

# FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

AESTHETICAL ESSAYS OF  
FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

**Friedrich Schiller**  
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**of Friedrich Schiller**

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*Aesthetical Essays of Friedrich Schiller:*

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# **Friedrich Schiller Aesthetical Essays of Friedrich Schiller**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The special subject of the greater part of the letters and essays of Schiller contained in this volume is Aesthetics; and before passing to any remarks on his treatment of the subject it will be useful to offer a few observations on the nature of this topic, and on its treatment by the philosophical spirit of different ages.

First, then, aesthetics has for its object the vast realm of the beautiful, and it may be most adequately defined as the philosophy of art or of the fine arts. To some the definition may seem arbitrary, as excluding the beautiful in nature; but it will cease to appear so if it is remarked that the beauty which is the work of art is higher than natural beauty, because it is the offspring of the mind. Moreover, if, in conformity with a certain school of modern philosophy, the mind be viewed as the true being, including all in itself, it must be admitted that beauty is only truly beautiful when it shares in the nature of mind, and is mind's offspring.

Viewed in this light, the beauty of nature is only a reflection

of the beauty of the mind, only an imperfect beauty, which as to its essence is included in that of the mind. Nor has it ever entered into the mind of any thinker to develop the beautiful in natural objects, so as to convert it into a science and a system. The field of natural beauty is too uncertain and too fluctuating for this purpose. Moreover, the relation of beauty in nature and beauty in art forms a part of the science of aesthetics, and finds again its proper place.

But it may be urged that art is not worthy of a scientific treatment. Art is no doubt an ornament of our life and a charm to the fancy; but has it a more serious side? When compared with the absorbing necessities of human existence, it might seem a luxury, a superfluity, calculated to enfeeble the heart by the assiduous worship of beauty, and thus to be actually prejudicial to the true interest of practical life. This view seems to be largely countenanced by a dominant party in modern times, and practical men, as they are styled, are only too ready to take this superficial view of the office of art.

Many have indeed undertaken to defend art on this score, and to show that, far from being a mere luxury, it has serious and solid advantages. It has been even apparently exaggerated in this respect, and represented as a kind of mediator between reason and sense, between inclination and duty, having as its mission the work of reconciling the conflicting elements in the human heart. A strong trace of this view will be found in Schiller, especially in all that he says about the play-instinct in his "Aesthetical Letters."

Nevertheless, art is worthy of science; aesthetics is a true science, and the office of art is as high as that assigned to it in the pages of Schiller. We admit that art viewed only as an ornament and a charm is no longer free, but a slave. But this is a perversion of its proper end. Science has to be considered as free in its aim and in its means, and it is only free when liberated from all other considerations; it rises up to truth, which is its only real object, and can alone fully satisfy it. Art in like manner is alone truly art when it is free and independent, when it solves the problem of its high destination – that problem whether it has to be placed beside religion and philosophy as being nothing else than a particular mode or a special form of revealing God to consciousness, and of expressing the deepest interests of human nature and the widest truths of the human mind.

For it is in their works of art that the nations have imprinted their favorite thoughts and their richest intuitions, and not unfrequently the fine arts are the only means by which we can penetrate into the secrets of their wisdom and the mysteries of their religion.

It is made a reproach to art that it produces its effects by appearance and illusion; but can it be established that appearance is objectionable? The phenomena of nature and the acts of human life are nothing more than appearances, and are yet looked upon as constituting a true reality; for this reality must be sought for beyond the objects perceived immediately by the sense, the substance and speech and principle underlying all

things manifesting itself in time and space through these real existences, but preserving its absolute existence in itself. Now, the very special object and aim of art is to represent the action and development of this universal force. In nature this force or principle appears confounded with particular interests and transitory circumstances, mixed up with what is arbitrary in the passions and in individual wills. Art sets the truth free from the illusory and mendacious forms of this coarse, imperfect world, and clothes it in a nobler, purer form created by the mind itself. Thus the forms of art, far from being mere appearances, perfectly illusory, contain more reality and truth than the phenomenal existences of the real world. The world of art is truer than that of history or nature.

Nor is this all: the representations of art are more expressive and transparent than the phenomena of the real world or the events of history. The mind finds it harder to pierce through the hard envelop of nature and common life than to penetrate into works of art.

Two more reflections appear completely to meet the objection that art or aesthetics is not entitled to the name of science.

It will be generally admitted that the mind of man has the power of considering itself, of making itself its own object and all that issues from its activity; for thought constitutes the essence of the mind. Now art and its work, as creations of the mind, are themselves of a spiritual nature. In this respect art is much nearer to the mind than nature. In studying the works of art the mind



has to do with itself, with what proceeds from itself, and is itself.

Thus art finds its highest confirmation in science.

Nor does art refuse a philosophical treatment because it is dependent on caprice, and subject to no law. If its highest aim be to reveal to the human consciousness the highest interest of the mind, it is evident that the substance or contents of the representations are not given up to the control of a wild and irregular imagination. It is strictly determined by the ideas that concern our intelligence and by the laws of their development, whatever may be the inexhaustible variety of forms in which they are produced. Nor are these forms arbitrary, for every form is not fitted to express every idea. The form is determined by the substance which it has to suit.

A further consideration of the true nature of beauty, and therefore of the vocation of the artist, will aid us still more in our endeavor to show the high dignity of art and of aesthetics. The history of philosophy presents us with many theories on the nature of the beautiful; but as it would lead us too far to examine them all, we shall only consider the most important among them. The coarsest of these theories defines the beautiful as that which pleases the senses. This theory, issuing from the philosophy of sensation of the school of Locke and Condillac, only explains the idea and the feeling of the beautiful by disfiguring it. It is entirely contradicted by facts. For it converts it into desire, but desire is egotistical and insatiable, while admiration is respectful, and is its own satisfaction without seeking possession.

Others have thought the beautiful consists in proportion, and no doubt this is one of the conditions of beauty, but only one. An ill-proportioned object cannot be beautiful, but the exact correspondence of parts, as in geometrical figures, does not constitute beauty.

A noted ancient theory makes beauty consist in the perfect suitableness of means to their end. In this case the beautiful is not the useful, it is the suitable; and the latter idea is more akin to that of beauty. But it has not the true character of the beautiful. Again, order is a less mathematical idea than proportion, but it does not explain what is free and flowing in certain beauties.

The most plausible theory of beauty is that which makes it consist in two contrary and equally necessary elements – unity and variety. A beautiful flower has all the elements we have named; it has unity, symmetry, and variety of shades of color. There is no beauty without life, and life is movement, diversity. These elements are found in beautiful and also in sublime objects. A beautiful object is complete, finished, limited with symmetrical parts. A sublime object whose forms, though not out of proportion, are less determined, ever awakens in us the feeling of the infinite. In objects of sense all qualities that can produce the feeling of the beautiful come under one class called physical beauty. But above and beyond this in the region of mind we have first intellectual beauty, including the laws that govern intelligence and the creative genius of the artist, the poet, and the philosopher. Again, the moral world has beauty in its

ideas of liberty, of virtue, of devotion, the justice of Aristides, the heroism of Leonidas.

We have now ascertained that there is beauty and sublimity in nature, in ideas, in feelings, and in actions. After all this it might be supposed that a unity could be found amidst these different kinds of beauty. The sight of a statue, as the Apollo of Belvedere, of a man, of Socrates expiring, are adduced as producing impressions of the beautiful; but the form cannot be a form by itself, it must be the form of something. Physical beauty is the sign of an interior beauty, a spiritual and moral beauty which is the basis, the principle, and the unity of the beautiful.

Physical beauty is an envelop to intellectual and to moral beauty.

Intellectual beauty, the splendor of the true, can only have for principle that of all truth.

Moral beauty comprehends two distinct elements, equally beautiful, justice and charity. Thus God is the principle of the three orders of beauty, physical, intellectual, and moral. He also construes the two great powers distributed over the three orders, the beautiful and the sublime. God is beauty par excellence; He is therefore perfectly beautiful; He is equally sublime. He is to us the type and sense of the two great forms of beauty. In short, the Absolute Being as absolute unity and absolute variety is necessarily the ultimate principle, the extreme basis, the finished ideal of all beauty. This was the marvellous beauty which Diotimus had seen, and which is described in the Banquet

of Socrates.

It is our purpose after the previous discussion to attempt to elucidate still further the idea of art by following its historic development.

Many questions bearing on art and relating to the beautiful had been propounded before, even as far back as Plotinus, Plato, and Socrates, but recent times have been the real cradle of aesthetics as a science. Modern philosophy was the first to recognize that beauty in art is one of the means by which the contradictions can be removed between mind considered in its abstract and absolute existence and nature constituting the world of sense, bringing back these two factors to unity.

Kant was the first who felt the want of this union and expressed it, but without determining its conditions or expressing it scientifically. He was impeded in his efforts to effect this union by the opposition between the subjective and the objective, by his placing practical reason above theoretical reason, and he set up the opposition found in the moral sphere as the highest principle of morality. Reduced to this difficulty, all that Kant could do was to express the union under the form of the subjective ideas of reason, or as postulates to be deduced from the practical reason, without their essential character being known, and representing their realization as nothing more than a simple you ought, or imperative "Du sollst."

In his teleological judgment applied to living beings, Kant comes, on the contrary, to consider the living organism in such

wise that, the general including the particular, and determining it as an end, consequently the idea also determines the external, the compound of the organs, not by an act springing from without but issuing from within. In this way the end and the means, the interior and exterior, the general and particular, are confounded in unity. But this judgment only expresses a subjective act of reflection, and does not throw any light on the object in itself. Kant has the same view of the aesthetic judgment. According to him the judgment does not proceed either from reason, as the faculty of general ideas, or from sensuous perception, but from the free play of the reason and of the imagination. In this analysis of the cognitive faculty, the object only exists relatively to the subject and to the feeling of pleasure or the enjoyment that it experiences.

The characteristics of the beautiful are, according to Kant: —

1. The pleasure it procures is free from interest.
2. Beauty appears to us as an object of general enjoyment, without awakening in us the consciousness of an abstract idea and of a category of reason to which we might refer our judgment.
3. Beauty ought to embrace in itself the relation of conformity to its end, but in such a way that this conformity may be grasped without the idea of the end being offered to our mind.
4. Though it be not accompanied by an abstract idea, beauty ought to be acknowledged as the object of a necessary enjoyment.

A special feature of all this system is the indissoluble unity

of what is supposed to be separated in consciousness. This distinction disappears in the beautiful, because in it the general and the particular, the end and the means, the idea and the object, mentally penetrate each other completely. The particular in itself, whether it be opposed to itself or to what is general, is something accidental. But here what may be considered as an accidental form is so intimately connected with the general that it is confounded and identified with it. By this means the beautiful in art presents thought to us as incarnate. On the other hand, matter, nature, the sensuous as themselves possessing measure, end, and harmony, are raised to the dignity of spirit and share in its general character. Thought not only abandons its hostility against nature, but smiles in her. Sensation and enjoyment are justified and sanctified, so that nature and liberty, sense and ideas, find their justification and their sanctification in this union. Nevertheless this reconciliation, though seemingly perfect, is stricken with the character of subjectiveness. It cannot constitute the absolutely true and real.

Such is an outline of the principal results of Kant's criticism, and Hegel passes high praise on the profoundly philosophic mind of Schiller, who demanded the union and reconciliation of the two principles, and who tried to give a scientific explanation of it before the problem had been solved by philosophy. In his "Letters on Aesthetic Education," Schiller admits that man carries in himself the germ of the ideal man which is realized and represented by the state. There are two ways for the

individual man to approach the ideal man; first, when the state, considered as morality, justice, and general reason, absorbs the individualities in its unity; secondly, when the individual rises to the ideal of his species by the perfecting of himself. Reason demands unity, conformity to the species; nature, on the other hand, demands plurality and individuality; and man is at once solicited by two contrary laws. In this conflict, aesthetic education must come in to effect the reconciliation of the two principles; for, according to Schiller, it has as its end to fashion and polish the inclinations and passions so that they may become reasonable, and that, on the other hand, reason and freedom may issue from their abstract character, may unite with nature, may spiritualize it, become incarnate, and take a body in it. Beauty is thus given as the simultaneous development of the rational and of the sensuous, fused together, and interpenetrated one by the other, an union that constitutes in fact true reality.

