he is perfectly right if he merely has in mind the relation between actions and the moral law. But in the case of actions that are merely end serving, *to exceed the end, and pass beyond it* into the suprasensible (which in the present context can mean nothing more than carrying out the physical in an aesthetic manner), is in fact *to exceed duty*, since duty can only prescribe that *the will* be sacred, but not that *nature itself* shall have taken on sacral character. There is thus no possibility of a moral transcendence of duty; but there is such a thing as an aesthetic transcendence; and such conduct we call noble. But just because an element of supererogation can always be discerned in noble conduct—inasmuch as what was only required to have material value has acquired a free formal value, or, in other words, has combined with the inner value, which it ought to have, an outer value, which it could legitimately do without—for this reason many have confused aesthetic supererogation with moral, and, misled by the appearance of what is noble, have imported into morality an element of arbitrariness and contingency that would end in its entire destruction.

3. Noble conduct is to be distinguished from sublime conduct. The first transcends moral obligation; not so the latter, although we rate it incomparably higher.

feeling may have no say whatsoever; but in the sphere of being and well-being, form has every right to exist, and the play drive every right to command.

It is here, then, in the indifferent sphere of physical life, that man must make a start upon his moral life; here, while he is still passive, already start to manifest his autonomy, and while still within the limitations of sense begin to make some show of rational freedom. The law of his will he must apply even to his inclinations; he must, if you will permit me the expression, *play* the war against matter into the very territory of matter itself, so that he may be spared having to fight this dread foe on the sacred soil of freedom. He must learn to desire *more nobly*, so that he may not need to *will sublimely*. This is brought about by means of aesthetic education, which subjects to laws of beauty all those spheres of human behavior in which neither natural laws, nor yet rational laws, are binding upon human caprice, and which, in the form it gives to outer life, already opens up the inner.

Twenty-Fourth Letter

We can, then, distinguish three different moments or stages of development through which both the individual and the species as a whole must pass, inevitably and in a definite order, if they are to complete the full cycle of their destiny. Through contingent causes, deriving either from the influence of external circumstances or from the arbitrary caprice of man himself, these several periods may indeed be either lengthened or shortened, but no one of them can be left out altogether; nor can the order in which they follow each other be reversed, neither by the power of nature nor by that of the will. Man in his *physical* state merely suffers the dominion of nature; he emancipates himself from this dominion in the *aesthetic* state, and he acquires mastery over it in the *moral*.

But we do not thus esteem it because it exceeds the rational concept of its object (i.e., the moral law), but because it exceeds the empirical concept of its subject (i.e., our experience of the goodness and strength of the human will). Conversely, we do not prize noble conduct because it surpasses the nature of its subject—on the contrary, it must flow freely and without constraint out of this—but because it surpasses the nature of its object (i.e., its physical end) and passes beyond this into the realm of spirit. In the first case, one might say, we marvel at the victory that the object achieves over man; in the latter we admire the élan that man imparts to the object.

What is man before beauty cajoles from him a delight in things for their own sake, or the serenity of form tempers the savagery of life? A monotonous round of ends, a constant vacillation of judgments; self-seeking, and yet without a self; lawless, yet without freedom; a slave, yet to no rule. At this stage the world is for him merely fate, not yet object; nothing exists for him except what furthers his own existence; that which neither gives to him, nor takes from him, is not there for him at all. Each phenomenon stands before him, isolated and cut off from all other things, even as he himself is isolated and unrelated in the great chain of being. All that exists, exists for him only at the behest of the moment; every change seems to him an entirely new creation, since with the lack of necessity *within him* there is none *outside of him* either, to connect the changing forms into a universe and, though individual phenomena pass away, to hold fast upon the stage of the world the unvarying law that informs them. In vain does nature let her rich variety pass before his senses; he sees in her splendid profusion nothing but his prey, in all her might and grandeur nothing but his foe. Either he hurls himself upon objects to devour them in an access of desire; or the objects press in upon him to destroy him, and he thrusts them away in horror. In either case his relation to the world of sense is that of immediate *contact*; and eternally anguished by its pressures, ceaselessly tortured by imperious needs, he finds rest nowhere but in exhaustion, and limits nowhere but in spent desire.

His violent passions and the Titans'
Vigorous marrow are his . . .
Certain heritage; yet round his brow
Zeus forged a brazen band.
Counsel and Patience, Wisdom, Moderation
He shrouded from his fearful sullen glance.
In him each passion grows to savage fury,
And all uncheck'd his fury rages round.

Iphigenia in Tauris

Unacquainted as yet with *his own* human dignity, he is far from respecting it in others; and, conscious of his own savage greed, he fears it in every creature that resembles him. He never sees others in himself, but only himself in others; and communal life, far from

enlarging him into a representative of the species, only confines him ever more narrowly within his own individuality. In this state of sullen limitation he gropes his way through the darkness of his life until a kindly nature shifts the burden of matter from his beclouded senses, and he learns through reflection to distinguish *himself* from things, so that objects reveal themselves at last in the reflected light of consciousness.

This state of brute nature is not, I admit, to be found exactly as I have presented it here among any particular people or in any particular age. It is purely an idea; but an idea with which experience is, in certain particulars, in complete accord. Man, one may say, was never in such a completely animal condition; but he has on the other hand, never entirely escaped from it. Even among the rudest of human creatures one finds unmistakable traces of rational freedom, just as among the most cultivated peoples there are moments in plenty that recall that dismal state of nature. It is, after all, peculiar to man that he unites in his nature the highest and the lowest; and if his *moral dignity* depends on his distinguishing strictly between the one and the other, *his hope of joy and blessedness* depends on a due and proper reconciliation of the opposites he has distinguished. An education that is to bring his dignity into harmony with his happiness will, therefore, have to see to it that those two principles are maintained in their utmost purity even while they are being most intimately fused.

The first appearance of reason in man does not necessarily imply that he has started to become truly human. This has to wait upon his freedom; and the first thing reason does is to make him utterly dependent upon his senses—a phenomenon which, for all its universality and importance, has still, so it seems to me, never been properly explored. It is, as we know, through the demand for the absolute (as that which is grounded upon itself and necessary) that reason makes itself known in man. This demand, since it can never be wholly satisfied in any single condition of his physical life, forces him to leave the physical altogether, and ascend out of a limited reality into the realm of ideas. But although the true purport of such a demand is to wrest him from the bondage of time, and lead him upwards from the sensuous world towards an ideal world, it can, through a misunderstanding (almost unavoidable in this early epoch of prevailing materiality), be directed toward physical life,

and instead of making man independent plunge him into the most terrifying servitude.

And this is what does in fact happen. On the wings of fancy, man leaves the narrow confines of the present in which mere animality stays bound, in order to strive toward an unlimited future. But while the infinite opens up before his reeling *imagination*, his heart has not yet ceased to live in the particular or to wait upon the moment. In the very midst of his animality the drive toward the absolute catches him unawares—and since in this state of apathy all his endeavour is directed merely toward the material and the temporal, and limited exclusively to himself as individual, he will merely be incited by that demand to give his own individuality unlimited extension rather than to abstract from it altogether: will be led to strive, not after form, but after an unfailing supply of matter; not after changelessness, but after perpetually enduring change; and after the absolute assurance of his temporal existence. That very drive which, applied to his thinking and activity, was meant to lead him to truth and morality, brought now to bear upon his passivity and feeling, produces nothing but unlimited longing and absolute instinctual need. The first fruits which he reaps in the realm of spirit are, therefore, *care* and *fear*; both of them products of reason, not of sense; but of a reason which mistakes its object and applies its imperative directly to matter. Fruits of this same tree are all your systems of unqualified eudaemonism, whether they have as their object the present day, or the whole of our life, or—and this by no means makes them any more worthy of respect—the whole of eternity. An unlimited perpetuation of being and well-being, merely for the sake of being and well-being, is an ideal that belongs to appetite alone, hence a demand that can only be made by an animality striving toward the absolute. Thus, without gaining anything for his humanity through such manifestations of reason, man merely loses thereby the happy limitation of the animal, over which he now possesses none but the—far from enviable—advantage of having forfeited possession of the here and now in favor of longings for what is not, yet without seeking in all those limitless vistas anything but the here and now he already knows.

But even if reason does not mistake its objective and confuse the question, sense will for a long time falsify the answer. As soon as

man has begun to use his intellect, and to connect the phenomena around him in the relation of cause and effect, reason, in accordance with its very definition, presses for an absolute connection and an unconditioned cause. In order to be able to postulate such a demand at all, man must already have taken a step beyond mere sense; but it is this very demand that sense now makes use of to recall her truant child. This, strictly speaking, would be the point at which he ought to leave the world of sense altogether, and soar upwards to the realm of pure ideas; for the intellect remains eternally confined within the realm of the conditioned, and goes on eternally asking questions without ever lighting upon any ultimate answer. But since the man with whom we are here concerned is not yet capable of such abstraction, that which he cannot find in his *sphere of empirical knowledge*, and does not yet seek beyond it in the sphere of pure reason, he will seek beneath it in his *sphere of feeling* and, to all appearances, find it. True, this world of sense shows him nothing that might be its own cause and subject to none but its own law; but it does show him something that knows of no cause and obeys no law. Since, then, he cannot appease his inquiring intellect by evoking any ultimate and inward cause, he manages at least to silence it with the notion of *no-cause*, and remains within the blind compulsion of matter since he is not yet capable of grasping the sublime necessity of reason. Because the life of sense knows no *purpose* other than its own advantage, and feels driven by *no cause* other than blind chance, he makes the former into the arbiter of his actions and the latter into the sovereign ruler of the world.

Even what is most sacred in man, the moral law, when it first makes its appearance in the life of sense, cannot escape such perversion. Since its voice is merely inhibitory, and against the interest of his animal self-love, it is bound to seem like something external to himself as long as he has not yet reached the point of regarding his self-love as the thing that is really external to him, and the voice of reason as his true self. Hence he merely feels the fetters that reason lays upon him, not the infinite liberation that she is capable of affording him. Without suspecting the dignity of the lawgiver within, he merely experiences its coercive force and feels the impotent resistance of a powerless subject. Because in his experience the sense drive *precedes* the moral, he assigns to the law of necessity a beginning in time too, a *positive origin*, and through

this most unfortunate of all errors makes the unchangeable and eternal in himself into an accidental product of the transient. He persuades himself into regarding the concepts of right and wrong as statutes introduced by some will, not as something valid in themselves for all eternity. Just as in the explanation of particular natural phenomena he goes beyond *nature* and seeks outside of it what can only be found in the laws inherent within it, so too, in the explanation of the moral world, he goes beyond *reason* and forfeits his humanity by seeking a Godhead along these same lines. No wonder that a religion bought by the debasement of his humanity proves itself worthy of such an origin, or that man considers laws that were not binding *from* all eternity as not unconditional and not binding *to* all eternity either. His concern is not with a holy, but merely with a powerful, being. The spirit in which he worships God is therefore fear, which degrades him, not reverence, which exalts him in his own estimation.