This unity of the general and of the particular, of liberty and necessity of the spiritual and material, which Schiller understood scientifically as the spirit of art, and which he tried to make appear in real life by aesthetic art and education, was afterwards put forward under the name of idea as the principle of all knowledge and existence. In this way, through the agency of Schelling, science raised itself to an absolute point of view. It was thus that art began to claim its proper nature and dignity. From that time its proper place was finally marked out for it in science, though the mode of viewing it still labored under certain

defects. Its high and true distinction were at length understood.

In viewing the higher position to which recent philosophical systems have raised the theory of art in Germany, we must not overlook the advantages contributed by the study of the ideal of the ancients by such men as Winckelmann, who, by a kind of inspiration, raised art criticism from a carping about petty details to seek the true spirit of great works of art, and their true ideas, by a study of the spirit of the originals.

It has appeared expedient to conclude this introduction with a summary of the latest and highest theory of art and aesthetics issuing from Kant and Schiller, and developed in the later philosophy of Hegel.

Our space only allows us to give a glance, first, at the metaphysics of the beautiful as developed by Hegel in the first part of his 'Aesthetik,' and then at the later development of the same system in recent writers issuing from his school.

Hegel considers, first, the abstract idea of the beautiful; secondly, beauty in nature; thirdly, beauty in art or the ideal; and he winds up with an examination of the qualities of the artist.

His preliminary remarks are directed to show the relations of art to religion and philosophy, and he shows that man's destination is an infinite development. In real life he only satisfies his longing partially and imperfectly by limited enjoyments. In science he finds a nobler pleasure, and civil life opens a career for his activity; but he only finds an imperfect pleasure in these pursuits. He cannot then find the ideal after which he sighs. Then



he rises to a higher sphere, where all contradictions are effaced and the ideas of good and happiness are realized in perfect accord and in constant harmony. This deep want of the soul is satisfied in three ways: in art, in religion, and in philosophy.

Art is intended to make us contemplate the true and the infinite in forms of sense. Yet even art does not fully satisfy the deepest need of the soul. The soul wants to contemplate truth in its inmost consciousness. Religion is placed above the dominion of art.

First, as to idea of the beautiful, Hegel begins by giving its characteristics. It is infinite, and it is free; the contemplation of the beautiful suffices to itself, it awakens no desire. The soul experiences something like a godlike felicity and is transported into a sphere remote from the miseries of life. This theory of the beautiful comes very near that of Plato.

Secondly, as to beauty in nature. Physical beauty, considered externally, presents itself successively under the aspects of regularity and of symmetry, of conformity with a law, and of harmony, also of purity and simplicity of matter.

Thirdly, beauty in art or the ideal is beauty in a higher degree of perfection than real beauty. The ideal in art is not contrary to the real, but the real idealized, purified, and perfectly expressed. The ideal is also the soul arrived at the consciousness of itself, free and fully enjoying its faculties; it is life, but spiritual life and spirit. Nor is the ideal a cold abstraction, it is the spiritual principle under the form of a living individuality freed from the

laws of the finite. The ideal in its highest form is the divine, as expressed in the Greek divinities; the Christian ideal, as expressed in all its highest purity in God the Father, the Christ, the Virgin. Its essential features are calm, majesty, serenity.

At a lower degree the ideal is in man the victory of the eternal principles that fill the human heart, the triumph of the nobler part of the soul, the moral and divine principle.

But the ideal manifested in the world becomes action, and action implies a form of society, a determinate situation with collision, and an action properly so called. The heroic age is the best society for the ideal in action; in its determinate situation the ideal in action must appear as the manifestation of moral power, and in action, properly so called, it must contain three points in the ideal: first, general principles; secondly, personages; thirdly, their character and their passions. Hegel winds up by considering the qualities necessary in an artist: imagination, genius, inspiration, originality, etc.

A recent exponent of Hegel's aesthetical ideas further developed expresses himself thus on the nature of beauty: —

"After the bitterness of the world, the sweetness of art soothes and refreshes us. This is the high value of the beautiful — that it solves the contradiction of mind and matter, of the moral and sensuous world, in harmony. Thus the beautiful and its representation in art procures for intuition what philosophy gives to the cognitive insight and religion to the believing frame of mind. Hence the delight with which Schiller's wonderful poem

on the Bell celebrates the accord of the inner and outer life, the fulfilment of the longing and demands of the soul by the events in nature. The externality of phenomena is removed in the beautiful; it is raised into the circle of ideal existence; for it is recognized as the revelation of the ideal, and thus transfigured it gives to the latter additional splendor."

"Thus the beautiful is active, living unity, full existence without defect, as Plato and Schelling have said, or as recent writers describe it; the idea that is quite present in the appearance, the appearance which is quite formed and penetrated by the idea."

"Beauty is the world secret that invites us in image and word," is the poetical expression of Plato; and we may add, because it is revealed in both. We feel in it the harmony of the world; it breaks forth in a beauty, in a lovely accord, in a radiant point, and starting thence we penetrate further and yet further, and find as the ground of all existence the same charm which had refreshed us in individual forms. Thus Christ pointed to the lilies of the field to knit His followers' reliance on Providence with the phenomena of nature: and could they jet forth in royal beauty, exceeding that of Solomon, if the inner ground of nature were not beauty?

We may also name beauty in a certain sense a mystery, as it mediates to us in a sensuous sign a heavenly gift of grace, that it opens to us a view into the eternal Being, teaching us to know nature in God and God in nature, that it brings the divine even

to the perception of sense, and establishes the energy of love and freedom as the ground, the bond, and the end of the world.

In the midst of the temporal the eternal is made palpable and present to us in the beautiful, and offers itself to our enjoyment. The separation is suppressed, and the original unity, as it is in God, appears as the first, as what holds together even the past in the universe, and what constitutes the aim of the development in a finite accord.

The beautiful not only presents itself to us as mediator of a foreign excellence or of a remote divinity, but the ideal and the godlike are present in it. Hence aesthetics requires as its basis the system in which God is known as indwelling in the world, that He is not far distant from any one of us, but that He animates us, and that we live in Him. Aesthetics requires the knowledge that mind is the creative force and unity of all that is extended and developed in time and space.

The beautiful is thus, according to these later thinkers, the revelation of God to the mind through the senses; it is the appearance of the idea. In the beautiful spirit reveals itself to spirit through matter and the senses; thus the entire man feels himself raised and satisfied by it. By the unity of the beautiful with us we experience with delight that thought and the material world are present for our individuality, that they utter tones and shine forth in it, that both penetrate each other and blend in it and thus become one with it. We feel one with them and one in them.

This later view was to a great extent expressed by Schiller in

his "Aesthetical Letters."

But art and aesthetics, in the sense in which these terms are used and understood by German philosophical writers, such as Schiller, embrace a wider field than the fine arts. Lessing, in his "Laocoon," had already shown the point of contrast between painting and poetry; and aesthetics, being defined as the science of the beautiful, must of necessity embrace poetry. Accordingly Schiller's essays on tragic art, pathos, and sentimental poetry, contained in this volume, are justly classed under his aesthetical writings.

This being so, it is important to estimate briefly the transitions of German poetry before Schiller, and the position that he occupied in its historic development.

The first classical period of German poetry and literature was contained between A. D. 1190 and 1300. It exhibits the intimate blending of the German and Christian elements, and their full development in splendid productions, for this was the period of the German national epos, the "Nibelungenlied," and of the "Minnegesang."

This was a period which has nothing to compare with it in point of art and poetry, save perhaps, and that imperfectly, the heroic and post-Homeric age of early Greece.

The poetical efforts of that early age may be grouped under – (1) national epos: the "Nibelungenlied;" (2) art epos: the "Rolandslied," "Percival," etc.; (3) the introduction of antique legends: Veldeck's "Aeneide," and Konrad's "War of Troy;" (4)

Christian legends "Barlaam," "Sylvester," "Pilatus," etc.; (5) poetical narratives: "Crescentia," "Graf Rudolf," etc.; (6) animal legends; "Reinecke Vos;" (7) didactic poems: "Der Renner;" (8) the Minne-poetry, and prose.

The fourth group, though introduced from a foreign source, gives the special character and much of the charm of the period we consider. This is the sphere of legends derived from ecclesiastical ground. One of the best German writers on the history of German literature remarks: "If the aim and nature of all poetry is to let yourself be filled by a subject and to become penetrated with it; if the simple representation of unartificial, true, and glowing feelings belongs to its most beautiful adornments; if the faithful direction of the heart to the invisible and eternal is the ground on which at all times the most lovely flowers of poetry have sprouted forth, these legendary poems of early Germany, in their lovely heartiness, in their unambitious limitation, and their pious sense, deserve a friendly acknowledgment. What man has considered the pious images in the prayer-books of the Middle Ages, the unadorned innocence, the piety and purity, the patience of the martyrs, the calm, heavenly transparency of the figures of the holy angels, without being attracted by the simple innocence and humility of these forms, the creation of pious artists' hands? Who has beheld them without tranquil joy at the soft splendor poured, over them, without deep sympathy, nay, without a certain emotion and tenderness? And the same spirit that created these images also

produced those poetical effusions, the same spirit of pious belief, of deep devotion, of heavenly longing. If we make a present reality of the heroic songs of the early German popular poetry, and the chivalrous epics of the art poetry, the military expeditions and dress of the Crusades, this legendary poetry appears as the invention of humble pilgrims, who wander slowly on the weary way to Jerusalem, with scollop and pilgrim's staff, engaged in quiet prayer, till they are all to kneel at the Saviour's sepulchre; and thus contented, after touching the holy earth with their lips, they return, poor as they were, but full of holy comfort, to their distant home.

"While the knightly poetry is the poetry of the splendid secular life, full of cheerful joy, full of harp-tones and song, full of tournaments and joyous festivals, the poetry of the earthly love for the earthly bride, the poetry of the legends is that of the spontaneous life of poverty, the poetry of the solitary cloister cell, of the quiet, well-walled convent garden, the poetry of heavenly brides, who without lamenting the joys of the world, which they need not, have their joy in their Saviour in tranquil piety and devout resignation – who attend at the espousals of Anna and Joachim, sing the Magnificat with the Holy Mother of God, stand weeping beneath the cross, to be pierced also by the sword, who hear the angel harp with St. Cecilia, and walk with St. Theresa in the glades of Paradise. While the Minne-poetry was the tender homage offered to the beauty, the gentleness, the grace, and charm of noble women of this world, legendary

poetry was the homage given to the Virgin Mother, the Queen of Heaven, transfiguring earthly love into a heavenly and eternal love."

"For the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were the time of woman cultus, such as has never been before or since seen; it is also the time of the deepest and simplest and truest, most enthusiastic and faithful veneration of the Virgin Mary. If we, by a certain effort, manage to place ourselves back on the standpoint of childlike poetic faith of that time, and set aside in thought the materializing and exaggeration of the hagiology and Mariolatry produced by later centuries, rendering the reaction of the Reformation unavoidable – if now in our age, turned exclusively to logical ideas and a negative dialectic, we live again by thought in those ages of feeling and poetry – if we acknowledge all these things to be something more than harmless play of words and fancy, and as the true lifelike contents of the period, then we can properly appreciate this legendary poetry as a necessary link in the crown of pearls of our ancient poetry."

In short, the first classical period of German literature was a time of youthful freshness, of pure harmony, plunged in verse and song, full of the richest tones and the noblest rhythm, so that rhyme and song alone must be looked for as the form of poetic creations. Accordingly it had no proper prose. Like our own youth, it was a happy, free, and true youth, it knew no prose; like us it dreamed to speechless songs; and as we expressed our youthful language and hopes, woes and joys, in rhyme and song,



thus a whole people and age had its beautiful youth full of song and verse tones. The life was poetry and poetry was the life.

Then came degeneracy and artifice; after that the great shock of the Reformation; subsequently a servile and pedantic study of classical forms without imbibing their spirit, but preparing the way for a truer art spirit, extracted from their study by the masterly criticism of Winckelmann and Lessing, till the second classical period of German literature and poetry bloomed forth in full beauty, blending the national and legendary elements so well expressed by Herder with the highest effusions of dramatic poetry, partly creative and partly imitative of the Greek models, in Schiller and Goethe.

Modern German literature presents a very remarkable spectacle, though far from unique in history, for there we see criticism begetting genius.