Although these manifold aberrations from the ideal that man is meant to achieve cannot all take place in the same epoch—since in order to move from absence of thought to error of thought, from lack of will to perversion of will, he must pass through several stages—these deviations are nevertheless all attendant upon his physical condition, since in all of them the life impulse plays the master over the form impulse. Whether it, then, be that reason has not yet made its voice heard in man, and the physical still rules him with blind necessity; or that reason has not yet sufficiently purified itself of sense, and the moral is still at the service of the physical: in either case the sole principle prevailing within him is a material one, and man is, at least in his ultimate tendency, a creature of sense—with this sole difference, that in the first case he is an animal void of reason, in the second an animal endowed with reason. What he is meant to be, however, is neither of these; he is meant to be a human being. Nature is not meant to rule him exclusively, nor reason to rule him conditionally. Both these systems of rule are meant to coexist, in perfect independence of each other, and yet in perfect concord.

Twenty-Fifth Letter

As long as man, in that first physical state, is merely a passive recipient of the world of sense, i.e., does no more than feel, he is

still completely one with that world; and just because he is himself nothing but world, there exists for him as yet no world. Only when, at the aesthetic stage, he puts it outside himself, or *contemplates* it, does his personality differentiate itself from it, and a world becomes manifest to him because he has ceased to be one with it.*

Contemplation (or reflection) is the first liberal relation that man establishes with the universe around him. If desire seizes directly upon its object, contemplation removes *its* object to a distance, and makes it into a true and inalienable possession by putting it beyond the reach of passion. The necessity of nature, which in the stage of mere sensation ruled him with undivided authority, begins at the stage of reflection to relax its hold upon him. In his senses there results a momentary peace; time itself, the eternally moving, stands still; and, as the divergent rays of consciousness converge, there is reflected against a background of transience an image of the infinite, namely, *form*. As soon as light dawns within man, there is no longer any night without; as soon as it grows still within him, the storm in the universe abates and the contending forces of nature come to rest between stable confines. Small wonder, then, that the most primitive poetry speaks of this great happening in the inner world of man as though it were a revolution in the outer, and symbolizes thought triumphing over the laws of time by the image of *Zeus* putting an end to the reign of *Saturn*.

From being a slave of nature, which he remains as long as he merely feels it, man becomes its lawgiver from the moment he begins to think it. That which hitherto merely dominated him as *force*, now stands before his eyes as *object*. Whatsoever is object for him has no power over him; for in order to be object at all, it

* I remind my readers once again that, necessary as it is to distinguish these two periods in theory, in practice they more or less merge one into the other. Nor must we imagine that there ever was a time when man found himself purely at the physical stage, or another when he had entirely freed himself from it. From the moment man *sees an object*, he is no longer in a merely physical state; and as long as he continues to see objects, he will not entirely have escaped from that physical stage; for only inasmuch as he has physical sensations is he able to see at all. In a general way, then, those three moments that I mentioned at the beginning of the twenty-fourth letter may well be considered as three different epochs, if we are thinking either of the development of mankind as a whole, or of the whole development of a single individual; but they are also to be distinguished in each single act of perception, and are, in a word, the necessary conditions of all knowledge that comes to us through the senses.

must be subjected to the power that is his. To the extent that he imparts form to matter, and for precisely as long as he imparts it, he is immune to its effects; for spirit cannot be injured by anything except that which robs it of its freedom, and man gives evidence of his freedom precisely by giving form to that which is formless. Only where sheer mass, ponderous and inchoate, holds sway, its murky contours shifting within uncertain boundaries, can fear find its seat; man is more than a match for any of nature's terrors once he knows how to give it form and convert it into an object of his contemplation. Once he begins to assert his independence in the face of nature as phenomenon, then he also asserts his dignity vis-à-vis nature as force, and with noble freedom rises in revolt against his ancient gods. Now they cast off those ghastly masks that were the anguish of his childhood and surprise him with his own image by revealing themselves as projections of his own mind. The monstrous divinity of the Oriental, which rules the world with the blind strength of a beast of prey, shrinks in the imagination of the Greeks into the friendly contours of a human being. The empire of the Titans falls, and infinite force is tamed by infinite form.

But while I was merely seeking a way out from the material world and a transition to the world of spirit, my imagination has run away with me and carried me into the very heart of this latter. Beauty, which is what we were out to seek, already lies behind us; we have o'erleapt it completely in passing from mere life directly to pure form and the pure object. But a sudden leap of this kind is contrary to human nature, and in order to keep step with this latter we shall have to turn back once more to the world of sense.

Beauty is, admittedly, the work of free contemplation, and with it we do indeed enter upon the world of ideas—but, it should be emphasized, without therefore leaving behind the world of sense, as is the case when we proceed to knowledge of truth. Truth is the pure product of abstracting from everything that is material and contingent; it is object, pure and unadulterated, in which none of the limitations of the subject may persist, pure autonomous activity without any admixture of passivity. True, even from the highest abstractions, there is a way back to sense; for thought affects our inner life of feeling, and the perception of logical and moral unity passes over into a feeling of sensuous congruence. But when we take such delight in intellectual knowledge, we distinguish very

exactly between our perception and our feeling, and look upon the latter as something incidental, which could well be absent without the knowledge therefore ceasing to be knowledge or truth being any the less true. But it would be a vain undertaking to try to clear our perception of *beauty* of these connections with feeling—which is why it will not do to think of the one as the effect of the other, but is imperative to consider each as being, at the same time and reciprocally, both effect and cause. In the pleasure we take in knowledge we distinguish without difficulty the *transition* from activity to passivity, and are clearly aware that the first is over when the latter begins. In the delight we take in beauty, by contrast, no such succession of activity and passivity can be discerned; reflection is here so completely interfused with feeling that we imagine that the form is directly apprehended by sense. Beauty, then, is indeed an *object* for us, because reflection is the condition of our having any sensation of it; but it is at the same time a *state of the perceiving subject*, because feeling is a condition of our having any perception of it. Thus beauty is indeed form, because we contemplate it; but it is at the same time life, because we feel it. In a word: it is at once a state of our being and an activity we perform.