Lessing, the founder of the modern German drama, sought to banish all pomp from the theatre, and in doing so some critics have thought that he banished the ideal and fell into affectation. At any rate, his "Dramaturgy" is full of original ideas, and when he drew out the sphere of poetry contrasted with that of painting in his "Laocoon," all Germany resounded with his praise. "With that delight," says Goethe, "we saluted this luminous ray which a thinker of the first order caused to break forth from its clouds. It is necessary to have all the fire of youth to conceive the effect produced on us by the 'Laocoon' of Lessing." Another great contemporary, whose name is imperishable as that of

art, struck a mortal blow at a false taste in the study of the antique. Winckelmann questioned the works of the Greek chisel with an intelligence full of love, and initiated his countrymen into poetry by a feeling for sculpture! What an enthusiasm he displayed for classical beauty! what a worship of the form! what a fervor of paganism is found in its eloquent pages when he also comments on the admirable group of the Laocoon, or the still purer masterpiece of the Apollo of Belvedere.

These men were the vanguard of the great Germanic army; Schiller and Goethe alone formed its main column. In them German poetry shows itself in its perfection, and completely realizes the ideal designed for it by the critic. Every factitious precept and conventional law was now overthrown; these poetical Protestants broke away entirely from the yoke of tradition. Yet their genius was not without a rule. Every work bears in itself the organic laws of its development. Thus, although they laugh at the famous precept of the three unities, it is because they dig still deeper down to the root of things, to grasp the true principle from which the precept issued. "Men have not understood," said Goethe, "the basis of this law. The law of the comprehensive – 'das Fassliche' – is the principle; and the three unities have only value as far as they attain it. When they become an obstacle to the comprehension it is madness to wish to observe them. The Greeks themselves, from whom the rule is derived, did not always follow it. In the 'Phaeton' of Euripides, and in other pieces, there was change, place; accordingly they prefer to give a perfect

exposition of their subject, rather than blindly respect a law never very essential in itself. The pieces of Shakspeare violate in the highest degree the unity of time and of place; but they are full of comprehensiveness; nothing is easier to grasp, and for that reason they would have found favor with the Greeks. The French poets tried to obey exactly the law of the three unities; but they violate the law of comprehensiveness, as they do not expound dramatic subjects by dramas but by recitals."

Poetical creation was therefore viewed as free, but at the same time responsible. Immediately, as if fecundity were the reward of correctness, the German theatre became filled with true and living characters. The stage widens under their steps that they may have room to move. History with its great proportions and its terrible lessons, is now able to take place on the stage. The whole Thirty Years' War passes before us in "Wallenstein." We hear the tumult of camps, the disorder of a fanatical and undisciplined army, peasants, recruits, sutlers, soldiers. The illusion is complete, and enthusiasm breaks out among the spectators. Similar merits attach to many other of Schiller's plays.

This new drama, which seemed to give all to the natural sphere, concedes still more to the ideal. An able critic has said the details which are the truth of history are also its poetry. Here the German school professes a principle of the highest learning, and one that seems to be borrowed from its profoundest philosophers; it is that of the universal beauty of life, of the identity of beauty

and existence. "Our aesthetics," says Goethe, "speak a great deal of poetical or antipoetical subjects; fundamentally there is no subject that has not its poetry; it is for the poet to find it there."

Schiller and Goethe divide the empire over modern German poetry, and represent its two principal powers; the one, Schiller, impassioned and lyrical, pours his soul over all the subjects he touches; in him every composition, ode, or drama is always one of his noble ideas, borrowing its dress and ornament from the external world. He is a poet especially through the heart, by the force with which he rushes in and carries you with him. Goethe is especially an epic; no doubt he paints the passions with admirable truth, but he commands them; like the god of the seas in Virgil, he raises above the angry waves his calm and sublime forehead.

After this glance at the position and chief characteristics of Schiller, it may be useful to offer a few remarks on those of the principal works in this volume, his Aesthetical Letters and Essays. Schiller, in his Aesthetical Essays, did not choose the pure abstract method of deduction and conception like Kant, nor the historical like Herder, who strove thus to account for the genesis of our ideas of beauty and art. He struck out a middle path, which presents certain deficiencies to the advocates of either of these two systems. He leans upon Kantian ideas, but without scholastic constraint. Pure speculation, which seeks to set free the form from all contents and matter, was remote from his creative genius, to which the world of matter and sense was no hinderance, but a necessary envelop for his forms.

His removal to Jena in 1791, and acquaintance with Reinhold, familiarized him with the Kantian philosophy, but he only appreciated it by halves. The bare and bald dealing with fundamental principles was at this time equally repulsive to Goethe and Schiller, the man of the world and the man of life. But Schiller did not find anywhere at that time justice done to the dignity of art, or honor to the substantial value of beauty.

The Aesthetical Essays in this volume appeared for the most part since 1792, in the "Thalia" and the "Hours" periodicals. The first "On the Ground of our Pleasure in Tragic Subjects" (1792), applies Kantian principles of the sublime to tragedy, and shows Schiller's lofty estimate of this class of poetry. With Kant he shows that the source of all pleasure is suitableness; the touching and sublime elicit this feeling, implying the existence of unsuitableness. In this article he makes the aim and source of art to consist in giving enjoyment, in pleasing. To nature pleasure is a mediate object, to art its main object. The same proposition appears in Schiller's paper on Tragic Art (1792), closely connected with the former. This article contains views of the affection of pity that seem to approximate the Aristotelian propositions about tragedy.

His views on the sublime are expressed in two papers, "The Sublime" and "The Pathetic," in which we trace considerable influence of Lessing and Winckelmann. He is led especially to strong antagonism against the French tragedy, and he indulges in a lengthy consideration of the passage of Virgil on Laocoon,

showing the necessity of suffering and the pathetic in connection with moral adaptations to interest us deeply.

All these essays bespeak the poet who has tried his hand at tragedy, but in his next paper, "On Grace and Dignity," we trace more of the moralist. Those passages where he takes up a medium position between sense and reason, between Goethe and Kant, are specially attractive. The theme of this paper is the conception of grace, or the expression of a beautiful soul and dignity, or that of a lofty mind. The idea of grace has been developed more deeply and truly by Schiller than by Wieland or Winckelmann, but the special value of the paper is its constantly pointing to the ideal of a higher humanity. In it he does full justice to the sensuous and to the moral, and commencing with the beautiful nature of the Greeks, to whom sense was never mere sense, nor reason mere reason, he concludes with an image of perfected humanity in which grace and dignity are united, the former by architectonic beauty (structure), the last supported by power.

The following year, 1795, appeared his most important contribution to aesthetics, in his *Aesthetical Letters*.

In these letters he remarks that beauty is the work of free contemplation, and we enter with it into the world of ideas, but without leaving the world of sense. Beauty is to us an object, and yet at the same time a state of our subjectivity, because the feeling of the conditional is under that which we have of it. Beauty is a form because we consider it, and life because we

feel it; in a word, it is at once our state and our art. And exactly because it is both it serves us as a triumphant proof that suffering does not exclude activity, nor matter form, nor limitation the infinite, for in the enjoyment of beauty both natures are united, and by this is proved the capacity of the infinite to be developed in the finite, and accordingly the possibility of the sublimest humanity.

The free play of the faculty of cognition which had been determined by Kant is also developed by Schiller. His representation of this matter is this: Man, as a spirit, is reason and will, self-active, determining, form-giving; this is described by Schiller as the form-instinct; man, as a sensuous being, is determinable, receptive, termed to matter; Schiller describes this as the material instinct, "Stofftrieb." In the midst between these two is situated the beautiful, in which reason and the sensuous penetrate each other, and their enjoyable product is designated by Schiller the play instinct. This expression is not happily chosen. Schiller means to describe by it the free play of the forces, activity according to nature, which is at once a joy and a happiness; he reminds us of the life of Olympus, and adds: "Man is only quite a man when he plays." Personality is that which lasts, the state of feeling is the changeable in man; he is the fixed unity remaining eternally himself in the floods of change. Man in contact with the world is to take it up in himself, but to unite with it the highest freedom and independence, and, instead of being lost in the world, to subject it to his reason. It

is only by his being independent that there is reality out of him; only by being susceptible of feeling that there is reality in him. The object of sensuous instinct is life; that of the purer instinct figure; living figure or beauty is the object of the play instinct.

Only inasmuch as life is formed in the understanding and form in feeling does life win a form and form win life, and only thus does beauty arise. By beauty the sensuous man is led up to reason, the one-sided tension of special force is strung to harmony, and man made a complete whole.

Schiller adds that beauty knits together thought and feeling; the fullest unity of spirit and matter. Its freedom is not lack, but harmony, of laws; its conditions are not exclusions, inclusion of all infinity determined in itself. A true work of art generates lofty serenity and freedom of mind. Thus the aesthetic disposition bestows on us the highest of all gifts, that of a disposition to humanity, and we may call beauty our second creator.

In these letters Schiller spoke out the mildest and highest sentiments on art, and in his paper on Simple and Sentimental Poetry (1795) he constructs the ideal of the perfect poet. This is by far the most fruitful of Schiller's essays in its results. It has much that is practically applicable, and contains a very able estimate of German poetry. The writing is also very pointed and telling, because it is based upon actual perceptions, and it is interesting because the contrast drawn out throughout it between the simple and the sentimental has been referred to his own contrast with Goethe. He also wished to vindicate modern



poetry, which Goethe seemed to wish to sacrifice to the antique.

The sentimental poetry is the fruit of quiet and retirement; simple poetry the child of life. One is a favor of nature; the sentimental depends on itself, the simple on the world of experience. The sentimental is in danger of extending the limits of human nature too far, of being too ideal, too mystical. Neither character exhausts the ideal of humanity, but the intimate union of both. Both are founded in human nature; the contradictions lying at their basis, when cleared in thought from the poetical faculty, are realism and idealism. These also are sides of human nature, which, when unconnected, bring forth disastrous results. Their opposition is as old as the beginning of culture, and till its end can hardly be set aside, save in the individual. The idealist is a nobler but a far less perfect being; the realist appears far less noble, but is more perfect, for the noble lies in the proof of a great capacity, but the perfect in the general attitude of the whole and in the real facts.

On the whole it may be said, taking a survey of these labors, that if Schiller had developed his ideas systematically and the unity of his intuition of the world, which were present in his feelings, and if he had based them scientifically, a new epoch in philosophy might have been anticipated. For he had obtained a view of such a future field of thought with the deep clairvoyance of his genius.

A few words may be desirable on Schiller's religious standpoint, especially in connection with his philosophical

letters.

Schiller came up ten years later than Goethe, and concluded the cycl<sup>us</sup> of genius that Goethe had inaugurated. But as he was the last arrival of that productive period of tempestuous agitation, he retained more of its elements in his later life and poetry than any others who had passed through earlier agitations, such as Goethe. For Goethe cast himself free in a great measure from the early intoxication of his youthful imagination, devoting himself partly to nobler matter and partly to purer forms.

Schiller derived from the stormy times of his youth his direction to the ideal, to the hostility against the narrow spirit of civil relations, and to all given conditions of society in general. He derived from it his disposition, not to let himself be moulded by matter, but to place his own creative and determining impress on matter, not so much to grasp reality poetically and represent it poetically as to cast ideas into reality, a disposition for lively representation and strong oratorical coloring. All this he derived from the genial period, though later on somewhat modified, and carried it over into his whole life and poetry; and for this very reason he is not only together with Goethe, but before Goethe, the favorite poet of the nation, and especially with that part of the nation which sympathizes with him in the choice of poetic material and in his mode of feeling.

Gervinus remarks that Schiller had at Weimar long fallen off from Christianity, and occupied his mind tranquilly for a time with the views of Spinoza (realistic pantheism). Like Herder

and Goethe, he viewed life in its great entirety and sacrificed the individual to the species. Accordingly, through the gods of Greece, he fell out with strict, orthodox Christians.

But Schiller had deeply religious and even Christian elements, as became a German and a Kantian. He receives the Godhead in His will, and He descends from His throne, He dwells in his soul; the poet sees divine revelations, and as a seer announces them to man. He is a moral educator of his people, who utters the tones of life in his poetry from youth upwards. Philosophy was not disclosed to Plato in the highest and purest thought, nor is poetry to Schiller merely an artificial edifice in the harmony of speech; philosophy and poetry are to both a vibration of love in the soul upwards to God, a liberation from the bonds of sense, a purification of man, a moral art. On this reposes the religious consecration of the Platonic spirit and of that of Schiller.