And just because it is both these things at once, beauty provides us with triumphant proof that passivity by no means excludes activity, nor matter form, nor limitation infinity—that, in consequence, the moral freedom of man is by no means abrogated through his inevitable dependence upon physical things. Beauty is proof of this and, I must add, she *alone* can furnish such proof. For since in the enjoyment of truth, or logical unity, feeling is not inevitably and of necessity one with thought, but merely follows incidentally upon it, truth can only offer us proof that sensuousness can follow upon rationality, or vice versa; but not that both exist together, nor that they reciprocally work upon each other, nor that they are absolutely and of necessity to be united. On the contrary, from the fact that feeling is excluded as long as we are thinking, and thinking excluded as long as we are feeling, the *incompatibility* of our two natures would have to be inferred; and, indeed, analytical philosophers are unable to adduce any better proof that pure reason can in practice be realized in human kind than that this is in fact enjoined upon them. But since in the enjoyment of beauty, or *aesthetic unity*, an actual *union* and interchange between matter

and form, passivity and activity, momentarily takes place, the *compatibility* of our two natures, the practicability of the infinite being realized in the finite, hence the possibility of sublimest humanity, is thereby actually proven.

We need, then, no longer feel at a loss for a way that might lead us from our dependence upon sense toward moral freedom, since beauty offers us an instance of the latter being perfectly compatible with the former, an instance of man not needing to flee matter in order to manifest himself as spirit. But if he is already free while still in association with sense, as the fact of beauty teaches, and if freedom is something absolute and suprasensual, as the very notion of freedom necessarily implies, then there can no longer be any question of how he is to succeed in raising himself from the limited to the absolute, or of how, in his thinking and willing, he is to offer resistance to the life of sense, since this has already happened in beauty. There can, in a single word, no longer be any question of how he is to pass from beauty to truth, since this latter is potentially contained in the former, but only a question of how he is to clear a way for himself from common reality to aesthetic reality, from mere life-serving feelings to feelings of beauty.

Twenty-Sixth Letter

Since, as I have argued in the preceding letters, it is the aesthetic mode of the psyche that first gives rise to freedom, it is obvious that it cannot itself derive from freedom and cannot, in consequence, be of moral origin. It must be a gift of nature; the favor of fortune alone can unloose the fetters of that first physical stage and lead the savage toward beauty.

The germ of beauty is as little likely to develop where nature in her niggardliness deprives man of quickening refreshment, as where in her bounty she relieves him of any exertion—alike where sense is too blunted to feel any need, as where violence of appetite is denied satisfaction. Not where man hides himself, a *troglydite*, in caves, eternally an isolated unit, never finding humanity *outside himself*; nor yet there were, a *nomad*, he roams in vast hordes over the face of the earth, eternally but one of a number, never finding humanity *within himself*—but only there, where, in his own hut, he discourses silently with himself and, from the moment he steps

out of it, with all the rest of his kind, only there will the tender blossom of beauty unfold. There, where a limpid atmosphere opens his senses to every delicate contact, and an energizing warmth animates the exuberance of matter—there where, even in inanimate nature, the sway of blind mass has been overthrown, and form triumphant ennobles even the lowest orders of creation—there, amid the most joyous surroundings, and in that favored zone where activity alone leads to enjoyment and enjoyment alone to activity, where out of life itself the sanctity of order springs, and out of the law of order nothing but life can develop—where imagination ever flees actuality yet never strays from the simplicity of nature—here alone will sense and spirit, the receptive and the formative power, develop in that happy equilibrium that is the soul of beauty and the condition of all humanity.

And what are the outward and visible signs of the savage's entry upon humanity? If we inquire of history, however far back, we find that they are the same in all races that have emerged from the slavery of the animal condition: delight in *semblance*, and a propensity to *ornamentation* and *play*.

Supreme stupidity and supreme intelligence have a certain affinity with each other in that both of them seek only the *real* and are completely insensitive to mere semblance. Only by objects that are actually present to the senses is stupidity jerked out of its quiescence; only when its concepts can be referred back to the facts of experience is intelligence to be pacified. In a word, stupidity cannot rise above actuality, and intelligence cannot stop short of truth. Inasmuch as need of reality and attachment to the actual are merely consequences of some deficiency, then indifference to reality and interest in semblance may be regarded as a genuine enlargement of humanity and a decisive step toward culture. In the first place, this affords evidence of outward freedom: for as long as necessity dictates, and need drives, imagination remains tied to reality with powerful bonds; only when wants are stilled does it develop its unlimited potential. But it affords evidence, too, of inner freedom, since it makes us aware of a power that is able to move of its own accord, independently of any material stimulus from without, and that is sufficiently in control of energy to hold at arm's length the importunate pressure of matter. The reality of things is the work of things themselves; the semblance of things is the work of man;

and a nature that delights in semblance is no longer taking pleasure in what it receives, but in what it does.

It goes without saying that the only kind of semblance I am here concerned with is aesthetic semblance (which we distinguish from actuality and truth) and not logical semblance (which we confuse with these): semblance, therefore, which we love just because it is semblance, and not because we take it to be something better. Only the first is play, whereas the latter is mere deception. To attach value to semblance of the first kind can never be prejudicial to truth, because one is never in danger of substituting it for truth, which is after all the only way in which truth can ever be impaired. To despise it, is to despise the fine arts altogether, the very essence of which is semblance. All the same, it sometimes happens that intelligence will carry its zeal for reality to such a pitch of intolerance, that it pronounces a disparaging judgment upon the whole art of aesthetic semblance just because it is semblance. But this only happens to intelligence when it recalls the above-mentioned affinity. Of the necessary limits of aesthetic semblance I shall treat separately on some other occasion.

It is nature herself that raises man from reality to semblance, by furnishing him with two senses that lead him to knowledge of the real world through semblance alone. In the case of the eye and the ear, she herself has driven importunate matter back from the organs of sense, and the object, with which in the case of our more animal senses we have direct contact, is set at a distance from us. What we actually *see* with the eye is something different from the *sensation we receive*; for the mind leaps out across light to objects. The object of touch is a force to which we are subjected; the object of eye and ear a form that we engender. As long as man is still a savage he enjoys by means of these tactile senses alone, and at this stage the senses of semblance are merely the servants of these. Either he does not rise to the level of seeing at all, or he is at all events not satisfied with it. Once he does begin to enjoy through the eye, and seeing acquires for him a value of its own, he is already aesthetically free and the play drive has started to develop.

And as soon as the play drive begins to stir, with its pleasure in semblance, it will be followed by the shaping spirit of imitation, which treats semblance as something autonomous. Once man has got to the point of distinguishing semblance from reality, form

from body, he is also in a position to abstract the one from the other, and has indeed already done so by the very fact of distinguishing between them. The capacity for imitative art is thus given with the capacity for form in general; the urge toward it rests upon a quite different endowment that I need not discuss here. Whether the artistic impulse is to develop early or late, will depend solely upon the degree of loving attachment with which man is capable of abiding with sheer semblance.

Since all actual existence derives from nature considered as alien force, whereas all semblance originates in man considered as perceiving subject, he is only availing himself of the undisputed rights of ownership when he reclaims semblance from substance, and deals with it according to laws of his own. With unrestricted freedom he is able, can he but imagine them together, actually to join together things that nature put asunder; and, conversely, to separate, can he but abstract them in his mind, things that nature has joined together. Nothing need here be sacred to him except his own law, if he but observes the demarcation separating *his* territory from the actual existence of things, that is to say from the realm of nature.

This sovereign human right he exercises in the *art of semblance*; and the more strictly he here distinguishes between mine and thine, the more scrupulously he separates form from substance, and the more complete the autonomy he is able to give to the former, then the more he will not only extend the realm of beauty, but actually preserve intact the frontiers of truth. For he cannot keep semblance clear of actuality without at the same time setting actuality free from semblance.

But it is in the *world of semblance* alone that he possesses this sovereign right, in the insubstantial realm of the imagination; and he possesses it there only as long as he scrupulously refrains from predicating real existence of it in theory, and as long as he renounces all idea of imparting real existence through it in practice. From this you see that the poet transgresses his proper limits, alike when he attributes existence to his ideal world, as when he aims at bringing about some determinate existence by means of it. For he can bring neither of these things to pass without either exceeding his rights as a poet (encroaching with his ideal upon the territory of experience, and presuming to determine actual existence by

means of what is merely possible) or surrendering his rights as a poet (allowing experience to encroach upon the territory of the ideal, and restricting the possible to the conditions of the actual).

Only inasmuch as it is *honest* (expressly renounces all claims to reality), and only inasmuch as it is *autonomous* (dispenses with all support from reality), is semblance aesthetic. From the moment it is dishonest, and simulates reality, or from the moment it is impure, and has need of reality to make its effect, it is nothing but a base instrument for material ends, and affords no evidence whatsoever of any freedom of the spirit. This does not, of course, imply that an object in which we discover aesthetic semblance must be devoid of reality; all that is required is that our judgment of it should take no account of that reality; for inasmuch as it does take account of it, it is not an aesthetic judgment. The beauty of a living woman will please us as well, or even a little better, than a mere painting of one equally beautiful; but inasmuch as the living beauty pleases better than the painted, she is no longer pleasing us as autonomous semblance, no longer pleasing the purely aesthetic sense; for the appeal to this sense, even by living things, must be through sheer appearance, even by real things, purely in virtue of their existence as idea. But it does, admittedly, require an incomparably higher degree of aesthetic culture to perceive nothing but sheer semblance in what is actually alive, than it does to dispense with the element of life in sheer semblance.

In whatever individual or whole people we find this honest and autonomous kind of semblance, we may assume both understanding and taste, and every kindred excellence. There we shall see actual life governed by the ideal, honor triumphant over possessions, thought over enjoyment, dreams of immortality over existence. There public opinion will be the only thing to be feared, and an olive wreath bestow greater honor than a purple robe. Only impotence and perversity will have recourse to dishonest and dependent semblance; and single individuals, as well as whole peoples, who either "eke out reality with semblance, or (aesthetic) semblance with reality"—the two often go together—give evidence alike of their moral worthlessness and of their aesthetic incapacity.

To the question "*How far can semblance legitimately exist in the moral world?*" the answer is then, briefly and simply, this: *to the extent that it is aesthetic semblance*; that is to say, semblance that

neither seeks to represent reality nor needs to be represented by it. Aesthetic semblance can never be a threat to the truth of morals; and where it might seem to be otherwise, it can be shown without difficulty that the semblance was not aesthetic. Only a stranger to polite society, for example, will take the protestations of courtesy, which are common form, for tokens of personal regard, and when deceived complain of dissimulation. But only a bungler in polite society will, for the sake of courtesy, call deceit to his aid, and produce flattery in order to please. The first still lacks all sense of autonomous semblance; hence he can only lend it significance by endowing it with some content of truth. The second is himself lacking in reality and would fain, therefore, replace it by semblance.