Issuing from the philosophical school of Kant, and imbued with the antagonism of the age against constituted authorities, it is natural that Schiller should be a rationalist in his religious views. It has been justly said of him that while Goethe's system was an apotheosis of nature Schiller's was an apotheosis of man.

Historically he was not prepared enough to test and search the question of evidence as applied to divine things handed down by testimony, and his Kantian coloring naturally disposed him to include all religions within the limits of pure reason, and to seek it rather in the subject than in anything objective.

In conclusion, we may attempt to classify and give Schiller his

place in the progress of the world's literary history. Progress is no doubt a law of the individual, of nations, and of the whole race. To grow in perfection, to exist in some sort at a higher degree, is the task imposed by God on man, the continuation of the very work of God, the complement of creation. But this moral growth, this need of increase, may, like all the forces of nature, yield to a greater force; it is an impulsion rather than a necessity; it solicits and does not constrain. A thousand obstacles stay its development in individuals and in societies; moral liberty may retard or accelerate its effects. Progress is therefore a law which cannot be abrogated, but which is not invariably obeyed.

Nevertheless, in proportion to the increase of the mass of individuals, the caprices of chance and of liberty neutralize each other to allow the providential action that presides over our destinies to prevail. Looking at the same total of the life of the world, humanity undoubtedly advances: there are in our time fewer moral miseries, fewer physical miseries, than were known in the past.

Consequently art and literature, which express the different states of society, must share in some degree in this progressive march. But there are two things in literary work: on the one hand the ideas and social manners which it expresses, on the other the intelligence, the feeling, the imagination of the writer who becomes its interpreter. While the former of these elements tends incessantly to a greater perfection, the latter is subject to all the hazards of individual genius. Accordingly the progressive

literature is only in the inspiration, and so to speak in the matter; it may and must therefore not be continuous in form.

But more than this: in very advanced societies the very grandeur of ideas, the abundance of models, the satiety of the public render the task of the artist more and more difficult. The artist himself has no longer the enthusiasm of the first ages, the youth of imagination and of the heart; he is an old man whose riches have increased, but who enjoys his wealth less.

If all the epochs of literature are considered as a whole it will be seen that they succeed each other in a constant order. After the period when the idea and the form combined in a harmonious manner comes another where the social idea is superabundant, and destroys the literary form of the preceding epoch.

The middle ages introduced spiritualism in art; before this new idea the smiling untruths of Greek poetry fled away frightened. The classical form so beautiful, so pure, cannot contain high Catholic thought. A new art is formed; on this side the Alps it does not reach the maturity that produces masterpieces. But at that time all Europe was one fatherland; Italy completes what is lacking in France and elsewhere.

The renaissance introduces new ideas into civilization; it resuscitates the traditions of antique science and seeks to unite them to the truths of Christianity. The art of the middle ages, as a vessel of too limited capacity, is broken by the new flood poured into it. These different ideas are stirred up and in conflict in the sixteenth century; they became co-ordinate and attain to

an admirable expression in the following age.

In the eighteenth century there is a new invasion of ideas; all is examined and questioned; religion, government, society, all becomes a matter of discussion for the school called philosophical. Poetry appeared dying out, history drying up, till a truer spirit was breathed into the literary atmosphere by the criticism of Lessing, the philosophy of Kant, and the poetry of Klopstock. It was at this transition period that Schiller appeared, retaining throughout his literary career much of the revolutionary and convulsive spirit of his early days, and faithfully reflecting much of the dominant German philosophy of his time.

## **Part of the nineteenth century seems to take in hand the task of**

reconstructing the moral edifice and of giving back to thought a larger form. The literary result of its effects is the renaissance of lyrical poetry with an admirable development in history.

Schiller's most brilliant works were in the former walk, his histories have inferior merit, and his philosophical writings bespeak a deep thinking nature with great originality of conception, such as naturally results from a combination of high poetic inspiration with much intellectual power.

Schiller, like all great men of genius, was a representative man of his country and of his age. A German, a Protestant free-thinker, a worshipper of the classical, he was the expression of these aspects of national and general thought.

The religious reformation was the work of the North. The instinct of races came in it to complicate the questions of dogmas. The awakening of individual nationalities was one of the characters of the epoch.

The nations compressed in the severe unity of the Middle Ages escaped in the Reformation from the uniform mould that had long enveloped them, and tended to that other unity, still very distant, which must spring from the spontaneous view of the same truth by all men, result from the free and original

development of each nation, and, as in a vast concert, unite harmonious dissonances. Europe, without being conscious of its aim, seized greedily at the means – insurrection; the only thought was to overthrow, without yet thinking of a reconstruction. The sixteenth century was the vanguard of the eighteenth. At all times the North had fretted under the antipathetic yoke of the South. Under the Romans, Germany, though frequently conquered, had never been subdued. She had invaded the Empire and determined its fall. In the Middle Ages the struggle had continued; not only instincts, but ideas, were in conflict; force and spirit, violence and polity, feudalism and the Catholic hierarchy, hereditary and elective forms, represented the opposition of two races. In the sixteenth century the schism long anticipated took place. The Catholic dogma had hitherto triumphed over all outbreaks – over Arnaldo of Brescia, the Waldenses, and Wickliffe. But Luther appeared, and the work was accomplished: Catholic unity was broken.

And this breaking with authority went on fermenting in the nations till its last great outburst at the French Revolution; and Schiller was born at this convulsive period, and bears strong traces of his parentage in his anti-dogmatic spirit.

Yet there is another side to Germanism which is prone to the ideal and the mystical, and bears still the trace of those lovely legends of mediaeval growth to which we have adverted. For Christianity was not a foreign and antagonistic importation in Germany; rather, the German character obtained



its completeness through Christianity. The German found himself again in the Church of Christ, only raised, transfigured, and sanctified. The apostolic representation of the Church as the bride of Christ has found its fullest and truest correspondence in that of Germany. Hence when the German spirit was thoroughly espoused to the Christian spirit, we find that character of love, tenderness, and depth so characteristic of the early classics of German poetry, and reappearing in glorious afterglow in the second classics, in Klopstock, Herder, and, above all, Schiller.

It is this special instinct for the ideal and mystical in German nature that has enabled spirits born of negation and revolution, like Schiller, to unite with those elements the most genial and creative inspirations of poetry.

# VOCABULARY OF TERMINOLOGY

**Absolute, The.** A conception, or, more strictly, in Kantian language, an idea of the pure reason, embracing the fundamental and necessary yet free ground of all things.

**Antinomy.** The conflict of the laws of pure reason; as in the question of free will and necessity.

**Autonomy (autonomous).** Governing itself by the spontaneous action of free will.

**Aesthetics.** The science of beauty; as ethics of duty.

**Cognition (knowledge; Germanic, "Erkenntniss")** is either an intuition or a conception. The former has an immediate relation to the object, and is singular and individual; the latter has but a mediate relation, by means of a characteristic mark, which may be common to several things.

Cognition is an objective perception.

**Conception.** A conception is either empirical or pure. A pure conception, in so far as it has its origin in the understanding alone, and is not the conception of a pure sensuous image, is called *notio*.

Conceptions are distinguished on the one hand from sensation and perception, and on the other hand from the intuitions of pure reason or ideas. They are distinctly the product of thought

and of the understanding, except when quite free from empirical elements.

Feeling (Gefuehl). That part of our nature which relates to passion and instinct. Feelings are connected both with our sensuous nature, our imagination, and the pure reason.

Form. See Matter.

Ideas. The product of the pure reason (Vernunft) or intuitive faculty. Wherever the absolute is introduced in thought we have ideas. Perfection in all its aspects is an idea, virtue and wisdom in their perfect purity and ideas. Kant remarks ("Critique of Pure Reason," Meiklejohn's translation, p. 256): "It is from the understanding alone that pure and transcendental conceptions take their origin; the reason does not properly give birth to any conception, but only frees the conception of the understanding from the unavoidable limitation of possible experience. A conception formed from notions which transcend the possibility of experience is an idea or a conception of reason."

Intuition (Anschauung) as used by Kant, is external or internal. External, sensuous intuition is identical with perception; internal intuition gives birth to ideas.

Matter and Form. "These two conceptions are at the foundation of all other reflection, being inseparably connected with every mode of exercising the understanding. By the former is implied that which can be determined in general; the second implies its determination, both in a transcendental sense, abstraction being made of any difference in that which is given,

and of the mode in which it is determined. That which in the phenomenon corresponds to the sensation, I term its matter; but that which effects that the content of the phenomenon can be arranged under certain relations, I call its form." – Kant, "Critique," op. cit.

**Objective.** What is inherent or relative to an object, or not Myself, except in the case when I reflect on myself, in which case my states of mind are objective to my thoughts. In a popular sense objective means external, as contrasted with the subjective or internal.

**Perception**, if it relates only to the subject as a modification of its state, is a sensation. An objective perception is a cognition (Erkenntniss).

**Phenomena** (Erscheinnnngen). The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called phenomenon.

**Reason** (pure; Germanice, "Vernunft"). The source of ideas of moral feelings and of conceptions free from all elements taken up from experience.

**Representation** (Vorstellung). All the products of the mind are styled representations (except emotions and mere sensations) and the term is applied to the whole genus.

Representation with consciousness is perceptio.

**Sensation.** The capacity of receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects is called sensibility. By means of sensibility objects are given to us, and it alone furnishes with intentions meaning sensuous intuitions. By the

understanding they are thought, and from it arise conceptions.

Subjective. What has its source in and relation to the personality, to Myself, I, or the Ego; opposed to the objective, or what is inherent in and relative to the object. Not myself, except in the case when my states of mind are the object of my own reflection.

Supersensuous. Contrasted with and opposed to the sensuous. What is exclusively related to sense or imparted through the sensuous ideas is supersensuous. See Transcendental.

Transcendental. What exceeds the limits of sense and empirical observation. "I apply the term transcendental to all knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our cognition of these objects, so far as this mode of cognition is possible a priori." Kant's "Critique," op. cit. p. 16.

Understanding (Verstand). The thought of faculty, the source of conceptions and notions (Begriffe) of the laws of logic, the categories, and judgment.

# LETTER I

By your permission I lay before you, in a series of letters, the results of my researches upon beauty and art. I am keenly sensible of the importance as well as of the charm and dignity of this undertaking. I shall treat a subject which is closely connected with the better portion of our happiness and not far removed from the moral nobility of human nature. I shall plead this cause of the beautiful before a heart by which her whole power is felt and exercised, and which will take upon itself the most difficult part of my task in an investigation where one is compelled to appeal as frequently to feelings as to principles.

That which I would beg of you as a favor, you generously impose upon me as a duty; and, when I solely consult my inclination, you impute to me a service. The liberty of action you prescribe is rather a necessity for me than a constraint. Little exercised in formal rules, I shall scarcely incur the risk of sinning against good taste by any undue use of them; my ideas, drawn rather from within than from reading or from an intimate experience with the world, will not disown their origin; they would rather incur any reproach than that of a sectarian bias, and would prefer to succumb by their innate feebleness than sustain themselves by borrowed authority and foreign support.

In truth, I will not keep back from you that the assertions which follow rest chiefly upon Kantian principles; but if in the

course of these researches you should be reminded of any special school of philosophy, ascribe it to my incapacity, not to those principles. No; your liberty of mind shall be sacred to me; and the facts upon which I build will be furnished by your own sentiments; your own unfettered thought will dictate the laws according to which we have to proceed.

With regard to the ideas which predominate in the practical part of Kant's system, philosophers only disagree, whilst mankind, I am confident of proving, have never done so. If stripped of their technical shape, they will appear as the verdict of reason pronounced from time immemorial by common consent, and as facts of the moral instinct which nature, in her wisdom, has given to man in order to serve as guide and teacher until his enlightened intelligence gives him maturity. But this very technical shape which renders truth visible to the understanding conceals it from the feelings; for, unhappily, understanding begins by destroying the object of the inner sense before it can appropriate the object. Like the chemist, the philosopher finds synthesis only by analysis, or the spontaneous work of nature only through the torture of art. Thus, in order to detain the fleeting apparition, he must enchain it in the fetters of rule, dissect its fair proportions into abstract notions, and preserve its living spirit in a fleshless skeleton of words. Is it surprising that natural feeling should not recognize itself in such a copy, and if in the report of the analyst the truth appears as paradox?