Nothing is more common than to hear certain shallow critics of our age voicing the complaint that the solid virtues have disappeared from the face of the world, and that being is neglected for the sake of seeming. Though I feel no call to defend our age against such accusations, it is obvious enough from the sweeping way in which these severe moralizers tend to generalize their indictment, that they reproach the age not only for dishonest but for honest semblance too. And even the exceptions they might possibly be prepared to make for the sake of beauty refer rather to dependent, than to autonomous, semblance. They do not merely attack the lying colors that mask the face of truth and are bold enough to masquerade as reality; they also inveigh against that beneficent semblance with which we fill out our emptiness and cover up our wretchedness, and against that ideal semblance that ennobles the reality of common day. The hypocrisy of our morals rightly offends their strict sense of truth; it is only regrettable that, in their eyes, politeness too should count as hypocrisy. They dislike the superficial glitter that so often eclipses true merit; but it irks them no less that we should require genuine merit to have style, and refuse to absolve inward substance from having a pleasing outward form. They regret the sincerity, soundness, and solidity of former times; but they would like to see reintroduced with these the uncouthness and bluntness of primitive manners, the heavy awkwardness of ancient forms, and the lost exuberance of a Gothic Age. With judgments of this kind they show a respect for *substance as such* which is unworthy of man, who is meant to value matter only to the extent that it is capable of taking on form and extending the realm

of ideas. To such voices, therefore, the taste of our century need pay no undue heed, so long as it can stand its ground before a higher tribunal. What a more rigoristic judge of beauty could well reproach us with, is not that we attach value to aesthetic semblance (we do not attach nearly enough), but that we have not yet attained to the level of pure semblance at all, that we have not sufficiently distinguished existence from appearance, and thereby made the frontiers of each secure forever. We shall deserve this reproach as long as we cannot enjoy the beauty of living nature without coveting it, or admire the beauty of imitative art without inquiring after its purpose—as long as we still refuse imagination any absolute legislative rights of her own, and, by the kind of respect we accord to her works, go on referring her instead to the dignity of her office.

Twenty-Seventh Letter

You need have no fear for either reality or truth if the lofty conception of aesthetic semblance that I put forward in the last letter were to become universal. It will not become universal as long as man is still uncultivated enough to be in a position to misuse it; and should it become universal, this could only be brought about by the kind of culture that would automatically make any misuse of it impossible. To strive after autonomous semblance demands higher powers of abstraction, greater freedom of heart, more energy of will, than man ever needs when he confines himself to reality; and he must already have left this reality behind if he would arrive at that kind of semblance. How ill-advised he would be, then, to take the path toward the ideal in order to save himself the way to the real! From semblance as here understood we should thus have little cause to fear for reality; all the more to be feared, I would suggest, is the threat from reality to semblance. Chained as he is to the material world, man subordinates semblance to ends of his own long before he allows it autonomous existence in the ideal realm of art. For this latter to happen a complete revolution in his whole way of feeling is required, without which he would not even find himself *on the way* to the ideal. Wherever, then, we find traces of a disinterested and unconditional appreciation of pure semblance, we may infer that a revolution of this order has taken place in his

nature, and that he has started to become truly human. Traces of this kind are, however, actually to be found even in his first crude attempts at *embellishing* his existence, attempts made even at the risk of possibly worsening it from the material point of view. As soon as ever he starts preferring form to substance, and jeopardizing reality for the sake of semblance (which he must, however, recognize as such), a breach has been effected in the cycle of his animal behavior, and he finds himself set upon a path to which there is no end.

Not just content with what satisfies nature, and meets his instinctual needs, he demands something over and above this: to begin with, admittedly, only a superfluity of *material things*, in order to conceal from appetite the fact that it has limits, and ensure enjoyment beyond the satisfaction of immediate needs; soon, however, a superfluity in *material things*, an aesthetic surplus, in order to satisfy the formal impulse too, and extend enjoyment beyond the satisfaction of every need. By merely gathering supplies around him for future use, and enjoying them in anticipation, he does, it is true, transcend the present moment—but without transcending time altogether. He enjoys *more*, but he does not enjoy *differently*. But when he also lets form enter into his enjoyment, and begins to notice the outward appearance of the things that satisfy his desires, then he has not merely enhanced his enjoyment in scope and degree, but also ennobled it in kind.

It is true that nature has given even to creatures without reason more than the bare necessities of existence, and shed a glimmer of freedom even into the darkness of animal life. When the lion is not gnawed by hunger, nor provoked to battle by any beast of prey, his idle strength creates an object for itself: he fills the echoing desert with a roaring that speaks defiance, and his exuberant energy enjoys its *self* in purposeless display. With what enjoyment of life do insects swarm in the sunbeam; and it is certainly not the cry of desire that we hear in the melodious warbling of the songbird. Without doubt there is freedom in these activities; but not freedom from compulsion altogether, merely from a certain kind of compulsion, compulsion from without. An animal may be said to *be at work* when the stimulus to activity is some lack; it may be said to *be at play* when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action. Even inani-

mate nature exhibits a similar luxuriance of forces, coupled with a laxity of determination that, in that material sense, might well be called play. The tree puts forth innumerable buds that perish without ever unfolding, and sends out far more roots, branches, and leaves in search of nourishment than are ever used for the sustaining of itself or its species. Such portion of its prodigal profusion as it returns, unused and unenjoyed, to the elements, is the overplus that living things are entitled to squander in a movement of carefree joy. Thus does nature, even in her material kingdom, offer us a prelude of the illimitable, and even here remove *in part* the chains that, in the realm of form, she casts away entirely. From the compulsion of want, or *physical earnestness*, she makes the transition via the compulsion of superfluity, or *physical play*, to aesthetic play; and before she soars, in the sublime freedom of beauty, beyond the fetters of ends and purposes altogether, she makes some approach to this independence, at least from afar, in that kind of *free activity* that is at once its own end and its own means.