Permit me therefore to crave your indulgence if the following researches should remove their object from the sphere of sense while endeavoring to draw it towards the understanding. That which I before said of moral experience can be applied with greater truth to the manifestation of "the beautiful." It is the mystery which enchants, and its being is extinguished with the extinction of the necessary combination of its elements.



## LETTER II

But I might perhaps make a better use of the opening you afford me if I were to direct your mind to a loftier theme than that of art. It would appear to be unseasonable to go in search of a code for the aesthetic world, when the moral world offers matter of so much higher interest, and when the spirit of philosophical inquiry is so stringently challenged by the circumstances of our times to occupy itself with the most perfect of all works of art – the establishment and structure of a true political freedom.

It is unsatisfactory to live out of your own age and to work for other times. It is equally incumbent on us to be good members of our own age as of our own state or country. If it is conceived to be unseemly and even unlawful for a man to segregate himself from the customs and manners of the circle in which he lives, it would be inconsistent not to see that it is equally his duty to grant a proper share of influence to the voice of his own epoch, to its taste and its requirements, in the operations in which he engages.

But the voice of our age seems by no means favorable to art, at all events to that kind of art to which my inquiry is directed. The course of events has given a direction to the genius of the time that threatens to remove it continually further from the ideal of art. For art has to leave reality, it has to raise itself boldly above necessity and neediness; for art is the daughter of freedom, and it requires its prescriptions and rules to be furnished by the

necessity of spirits and not by that of matter. But in our day it is necessity, neediness, that prevails, and lends a degraded humanity under its iron yoke. Utility is the great idol of the time, to which all powers do homage and all subjects are subservient. In this great balance on utility, the spiritual service of art has no weight, and, deprived of all encouragement, it vanishes from the noisy Vanity Fair of our time. The very spirit of philosophical inquiry itself robs the imagination of one promise after another, and the frontiers of art are narrowed in proportion as the limits of science are enlarged.

The eyes of the philosopher as well as of the man of the world are anxiously turned to the theatre of political events, where it is presumed the great destiny of man is to be played out. It would almost seem to betray a culpable indifference to the welfare of society if we did not share this general interest. For this great commerce in social and moral principles is of necessity a matter of the greatest concern to every human being, on the ground both of its subject and of its results. It must accordingly be of deepest moment to every man to think for himself. It would seem that now at length a question that formerly was only settled by the law of the stronger is to be determined by the calm judgment of the reason, and every man who is capable of placing himself in a central position, and raising his individuality into that of his species, can look upon himself as in possession of this judicial faculty of reason; being moreover, as man and member of the human family, a party in the case under trial and involved more or

less in its decisions. It would thus appear that this great political process is not only engaged with his individual case, it has also to pronounce enactments, which he as a rational spirit is capable of enunciating and entitled to pronounce.

It is evident that it would have been most attractive to me to inquire into an object such as this, to decide such a question in conjunction with a thinker of powerful mind, a man of liberal sympathies, and a heart imbued with a noble enthusiasm for the weal of humanity. Though so widely separated by worldly position, it would have been a delightful surprise to have found your unprejudiced mind arriving at the same result as my own in the field of ideas. Nevertheless, I think I can not only excuse, but even justify by solid grounds, my step in resisting this attractive purpose and in preferring beauty to freedom. I hope that I shall succeed in convincing you that this matter of art is less foreign to the needs than to the tastes of our age; nay, that, to arrive at a solution even in the political problem, the road of aesthetics must be pursued, because it is through beauty that we arrive at freedom. But I cannot carry out this proof without my bringing to your remembrance the principles by which the reason is guided in political legislation.

## LETTER III

Man is not better treated by nature in his first start than her other works are; so long as he is unable to act for himself as an independent intelligence she acts for him. But the very fact that constitutes him a man is that he does not remain stationary, where nature has placed him, that he can pass with his reason, retracing the steps nature had made him anticipate, that he can convert the work of necessity into one of free solution, and elevate physical necessity into a moral law.

When man is raised from his slumber in the senses he feels that he is a man; he surveys his surroundings and finds that he is in a state. He was introduced into this state by the power of circumstances, before he could freely select his own position. But as a moral being he cannot possibly rest satisfied with a political condition forced upon him by necessity, and only calculated for that condition; and it would be unfortunate if this did satisfy him. In many cases man shakes off this blind law of necessity, by his free spontaneous action, of which among many others we have an instance, in his ennobling by beauty and suppressing by moral influence the powerful impulse implanted in him by nature in the passion of love. Thus, when arrived at maturity, he recovers his childhood by an artificial process, he founds a state of nature in his ideas, not given him by any experience, but established by the necessary laws and conditions of his reason, and he attributes

to this ideal condition an object, an aim, of which he was not cognizant in the actual reality of nature. He gives himself a choice of which he was not capable before, and sets to work just as if he were beginning anew, and were exchanging his original state of bondage for one of complete independence, doing this with complete insight and of his free decision. He is justified in regarding this work of political thralldom as non-existing, though a wild and arbitrary caprice may have founded its work very artfully; though it may strive to maintain it with great arrogance and encompass it with a halo of veneration. For the work of blind powers possesses no authority before which freedom need bow, and all must be made to adapt itself to the highest end which reason has set up in his personality. It is in this wise that a people in a state of manhood is justified in exchanging a condition of thralldom for one of moral freedom.

Now the term natural condition can be applied to every political body which owes its establishment originally to forces and not to laws, and such a state contradicts the moral nature of man, because lawfulness can alone have authority over this. At the same time this natural condition is quite sufficient for the physical man, who only gives himself laws in order to get rid of brute force. Moreover, the physical man is a reality, and the moral man problematical. Therefore when the reason suppresses the natural condition, as she must if she wishes to substitute her own, she weighs the real physical man against the problematical moral man, she weighs the existence of society against a possible,

though morally necessary, ideal of society. She takes from man something which he really possesses, and without which he possesses nothing, and refers him as a substitute to something that he ought to possess and might possess; and if reason had relied too exclusively on him she might, in order to secure him a state of humanity in which he is wanting and can want without injury to his life, have robbed him even of the means of animal existence, which is the first necessary condition of his being a man. Before he had opportunity to hold firm to the law with his will, reason would have withdrawn from his feet the ladder of nature.

The great point is, therefore, to reconcile these two considerations, to prevent physical society from ceasing for a moment in time, while the moral society is being formed in the idea; in other words, to prevent its existence from being placed in jeopardy for the sake of the moral dignity of man. When the mechanic has to mend a watch he lets the wheels run out; but the living watchworks of the state have to be repaired while they act, and a wheel has to be exchanged for another during its revolutions. Accordingly props must be sought for to support society and keep it going while it is made independent of the natural condition from which it is sought to emancipate it.

This prop is not found in the natural character of man, who, being selfish and violent, directs his energies rather to the destruction than to the preservation of society. Nor is it found in his moral character, which has to be formed, which

can never be worked upon or calculated on by the lawgiver, because it is free and never appears. It would seem, therefore, that another measure must be adopted. It would seem that the physical character of the arbitrary must be separated from moral freedom; that it is incumbent to make the former harmonize with the laws and the latter dependent on impressions; it would be expedient to remove the former still farther from matter and to bring the latter somewhat more near to it; in short, to produce a third character related to both the others – the physical and the moral – paving the way to a transition from the sway of mere force to that of law, without preventing the proper development of the moral character, but serving rather as a pledge in the sensuous sphere of a morality in the unseen.

## LETTER IV

Thus much is certain. It is only when a third character, as previously suggested, has preponderance that a revolution in a state according to moral principles can be free from injurious consequences; nor can anything else secure its endurance. In proposing or setting up a moral state, the moral law is relied upon as a real power, and free-will is drawn into the realm of causes, where all hangs together mutually with stringent necessity and rigidity. But we know that the condition of the human will always remains contingent, and that only in the Absolute Being physical coexists with moral necessity. Accordingly, if it is wished to depend on the moral conduct of man as on natural results, this conduct must become nature, and he must be led by natural impulse to such a course of action as can only and invariably have moral results. But the will of man is perfectly free between inclination and duty, and no physical necessity ought to enter as a sharer in this magisterial personality. If, therefore, he is to retain this power of solution, and yet become a reliable link in the causal concatenation of forces, this can only be effected when the operations of both these impulses are presented quite equally in the world of appearances. It is only possible when, with every difference of form, the matter of man's volition remains the same, when all his impulses agreeing with his reason are sufficient to have the value of a universal legislation.



It may be urged that every individual man carries within himself, at least in his adaptation and destination, a purely ideal man. The great problem of his existence is to bring all the incessant changes of his outer life into conformity with the unchanging unity of this ideal. This pure ideal man, which makes itself known more or less clearly in every subject, is represented by the state, which is the objective, and, so to speak, canonical form in which the manifold differences of the subjects strive to unite. Now two ways present themselves to the thought in which the man of time can agree with the man of idea, and there are also two ways in which the state can maintain itself in individuals. One of these ways is when the pure ideal man subdues the empirical man, and the state suppresses the individual, or again when the individual becomes the state, and the man of time is ennobled to the man of idea.

I admit that in a one-sided estimate from the point of view of morality this difference vanishes, for the reason is satisfied if her law prevails unconditionally. But when the survey taken is complete and embraces the whole man (anthropology), where the form is considered together with the substance, and a living feeling has a voice, the difference will become far more evident. No doubt the reason demands unity, and nature variety, and both legislations take man in hand. The law of the former is stamped upon him by an incorruptible consciousness, that of the latter by an ineradicable feeling. Consequently education will always appear deficient when the moral feeling can only be maintained

with the sacrifice of what is natural; and a political administration will always be very imperfect when it is only able to bring about unity by suppressing variety. The state ought not only to respect the objective and generic, but also the subjective and specific in individuals; and while diffusing the unseen world of morals, it must not depopulate the kingdom of appearance, the external world of matter.

When the mechanical artist places his hand on the formless block, to give it a form according to his intention, he has not any scruples in doing violence to it. For the nature on which he works does not deserve any respect in itself, and he does not value the whole for its parts, but the parts on account of the whole. When the child of the fine arts sets his hand to the same block, he has no scruples either in doing violence to it, he only avoids showing this violence. He does not respect the matter in which he works any more than the mechanical artist; but he seeks by an apparent consideration for it to deceive the eye which takes this matter under its protection. The political and educating artist follows a very different course, while making man at once his material and his end. In this case the aim or end meets in the material, and it is only because the whole serves the parts that the parts adapt themselves to the end. The political artist has to treat his material – man – with a very different kind of respect than that shown by the artist of fine art to his work. He must spare man's peculiarity and personality, not to produce a defective effect on the senses, but objectively and out of consideration for his inner being.

But the state is an organization which fashions itself through itself and for itself, and for this reason it can only be realized when the parts have been accorded to the idea of the whole. The state serves the purpose of a representative, both to pure ideal and to objective humanity, in the breast of its citizens, accordingly it will have to observe the same relation to its citizens in which they are placed to it; and it will only respect their subjective humanity in the same degree that it is ennobled to an objective existence. If the internal man is one with himself he will be able to rescue his peculiarity, even in the greatest generalization of his conduct, and the state will only become the exponent of his fine instinct, the clearer formula of his internal legislation. But if the subjective man is in conflict with the objective, and contradicts him in the character of a people, so that only the oppression of the former can give victory to the latter, then the state will take up the severe aspect of the law against the citizen, and in order not to fall a sacrifice, it will have to crush under foot such a hostile individuality without any compromise.

Now man can be opposed to himself in a twofold manner; either as a savage, when his feelings rule over his principles; or as a barbarian, when his principles destroy his feelings. The savage despises art, and acknowledges nature as his despotic ruler; the barbarian laughs at nature, and dishonors it, but he often proceeds in a more contemptible way than the savage to be the slave of his senses. The cultivated man makes of nature his friend, and honors its friendship, while only bridling its caprice.

Consequently, when reason brings her moral unity into physical society, she must not injure the manifold in nature. When nature strives to maintain her manifold character in the moral structure of society, this must not create any breach in moral unity; the victorious form is equally remote from uniformity and confusion. Therefore, totality of character must be found in the people which is capable and worthy to exchange the state of necessity for that of freedom.

# LETTER V

Does the present age, do passing events, present this character? I direct my attention at once to the most prominent object in this vast structure.