Like the bodily organs in man, his imagination, too, has its free movement and its material play, an activity in which, without any reference to form, it simply delights in its own absolute and unfettered power. Inasmuch as form does not yet enter this fantasy play at all, its whole charm residing in a free association of images, such play—although the prerogative of man alone—belongs merely to his animal life, and simply affords evidence of his liberation from all external physical compulsion, without as yet warranting the inference that there is any autonomous shaping power within him.*

* Most of the imaginative play that goes on in everyday life is either entirely based on this feeling for free association of ideas, or at any rate derives therefrom its greatest charm. This may not in itself be proof of a higher nature, and it may well be that it is just the most flaccid natures who tend to surrender to such unimpeded flow of images; it is nevertheless this very independence of the fantasy from external stimuli, which constitutes at least the negative condition of its creative power. Only by tearing itself free from reality does the formative power raise itself up to the ideal; and before first the imagination, in its productive capacity, can act according to its own laws, it must first, in its reproductive procedures, have freed itself from alien laws. From mere lawlessness to autonomous law giving from within, there is, admittedly, still a big step to be taken; and a completely new power, the faculty for ideas, must first be brought into play. But this power, too, can now develop with greater ease, since the senses are not working against it, and the indefinite does, at least negatively, border upon the infinite.

From this play of *freely associated ideas*, which is still of a wholly material kind, and to be explained by purely natural laws, the imagination, in its attempt at a *free form*, finally makes the leap to aesthetic play. A leap it must be called, since a completely new power now goes into action; for here, for the first time, mind takes a hand as lawgiver in the operations of blind instinct, subjects the arbitrary activity of the imagination to its own immutable and eternal unity, introduces its own autonomy into the transient, and its own infinity into the life of sense. But as long as brute nature still has too much power, knowing no other law but restless hastening from change to change, it will oppose to that necessity of the spirit its own unstable caprice, to that stability its own unrest, to that autonomy its own subservience, to that sublime self-sufficiency its own insatiable discontent. The aesthetic play drive, therefore, will in its first attempts be scarcely recognizable, since the physical play drive, with its willful moods and its unruly appetites, constantly gets in the way. Hence we see uncultivated taste first seizing upon what is new and startling—on the colorful, fantastic, and bizarre, the violent and the savage—and shunning nothing so much as tranquil simplicity. It fashions grotesque shapes, loves swift transitions, exuberant forms, glaring contrasts, garish lights, and a song full of feeling. At this stage what man calls beautiful is only what excites him, what offers him material—but excites him to a resistance involving autonomous activity, but offers him material *for possible shaping*. Otherwise it would not be beauty—even for him. The form of his judgments has thus undergone an astonishing change: he seeks these objects, not because they give him something to enjoy passively, but because they provide an incentive to respond actively. They please him, not because they meet a need, but because they satisfy a law that speaks, though softly as yet, within his breast.

Soon he is no longer content that things should please him; he himself wants to please. At first, indeed, only through that which is *his*; finally through that which *he* is. The things he possesses, the things he produces, may no longer bear upon them the marks of their use, their form no longer be merely a timid expression of their function; in addition to the service they exist to render, they must at the same time reflect the genial mind that conceived them, the loving hand that wrought them, the serene and liberal spirit that chose and displayed them. Now the ancient German goes in search

of glossier skins, statelier antlers, more elaborate drinking horns; and the Caledonian selects for his feasts the prettiest shells. Even weapons may no longer be mere objects of terror; they must be objects of delight as well, and the cunningly ornamented swordbelt claims no less attention than the deadly blade of the sword. Not content with introducing aesthetic superfluity into objects of necessity, the play drive as it becomes ever freer finally tears itself away from the fetters of utility altogether, and beauty in and for itself alone begins to be an object of his striving. Man *adorns* himself. Disinterested and undirected pleasure is now numbered among the necessities of existence, and what is in fact unnecessary soon becomes the best part of his delight.

And as form gradually comes upon him from without—in his dwelling, his household goods, and his apparel—so finally it begins to take possession of him himself, transforming at first only the outer, but ultimately the inner man too. Uncoordinated leaps of joy turn into dance, the unformed movements of the body into the graceful and harmonious language of gesture; the confused and indistinct cries of feeling become articulate, begin to obey the laws of rhythm, and to take on the contours of song. If the Trojan host storms on to the battlefield with piercing shrieks like a flock of cranes, the Greek army approaches it in silence, with noble and measured tread. In the former case we see only the exuberance of blind forces; in the latter, the triumph of form and the simple majesty of law.

Now compulsion of a lovelier kind binds the sexes together, and a communion of hearts helps sustain a connection but intermittently established by the fickle caprice of desire. Released from its dark bondage, the eye, less troubled now by passion, can apprehend the form of the beloved; soul looks deep into soul, and out of a selfish exchange of lust there grows a generous interchange of affection. Desire widens, and is exalted into love, once humanity has dawned in its object; and a base advantage over sense is now disdained for the sake of a nobler victory over will. The need to please subjects the all-conquering male to the gentle tribunal of taste; lust he can steal, but love must come as a gift. For this loftier prize he can only contend by virtue of form, never by virtue of matter. From being a force impinging upon feeling, he must become a form confronting the mind; he must be willing to concede freedom, because it is freedom he wishes to please. And even as beauty

resolves the conflict between opposing natures in this simplest and clearest paradigm, the eternal antagonism of the sexes, so too does it resolve it—or at least aims at resolving it—in the complex whole of society, endeavoring to reconcile the gentle with the violent in the moral world after the pattern of the free union it there contrives between the strength of man and the gentleness of woman. Now weakness becomes sacred, and unbridled strength dishonorable; the injustice of nature is rectified by the magnanimity of the chivalric code. He whom no violence may alarm is disarmed by the tender blush of modesty, and tears stifle a revenge that no blood was able to assuage. Even hatred pays heed to the gentle voice of honor; the sword of the victor spares the disarmed foe, and a friendly hearth sends forth welcoming smoke to greet the stranger on that dread shore where of old only murder lay in wait for him.