It is true that the consideration of opinion is fallen; caprice is unnerved, and, although still armed with power, receives no longer any respect. Man has awakened from his long lethargy and self-deception, and he demands with impressive unanimity to be restored to his imperishable rights. But he does not only demand them; he rises on all sides to seize by force what, in his opinion, has been unjustly wrested from him. The edifice of the natural state is tottering, its foundations shake, and a physical possibility seems at length granted to place law on the throne, to honor man at length as an end, and to make true freedom the basis of political union. Vain hope! The moral possibility is wanting, and the generous occasion finds an unsusceptible rule.

Man paints himself in his actions, and what is the form depicted in the drama of the present time? On the one hand, he is seen running wild, on the other, in a state of lethargy; the two extremest stages of human degeneracy, and both seen in one and the same period.

In the lower larger masses, coarse, lawless impulses come to view, breaking loose when the bonds of civil order are burst asunder, and hastening with unbridled fury to satisfy their savage

instinct. Objective humanity may have had cause to complain of the state; yet subjective man must honor its institutions. Ought he to be blamed because he lost sight of the dignity of human nature, so long as he was concerned in preserving his existence? Can we blame him that he proceeded to separate by the force of gravity, to fasten by the force of cohesion, at a time when there could be no thought of building or raising up? The extinction of the state contains its justification. Society set free, instead of hastening upward into organic life, collapses into its elements.

On the other hand, the civilized classes give us the still more repulsive sight of lethargy, and of a depravity of character which is the more revolting because it roots in culture. I forget who of the older or more recent philosophers makes the remark, that what is more noble is the more revolting in its destruction. The remark applies with truth to the world of morals. The child of nature, when he breaks loose, becomes a madman; but the art scholar, when he breaks loose, becomes a debased character. The enlightenment of the understanding, on which the more refined classes pride themselves with some ground, shows on the whole so little of an ennobling influence on the mind that it seems rather to confirm corruption by its maxims. We deny nature on her legitimate field and feel her tyranny in the moral sphere, and while resisting her impressions, we receive our principles from her. While the affected decency of our manners does not even grant to nature a pardonable influence in the initial stage, our materialistic system of morals allows her the casting vote in the

last and essential stage. Egotism has founded its system in the very bosom of a refined society, and without developing even a sociable character, we feel all the contagions and miseries of society. We subject our free judgment to its despotic opinions, our feelings to its bizarre customs, and our will to its seductions. We only maintain our caprice against her holy rights. The man of the world has his heart contracted by a proud self-complacency, while that of the man of nature often beats in sympathy; and every man seeks for nothing more than to save his wretched property from the general destruction, as it were from some great conflagration. It is conceived that the only way to find a shelter against the aberrations of sentiment is by completely foregoing its indulgence, and mockery, which is often a useful chastener of mysticism, slanders in the same breath the noblest aspirations. Culture, far from giving us freedom, only develops, as it advances, new necessities; the fetters of the physical close more tightly around us, so that the fear of loss quenches even the ardent impulse toward improvement, and the maxims of passive obedience are held to be the highest wisdom of life. Thus the spirit of the time is seen to waver between perversion and savagism, between what is unnatural and mere nature, between superstition and moral unbelief, and it is often nothing but the equilibrium of evils that sets bounds to it.

## LETTER VI

Have I gone too far in this portraiture of our times? I do not anticipate this stricture, but rather another – that I have proved too much by it. You will tell me that the picture I have presented resembles the humanity of our day, but it also bodies forth all nations engaged in the same degree of culture, because all, without exception, have fallen off from nature by the abuse of reason, before they can return to it through reason.

But if we bestow some serious attention to the character of our times, we shall be astonished at the contrast between the present and the previous form of humanity, especially that of Greece. We are justified in claiming the reputation of culture and refinement, when contrasted with a purely natural state of society, but not so comparing ourselves with the Grecian nature. For the latter was combined with all the charms of art and with all the dignity of wisdom, without, however, as with us, becoming a victim to these influences. The Greeks have put us to shame not only by their simplicity, which is foreign to our age; they are at the same time our rivals, nay, frequently our models, in those very points of superiority from which we seek comfort when regretting the unnatural character of our manners. We see that remarkable people uniting at once fulness of form and fulness of substance, both philosophizing and creating, both tender and energetic, uniting a youthful fancy to the virility of reason in a



glorious humanity.

At the period of Greek culture, which was an awakening of the powers of the mind, the senses and the spirit had no distinctly separated property; no division had yet torn them asunder, leading them to partition in a hostile attitude, and to mark off their limits with precision. Poetry had not as yet become the adversary of wit, nor had speculation abused itself by passing into quibbling. In cases of necessity both poetry and wit could exchange parts, because they both honored truth only in their special way. However high might be the flight of reason, it drew matter in a loving spirit after it, and while sharply and stiffly defining it, never mutilated what it touched. It is true the Greek mind displaced humanity, and recast it on a magnified scale in the glorious circle of its gods; but it did this not by dissecting human nature, but by giving it fresh combinations, for the whole of human nature was represented in each of the gods. How different is the course followed by us moderns! We also displace and magnify individuals to form the image of the species, but we do this in a fragmentary way, not by altered combinations, so that it is necessary to gather up from different individuals the elements that form the species in its totality. It would almost appear as if the powers of mind express themselves with us in real life or empirically as separately as the psychologist distinguishes them in the representation. For we see not only individual subjects, but whole classes of men, uphold their capacities only in part, while the rest of their faculties

scarcely show a germ of activity, as in the case of the stunted growth of plants.

I do not overlook the advantages to which the present race, regarded as a unity and in the balance of the understanding, may lay claim over what is best in the ancient world; but it is obliged to engage in the contest as a compact mass, and measure itself as a whole against a whole. Who among the moderns could step forth, man against man, and strive with an Athenian for the prize of higher humanity.

Whence comes this disadvantageous relation of individuals coupled with great advantages of the race? Why could the individual Greek be qualified as the type of his time; and why can no modern dare to offer himself as such? Because all-uniting nature imparted its forms to the Greek, and an all-dividing understanding gives our forms to us.

It was culture itself that gave these wounds to modern humanity. The inner union of human nature was broken, and a destructive contest divided its harmonious forces directly; on the one hand, an enlarged experience and a more distinct thinking necessitated a sharper separation of the sciences, while, on the other hand, the more complicated machinery of states necessitated a stricter sundering of ranks and occupations. Intuitive and speculative understanding took up a hostile attitude in opposite fields, whose borders were guarded with jealousy and distrust; and by limiting its operation to a narrow sphere, men have made unto themselves a master who is wont not

unfrequently to end by subduing and oppressing all the other faculties. Whilst on the one hand a luxuriant imagination creates ravages in the plantations that have cost the intelligence so much labor; on the other hand, a spirit of abstraction suffocates the fire that might have warmed the heart and inflamed the imagination.

This subversion, commenced by art and learning in the inner man, was carried out to fulness and finished by the spirit of innovation in government. It was, no doubt, reasonable to expect that the simple organization of the primitive republics should survive the quaintness of primitive manners and of the relations of antiquity. But, instead of rising to a higher and nobler degree of animal life, this organization degenerated into a common and coarse mechanism. The zoophyte condition of the Grecian states, where each individual enjoyed an independent life, and could, in cases of necessity, become a separate whole and unit in himself, gave way to an ingenious mechanism, when, from the splitting up into numberless parts, there results a mechanical life in the combination. Then there was a rupture between the state and the church, between laws and customs; enjoyment was separated from labor, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Man himself, eternally chained down to a little fragment of the whole, only forms a kind of fragment; having nothing in his ears but the monotonous sound of the perpetually revolving wheel, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting the seal of humanity on his being, he ends by being nothing more than the living impress of the craft to which

he devotes himself, of the science that he cultivates. This very partial and paltry relation, linking the isolated members to the whole, does not depend on forms that are given spontaneously; for how could a complicated machine, which shuns the light, confide itself to the free will of man? This relation is rather dictated, with a rigorous strictness, by a formulary in which the free intelligence of man is chained down. The dead letter takes the place of a living meaning, and a practised memory becomes a safer guide than genius and feeling.

If the community or state measures man by his function, only asking of its citizens memory, or the intelligence of a craftsman, or mechanical skill, we cannot be surprised that the other faculties of the mind are neglected for the exclusive culture of the one that brings in honor and profit. Such is the necessary result of an organization that is indifferent about character, only looking to acquirements, whilst in other cases it tolerates the thickest darkness, to favor a spirit of law and order; it must result if it wishes that individuals in the exercise of special aptitudes should gain in depth what they are permitted to lose in extension. We are aware, no doubt, that a powerful genius does not shut up its activity within the limits of its functions; but mediocre talents consume in the craft fallen to their lot the whole of their feeble energy; and if some of their energy is reserved for matters of preference, without prejudice to its functions, such a state of things at once bespeaks a spirit soaring above the vulgar. Moreover, it is rarely a recommendation in the eye of a state to

have a capacity superior to your employment, or one of those noble intellectual cravings of a man of talent which contend in rivalry with the duties of office. The state is so jealous of the exclusive possession of its servants that it would prefer – nor can it be blamed in this – for functionaries to show their powers with the Venus of Cytherea rather than the Uranian Venus.

It is thus that concrete individual life is extinguished, in order that the abstract whole may continue its miserable life, and the state remains forever a stranger to its citizens, because feeling does not discover it anywhere. The governing authorities find themselves compelled to classify, and thereby simplify the multiplicity of citizens, and only to know humanity in a representative form and at second-hand. Accordingly they end by entirely losing sight of humanity, and by confounding it with a simple artificial creation of the understanding, whilst on their part the subject-classes cannot help receiving coldly laws that address themselves so little to their personality. At length, society, weary of having a burden that the state takes so little trouble to lighten, falls to pieces and is broken up – a destiny that has long since attended most European states. They are dissolved in what may be called a state of moral nature, in which public authority is only one function more, hated and deceived by those who think it necessary, respected only by those who can do without it.

Thus compressed between two forces, within and without, could humanity follow any other course than that which it has

taken? The speculative mind, pursuing imprescriptible goods and rights in the sphere of ideas, must needs have become a stranger to the world of sense, and lose sight of matter for the sake of form. On its part, the world of public affairs, shut up in a monotonous circle of objects, and even there restricted by formulas, was led to lose sight of the life and liberty of the whole, while becoming impoverished at the same time in its own sphere. Just as the speculative mind was tempted to model the real after the intelligible, and to raise the subjective laws of its imagination into laws constituting the existence of things, so the state spirit rushed into the opposite extreme, wished to make a particular and fragmentary experience the measure of all observation, and to apply without exception to all affairs the rules of its own particular craft. The speculative mind had necessarily to become the prey of a vain subtlety, the state spirit of a narrow pedantry; for the former was placed too high to see the individual, and the latter too low to survey the whole. But the disadvantage of this direction of mind was not confined to knowledge and mental production; it extended to action and feeling. We know that the sensibility of the mind depends, as to degree, on the liveliness, and for extent on the richness of the imagination. Now the predominance of the faculty of analysis must necessarily deprive the imagination of its warmth and energy, and a restricted sphere of objects must diminish its wealth. It is for this reason that the abstract thinker has very often a cold heart, because he analyzes impressions, which only move the mind by their combination or

totality; on the other hand, the man of business, the statesman, has very often a narrow heart, because, shut up in the narrow circle of his employment, his imagination can neither expand nor adapt itself to another manner of viewing things.

My subject has led me naturally to place in relief the distressing tendency of the character of our own times and to show the sources of the evil, without its being my province to point out the compensations offered by nature. I will readily admit to you that, although this splitting up of their being was unfavorable for individuals, it was the only open road for the progress of the race. The point at which we see humanity arrived among the Greeks was undoubtedly a maximum; it could neither stop there nor rise higher. It could not stop there, for the sum of notions acquired forced infallibly the intelligence to break with feeling and intuition, and to lead to clearness of knowledge. Nor could it rise any higher; for it is only in a determinate measure that clearness can be reconciled with a certain degree of abundance and of warmth. The Greeks had attained this measure, and to continue their progress in culture, they, as we, were obliged to renounce the totality of their being, and to follow different and separate roads in order to seek after truth.