In the midst of the fearful kingdom of forces, and in the midst of the sacred kingdom of laws, the aesthetic impulse to form is at work, unnoticed, on the building of a third joyous kingdom of play and of semblance, in which man is relieved of the shackles of circumstance, and released from all that might be called constraint, alike in the physical and in the moral sphere.

If in the *dynamic* state of rights it is as force that one man encounters another, and imposes limits upon his activities; if in the *ethical* state of duties man sets himself over against man with all the majesty of the law, and puts a curb upon his desires: in those circles where conduct is governed by beauty, in the *aesthetic* state, none may appear to the other except as form, or confront him except as an object of free play. *To bestow freedom by means of freedom* is the fundamental law of this kingdom.

The dynamic state can merely make society possible, by letting one nature be curbed by another; the ethical state can merely make it (morally) necessary, by subjecting the individual will to the general; the aesthetic state alone can make it real, because it consummates the will of the whole through the nature of the individual. Though it may be his needs that drive man into society, and reason that implants within him the principles of social behavior, beauty alone can confer upon him a *social character*. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it fosters harmony in the individual. All other forms of perception divide man, because they are founded exclusively either upon the sensuous or upon the spiritual part of his being; only the aesthetic mode of perception makes of him a

whole, because both his natures must be in harmony if he is to achieve it. All other forms of communication divide society, because they relate exclusively either to the private receptivity or to the private proficiency of its individual members, hence to that which distinguishes man from man; only the aesthetic mode of communication unites society, because it relates to that which is common to all. The pleasures of the senses we enjoy merely as individuals, without the genus that is immanent within us having any share in them at all; hence we cannot make the pleasures of sense universal, because we are unable to universalize our own individuality. The pleasures of knowledge we enjoy merely as genus, and by carefully removing from our judgment all trace of individuality; hence we cannot make the pleasures of reason universal, because we cannot eliminate traces of individuality from the judgments of others as we can from our own. Beauty alone do we enjoy at once as individual and as genus, i.e., as *representatives* of the human genus. The good of the senses can only make one man happy, since it is founded on appropriation, and this always involves exclusion; and it can only make this one man onesidedly happy, since his personality has no part in it. Absolute good can only bring happiness under conditions that we cannot presume to be universal; for truth is the prize of abnegation alone, and only the pure in heart believe in the pure will. Beauty alone makes the whole world happy, and each and every being forgets its limitations while under its spell.

No privilege, no autocracy of any kind, is tolerated where taste rules, and the realm of aesthetic semblance extends its sway. This realm stretches upwards to the point where reason governs with unconditioned necessity, and all that is mere matter ceases to be. It stretches downwards to the point where natural impulse reigns with blind compulsion, and form has not yet begun to appear. And even at these furthest confines, where taste is deprived of all legislative power, it still does not allow the executive power to be wrested from it. A social appetite must renounce its self-seeking, and the agreeable, whose normal function is to seduce the senses, must cast toils of grace over the mind as well. Duty, stern voice of necessity, must moderate the censorious tone of its precepts—a tone only justified by the resistance they encounter—and show greater respect for nature through a nobler confidence in her willingness to obey them. From within the mysteries of science, taste

leads knowledge out into the broad daylight of common sense, and transforms a monopoly of the schools into the common possession of human society as a whole. In the kingdom of taste even the mightiest genius must divest itself of its majesty, and stoop in all humility to the mind of a little child. Strength must allow itself to be bound by the Graces, and the lion have its defiance curbed by the bridle of a Cupid. In return, taste throws a veil of decorum over those physical desires that, in their naked form, affront the dignity of free beings; and, by a delightful illusion of freedom, conceals from us our degrading kinship with matter. On the wings of taste even that art that must cringe for payment can lift itself out of the dust; and, at the touch of her wand, the fetters of serfdom fall away from the lifeless and the living alike. In the aesthetic state everything—even the tool that serves—is a free citizen, having equal rights with the noblest; and the mind, which would force the patient mass beneath the yoke of its purposes, must here first obtain its assent. Here, therefore, in the realm of aesthetic semblance, we find that ideal of equality fulfilled that the enthusiast would fain see realized in substance. And if it is true that it is in the proximity of thrones that fine breeding comes most quickly and most perfectly to maturity, would one not have to recognize in this, as in much else, a kindly dispensation that often seems to be imposing limits upon man in the real world, only in order to spur him on to realization in an ideal world?

But does such a state of aesthetic semblance really exist? And if so, where is it to be found? As a need, it exists in every finely attuned soul; as a realized fact, we are likely to find it, like the pure church and the pure republic, only in some few chosen circles, where conduct is governed, not by some soulless imitation of the manners and morals of others, but by the aesthetic nature we have made our own; where men make their way, with undismayed simplicity and tranquil innocence, through even the most involved and complex situations, free alike of the compulsion to infringe the freedom of others in order to assert their own, as of the necessity to shed their dignity in order to manifest grace.

Translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson
and L. A. Willoughby

On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*

There are moments in our lives when we extend a kind of love and tender respect toward nature in plants, minerals, animals, and landscapes, as well as to human nature in children, in the customs of country folk and the primitive world. We do this, not because it makes us feel good and not even because it satisfies our intellect or taste (in both cases the reverse can often occur), but merely *because it is nature*. Every more refined human being not utterly devoid of feeling experiences this when he wanders about in the open, when he resides in the country or lingers at the monuments of ancient times, in short, whenever in the midst of man-made contexts and situations he is taken aback by the sight of nature in its simplicity. It is this interest, often elevated to a need, that lies at the bottom of our many fondnesses for flowers and animals, for simple gardens, for walks, for the land and its inhabitants, for many an artifact of remote antiquity, and the like (pro-

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