There was no other way to develop the manifold aptitudes of man than to bring them in opposition with one another. This antagonism of forces is the great instrument of culture, but it is only an instrument: for as long as this antagonism lasts man is only on the road to culture. It is only because these

special forces are isolated in man, and because they take on themselves to impose all exclusive legislation, that they enter into strife with the truth of things, and oblige common sense, which generally adheres imperturbably to external phenomena, to dive into the essence of things. While pure understanding usurps authority in the world of sense, and empiricism attempts to subject this intellect to the conditions of experience, these two rival directions arrive at the highest possible development, and exhaust the whole extent of their sphere. While, on the one hand, imagination, by its tyranny, ventures to destroy the order of the world, it forces reason, on the other side, to rise up to the supreme sources of knowledge, and to invoke against this predominance of fancy the help of the law of necessity.

By an exclusive spirit in the case of his faculties, the individual is fatally led to error; but the species is led to truth. It is only by gathering up all the energy of our mind in a single focus, and concentrating a single force in our being, that we give in some sort wings to this isolated force, and that we draw it on artificially far beyond the limits that nature seems to have imposed upon it. If it be certain that all human individuals taken together would never have arrived, with the visual power given them by nature, to see a satellite of Jupiter, discovered by the telescope of the astronomer, it is just as well established that never would the human understanding have produced the analysis of the infinite, or the critique of pure reason, if in particular branches, destined for this mission, reason had not applied itself to special



researches, and it, after having, as it were, freed itself from all matter, it had not, by the most powerful abstraction given to the spiritual eye of man the force necessary, in order to look into the absolute. But the question is, if a spirit thus absorbed in pure reason and intuition will be able to emancipate itself from the rigorous fetters of logic, to take the free action of poetry, and seize the individuality of things with a faithful and chaste sense? Here nature imposes even on the most universal genius a limit it cannot pass, and truth will make martyrs as long as philosophy will be reduced to make its principal occupation the search for arms against errors.

But whatever may be the final profit for the totality of the world, of this distinct and special perfecting of the human faculties, it cannot be denied that this final aim of the universe, which devotes them to this kind of culture, is a cause of suffering, and a kind of malediction for individuals. I admit that the exercises of the gymnasium form athletic bodies; but beauty is only developed by the free and equal play of the limbs. In the same way the tension of the isolated spiritual forces may make extraordinary men; but it is only the well-tempered equilibrium of these forces that can produce happy and accomplished men. And in what relation should we be placed with past and future ages if the perfecting of human nature made such a sacrifice indispensable? In that case we should have been the slaves of humanity, we should have consumed our forces in servile work for it during some thousands of years, and we should have

stamped on our humiliated, mutilated nature the shameful brand of this slavery – all this in order that future generations, in a happy leisure, might consecrate themselves to the cure of their moral health, and develop the whole of human nature by their free culture.

But can it be true that man has to neglect himself for any end whatever? Can nature snatch from us, for any end whatever, the perfection which is prescribed to us by the aim of reason? It must be false that the perfecting of particular faculties renders the sacrifice of their totality necessary; and even if the law of nature had imperiously this tendency, we must have the power to reform by a superior art this totality of our being, which art has destroyed.

## LETTER VII

Can this effect of harmony be attained by the state? That is not possible, for the state, as at present constituted, has given occasion to evil, and the state as conceived in the idea, instead of being able to establish this more perfect humanity, ought to be based upon it. Thus the researches in which I have indulged would have brought me back to the same point from which they had called me off for a time. The present age, far from offering us this form of humanity, which we have acknowledged as a necessary condition of an improvement of the state, shows us rather the diametrically opposite form. If, therefore, the principles I have laid down are correct, and if experience confirms the picture I have traced of the present time, it would be necessary to qualify as unseasonable every attempt to effect a similar change in the state, and all hope as chimerical that would be based on such an attempt, until the division of the inner man ceases, and nature has been sufficiently developed to become herself the instrument of this great change and secure the reality of the political creation of reason.

In the physical creation, nature shows us the road that we have to follow in the moral creation. Only when the struggle of elementary forces has ceased in inferior organizations, nature rises to the noble form of the physical man. In like manner, the conflict of the elements of the moral man and that of

blind instincts must have ceased, and a coarse antagonism in himself, before the attempt can be hazarded. On the other hand, the independence of man's character must be secured, and his submission to despotic forms must have given place to a suitable liberty, before the variety in his constitution can be made subordinate to the unity of the ideal. When the man of nature still makes such an anarchial abuse of his will, his liberty ought hardly to be disclosed to him. And when the man fashioned by culture makes so little use of his freedom, his free will ought not to be taken from him. The concession of liberal principles becomes a treason to social order when it is associated with a force still in fermentation, and increases the already exuberant energy of its nature. Again, the law of conformity under one level becomes tyranny to the individual when it is allied to a weakness already holding sway and to natural obstacles, and when it comes to extinguish the last spark of spontaneity and of originality.

The tone of the age must therefore rise from its profound moral degradation; on the one hand it must emancipate itself from the blind service of nature, and on the other it must revert to its simplicity, its truth, and its fruitful sap; a sufficient task for more than a century. However, I admit readily, more than one special effort may meet with success, but no improvement of the whole will result from it, and contradictions in action will be a continual protest against the unity of maxims. It will be quite possible, then, that in remote corners of the world humanity may be honored in the person of the negro, while in Europe it may

be degraded in the person of the thinker. The old principles will remain, but they will adopt the dress of the age, and philosophy will lend its name to an oppression that was formerly authorized by the church. In one place, alarmed at the liberty which in its opening efforts always shows itself an enemy, it will cast itself into the arms of a convenient servitude. In another place, reduced to despair by a pedantic tutelage, it will be driven into the savage license of the state of nature. Usurpation will invoke the weakness of human nature, and insurrection will invoke its dignity, till at length the great sovereign of all human things, blind force, shall come in and decide, like a vulgar pugilist, this pretended contest of principles.

## LETTER VIII

Must philosophy therefore retire from this field, disappointed in its hopes? Whilst in all other directions the dominion of forms is extended, must this the most precious of all gifts be abandoned to a formless chance? Must the contest of blind forces last eternally in the political world, and is social law never to triumph over a hating egotism?

Not in the least. It is true that reason herself will never attempt directly a struggle with this brutal force which resists her arms, and she will be as far as the son of Saturn in the "Iliad" from descending into the dismal field of battle, to fight them in person. But she chooses the most deserving among the combatants, clothes him with divine arms as Jupiter gave them to his son-in-law, and by her triumphing force she finally decides the victory.

Reason has done all that she could in finding the law and promulgating it; it is for the energy of the will and the ardor of feeling to carry it out. To issue victoriously from her contest with force, truth herself must first become a force, and turn one of the instincts of man into her champion in the empire of phenomena. For instincts are the only motive forces in the material world. If hitherto truth has so little manifested her victorious power, this has not depended on the understanding, which could not have unveiled it, but on the heart which remained closed to it and on instinct which did not act with it.

Whence, in fact, proceeds this general sway of prejudices, this might of the understanding in the midst of the light disseminated by philosophy and experience? The age is enlightened, that is to say, that knowledge, obtained and vulgarized, suffices to set right at least on practical principles. The spirit of free inquiry has dissipated the erroneous opinions which long barred the access to truth, and has undermined the ground on which fanaticism and deception had erected their throne. Reason has purified itself from the illusions of the senses and from a mendacious sophistry, and philosophy herself raises her voice and exhorts us to return to the bosom of nature, to which she had first made us unfaithful. Whence then is it that we remain still barbarians?

There must be something in the spirit of man – as it is not in the objects themselves – which prevents us from receiving the truth, notwithstanding the brilliant light she diffuses, and from accepting her, whatever may be her strength for producing conviction. This something was perceived and expressed by an ancient sage in this very significant maxim: *sapere aude* [dare to be wise.]

Dare to be wise! A spirited courage is required to triumph over the impediments that the indolence of nature as well as the cowardice of the heart oppose to our instruction. It was not without reason that the ancient Mythos made Minerva issue fully armed from the head of Jupiter, for it is with warfare that this instruction commences. From its very outset it has to sustain a hard fight against the senses, which do not like to be roused

from their easy slumber. The greater part of men are much too exhausted and enervated by their struggle with want to be able to engage in a new and severe contest with error. Satisfied if they themselves can escape from the hard labor of thought, they willingly abandon to others the guardianship of their thoughts. And if it happens that nobler necessities agitate their soul, they cling with a greedy faith to the formula that the state and the church hold in reserve for such cases. If these unhappy men deserve our compassion, those others deserve our just contempt, who, though set free from those necessities by more fortunate circumstances, yet willingly bend to their yoke. These latter persons prefer this twilight of obscure ideas, where the feelings have more intensity, and the imagination can at will create convenient chimeras, to the rays of truth which put to flight the pleasant illusions of their dreams. They have founded the whole structure of their happiness on these very illusions, which ought to be combated and dissipated by the light of knowledge, and they would think they were paying too dearly for a truth which begins by robbing them of all that has value in their sight. It would be necessary that they should be already sages to love wisdom: a truth that was felt at once by him to whom philosophy owes its name. [The Greek word means, as is known, love of wisdom.]

It is therefore not going far enough to say that the light of the understanding only deserves respect when it reacts on the character; to a certain extent it is from the character that this light proceeds; for the road that terminates in the head must pass



through the heart. Accordingly, the most pressing need of the present time is to educate the sensibility, because it is the means, not only to render efficacious in practice the improvement of ideas, but to call this improvement into existence.

## LETTER IX

But perhaps there is a vicious circle in our previous reasoning! Theoretical culture must it seems bring along with it practical culture, and yet the latter must be the condition of the former. All improvement in the political sphere must proceed from the ennobling of the character. But, subject to the influence of a social constitution still barbarous, how can character become ennobled? It would then be necessary to seek for this end an instrument that the state does not furnish, and to open sources that would have preserved themselves pure in the midst of political corruption.

I have now reached the point to which all the considerations tended that have engaged me up to the present time. This instrument is the art of the beautiful; these sources are open to us in its immortal models.

Art, like science, is emancipated from all that is positive, and all that is humanly conventional; both are completely independent of the arbitrary will of man. The political legislator may place their empire under an interdict, but he cannot reign there. He can proscribe the friend of truth, but truth subsists; he can degrade the artist, but he cannot change art. No doubt, nothing is more common than to see science and art bend before the spirit of the age, and creative taste receive its law from critical taste. When the character becomes stiff and hardens

itself, we see science severely keeping her limits, and art subject to the harsh restraint of rules; when the character is relaxed and softened, science endeavors to please and art to rejoice. For whole ages philosophers as well as artists show themselves occupied in letting down truth and beauty to the depths of vulgar humanity. They themselves are swallowed up in it; but, thanks to their essential vigor and indestructible life, the true and the beautiful make a victorious fight, and issue triumphant from the abyss.

No doubt the artist is the child of his time, but unhappy for him if he is its disciple or even its favorite! Let a beneficent deity carry off in good time the suckling from the breast of its mother, let it nourish him on the milk of a better age, and suffer him to grow up and arrive at virility under the distant sky of Greece. When he has attained manhood, let him come back, presenting a face strange to his own age; let him come, not to delight it with his apparition, but rather to purify it, terrible as the son of Agamemnon. He will, indeed, receive his matter from the present time, but he will borrow the form from a nobler time and even beyond all time, from the essential, absolute, immutable unity. There, issuing from the pure ether of its heavenly nature, flows the source of all beauty, which was never tainted by the corruptions of generations or of ages, which roll along far beneath it in dark eddies. Its matter may be dishonored as well as ennobled by fancy, but the ever-chaste form escapes from the caprices of imagination. The Roman had already bent his

knee for long years to the divinity of the emperors, and yet the statues of the gods stood erect; the temples retained their sanctity for the eye long after the gods had become a theme for mockery, and the noble architecture of the palaces that shielded the infamies of Nero and of Commodus were a protest against them. Humanity has lost its dignity, but art has saved it, and preserves it in marbles full of meaning; truth continues to live in illusion, and the copy will serve to re-establish the model. If the nobility of art has survived the nobility of nature, it also goes before it like an inspiring genius, forming and awakening minds. Before truth causes her triumphant light to penetrate into the depths of the heart, poetry intercepts her rays, and the summits of humanity shine in a bright light, while a dark and humid night still hangs over the valleys.

But how will the artist avoid the corruption of his time which encloses him on all hands? Let him raise his eyes to his own dignity, and to law; let him not lower them to necessity and fortune. Equally exempt from a vain activity which would imprint its trace on the fugitive moment, and from the dreams of an impatient enthusiasm which applies the measure of the absolute to the paltry productions of time, let the artist abandon the real to the understanding, for that is its proper field. But let the artist endeavor to give birth to the ideal by the union of the possible and of the necessary. Let him stamp illusion and truth with the effigy of this ideal; let him apply it to the play of his imagination and his most serious actions, in short, to all sensuous and spiritual

forms; then let him quietly launch his work into infinite time.

But the minds set on fire by this ideal have not all received an equal share of calm from the creative genius – that great and patient temper which is required to impress the ideal on the dumb marble, or to spread it over a page of cold, sober letters, and then intrust it to the faithful hands of time. This divine instinct, and creative force, much too ardent to follow this peaceful walk, often throws itself immediately on the present, on active life, and strives to transform the shapeless matter of the moral world. The misfortune of his brothers, of the whole species, appeals loudly to the heart of the man of feeling; their abasement appeals still louder: enthusiasm is inflamed, and in souls endowed with energy the burning desire aspires impatiently to action and facts. But has this innovator examined himself to see if these disorders of the moral world wound his reason, or if they do not rather wound his self-love? If he does not determine this point at once, he will find it from the impulsiveness with which he pursues a prompt and definite end. A pure, moral motive has for its end the absolute; time does not exist for it, and the future becomes the present to it directly; by a necessary development, it has to issue from the present. To a reason having no limits the direction towards an end becomes confounded with the accomplishment of this end, and to enter on a course is to have finished it.

If, then, a young friend of the true and of the beautiful were to ask me how, notwithstanding the resistance of the times, he can satisfy the noble longing of his heart, I should reply: Direct

the world on which you act towards that which is good, and the measured and peaceful course of time will bring about the results. You have given it this direction if by your teaching you raise its thoughts towards the necessary and the eternal; if, by your acts or your creations, you make the necessary and the eternal the object of your leanings. The structure of error and of all that is arbitrary must fall, and it has already fallen, as soon as you are sure that it is tottering. But it is important that it should not only totter in the external but also in the internal man. Cherish triumphant truth in the modest sanctuary of your heart; give it an incarnate form through beauty, that it may not only be in the understanding that does homage to it, but that feeling may lovingly grasp its appearance. And that you may not by any chance take from external reality the model which you yourself ought to furnish, do not venture into its dangerous society before you are assured in your own heart that you have a good escort furnished by ideal nature. Live with your age, but be not its creation; labor for your contemporaries, but do for them what they need, and not what they praise. Without having shared their faults, share their punishment with a noble resignation, and bend under the yoke which they find it as painful to dispense with as to bear. By the constancy with which you will despise their good fortune, you will prove to them that it is not through cowardice that you submit to their sufferings. See them in thought such as they ought to be when you must act upon them; but see them as they are when you are tempted to

act for them. Seek to owe their suffrage to their dignity; but to make them happy keep an account of their unworthiness: thus, on the one hand, the nobleness of your heart will kindle theirs, and, on the other, your end will not be reduced to nothingness by their unworthiness. The gravity of your principles will keep them off from you, but in play they will still endure them. Their taste is purer than their heart, and it is by their taste you must lay hold of this suspicious fugitive. In vain will you combat their maxims, in vain will you condemn their actions; but you can try your moulding hand on their leisure. Drive away caprice, frivolity, and coarseness from their pleasures, and you will banish them imperceptibly from their acts, and at length from their feelings. Everywhere that you meet them, surround them with great, noble, and ingenious forms; multiply around them the symbols of perfection, till appearance triumphs over reality, and art over nature.

# LETTER X

Convinced by my preceding letters, you agree with me on this point, that man can depart from his destination by two opposite roads, that our epoch is actually moving on these two false roads, and that it has become the prey, in one case, of coarseness, and elsewhere of exhaustion and depravity. It is the beautiful that must bring it back from this twofold departure. But how can the cultivation of the fine arts remedy, at the same time, these opposite defects, and unite in itself two contradictory qualities? Can it bind nature in the savage, and set it free in the barbarian? Can it at once tighten a spring and loose it; and if it cannot produce this double effect, how will it be reasonable to expect from it so important a result as the education of man?

It may be urged that it is almost a proverbial adage that the feeling developed by the beautiful refines manners, and any new proof offered on the subject would appear superfluous. Men base this maxim on daily experience, which shows us almost always clearness of intellect, delicacy of feeling, liberality and even dignity of conduct, associated with a cultivated taste, while an uncultivated taste is almost always accompanied by the opposite qualities. With considerable assurance, the most civilized nation of antiquity is cited as an evidence of this, the Greeks, among whom the perception of the beautiful attained its highest development, and, as a contrast, it is usual to point



to nations in a partial savage state, and partly barbarous, who expiate their insensibility to the beautiful by a coarse, or, at all events, a hard, austere character. Nevertheless, some thinkers are tempted occasionally to deny either the fact itself or to dispute the legitimacy of the consequences that are derived from it. They do not entertain so unfavorable an opinion of that savage coarseness which is made a reproach in the case of certain nations; nor do they form so advantageous an opinion of the refinement so highly lauded in the case of cultivated nations. Even as far back as in antiquity there were men who by no means regarded the culture of the liberal arts as a benefit, and who were consequently led to forbid the entrance of their republic to imagination.

I do not speak of those who calumniate art because they have never been favored by it. These persons only appreciate a possession by the trouble it takes to acquire it, and by the profit it brings: and how could they properly appreciate the silent labor of taste in the exterior and interior man? How evident it is that the accidental disadvantages attending liberal culture would make them lose sight of its essential advantages? The man deficient in form despises the grace of diction as a means of corruption, courtesy in the social relations as dissimulation, delicacy and generosity in conduct as an affected exaggeration. He cannot forgive the favorite of the Graces for having enlivened all assemblies as a man of the world, of having directed all men to his views like a statesman, and of giving his impress to the

whole century as a writer: while he, the victim of labor, can only obtain with all his learning, the least attention or overcome the least difficulty. As he cannot learn from his fortunate rival the secret of pleasing, the only course open to him is to deplore the corruption of human nature, which adores rather the appearance than the reality.

But there are also opinions deserving respect, that pronounce themselves adverse to the effects of the beautiful, and find formidable arms in experience, with which to wage war against it. "We are free to admit" – such is their language – "that the charms of the beautiful can further honorable ends in pure hands; but it is not repugnant to its nature to produce, in impure hands, a directly contrary effect, and to employ in the service of injustice and error the power that throws the soul of man into chains. It is exactly because taste only attends to the form and never to the substance; it ends by placing the soul on the dangerous incline, leading it to neglect all reality and to sacrifice truth and morality to an attractive envelope. All the real difference of things vanishes, and it is only the appearance that determines the value! How many men of talent" – thus these arguers proceed – "have been turned aside from all effort by the seductive power of the beautiful, or have been led away from all serious exercise of their activity, or have been induced to use it very feebly? How many weak minds have been impelled to quarrel with the organizations of society, simply because it has pleased the imagination of poets to present the image of a world constituted differently, where

no propriety chains down opinion and no artifice holds nature in thralldom? What a dangerous logic of the passions they have learned since the poets have painted them in their pictures in the most brilliant colors, and since, in the contest with law and duty, they have commonly remained masters of the battle-field. What has society gained by the relations of society, formerly under the sway of truth, being now subject to the laws of the beautiful, or by the external impression deciding the estimation in which merit is to be held? We admit that all virtues whose appearance produces an agreeable effect are now seen to flourish, and those which, in society, give a value to the man who possesses them. But, as a compensation, all kinds of excesses are seen to prevail, and all vices are in vogue that can be reconciled with a graceful exterior." It is certainly a matter entitled to reflection that, at almost all the periods of history when art flourished and taste held sway, humanity is found in a state of decline; nor can a single instance be cited of the union of a large diffusion of aesthetic culture with political liberty and social virtue, of fine manners associated with good morals, and of politeness fraternizing with truth and loyalty of character and life.

As long as Athens and Sparta preserved their independence, and as long as their institutions were based on respect for the laws, taste did not reach its maturity, art remained in its infancy, and beauty was far from exercising her empire over minds. No doubt, poetry had already taken a sublime flight, but it was on the wings of genius, and we know that genius borders very

closely on savage coarseness, that it is a light which shines readily in the midst of darkness, and which therefore often argues against rather than in favor of the taste of time. When the golden age of art appears under Pericles and Alexander, and the sway of taste becomes more general, strength and liberty have abandoned Greece; eloquence corrupts the truth, wisdom offends it on the lips of Socrates, and virtue in the life of Phocion. It is well known that the Romans had to exhaust their energies in civil wars, and, corrupted by Oriental luxury, to bow their heads under the yoke of a fortunate despot, before Grecian art triumphed over the stiffness of their character. The same was the case with the Arabs: civilization only dawned upon them when the vigor of their military spirit became softened under the sceptre of the Abbassides. Art did not appear in modern Italy till the glorious Lombard League was dissolved, Florence submitting to the Medici; and all those brave cities gave up the spirit of independence for an inglorious resignation. It is almost superfluous to call to mind the example of modern nations, with whom refinement has increased in direct proportion to the decline of their liberties. Wherever we direct our eyes in past times, we see taste and freedom mutually avoiding each other. Everywhere we see that the beautiful only finds its sway on the ruins of heroic virtues.

And yet this strength of character, which is commonly sacrificed to establish aesthetic culture, is the most powerful spring of all that is great and excellent in man, and no other

advantage, however great, can make up for it. Accordingly, if we only keep to the experiments hitherto made, as to the influence of the beautiful, we cannot certainly be much encouraged in developing feelings so dangerous to the real culture of man. At the risk of being hard and coarse, it will seem preferable to dispense with this dissolving force of the beautiful rather than see human nature a prey to its enervating influence, notwithstanding all its refining advantages. However, experience is perhaps not the proper tribunal at which to decide such a question; before giving so much weight to its testimony, it would be well to inquire if the beauty we have been discussing is the power that is condemned by the previous examples. And the beauty we are discussing seems to assume an idea of the beautiful derived from a source different from experience, for it is this higher notion of the beautiful which has to decide if what is called beauty by experience is entitled to the name.

This pure and rational idea of the beautiful – supposing it can be placed in evidence – cannot be taken from any real and special case, and must, on the contrary, direct and give sanction to our judgment in each special case. It must therefore be sought for by a process of abstraction, and it ought to be deduced from the simple possibility of a nature both sensuous and rational; in short, beauty ought to present itself as a necessary condition of humanity. It is therefore essential that we should rise to the pure idea of humanity, and as experience shows us nothing but individuals, in particular cases, and never humanity

at large, we must endeavor to find in their individual and variable mode of being the absolute and the permanent, and to grasp the necessary conditions of their existence, suppressing all accidental limits. No doubt this transcendental procedure will remove us for some time from the familiar circle of phenomena, and the living presence of objects, to keep us on the unproductive ground of abstract idea; but we are engaged in the search after a principle of knowledge solid enough not to be shaken by anything, and the man who does not dare to rise above reality will never conquer this truth.

# LETTER XI

If abstraction rises to as great an elevation as possible, it arrives at two primary ideas, before which it is obliged to stop and to recognize its limits. It distinguishes in man something that continues, and something that changes incessantly. That which continues it names his person; that which changes his position, his condition.

The person and the condition, I and my determinations, which we represent as one and the same thing in the necessary being, are eternally distinct in the finite being. Notwithstanding all continuance in the person, the condition changes; in spite of all change of condition the person remains. We pass from rest to activity, from emotion to indifference, from assent to contradiction, but we are always we ourselves, and what immediately springs from ourselves remains. It is only in the absolute subject that all his determinations continue with his personality. All that Divinity is, it is because it is so; consequently it is eternally what it is, because it is eternal.

As the person and the condition are distinct in man, because he is a finite being, the condition cannot be founded on the person, nor the person on the condition. Admitting the second case, the person would have to change; and in the former case, the condition would have to continue. Thus in either supposition, either the personality or the quality of a finite being would

necessarily cease. It is not because we think, feel, and will that we are; it is not because we are that we think, feel, and will. We are because we are. We feel, think, and will because there is out of us something that is not ourselves.

Consequently the person must have its principle of existence in itself, because the permanent cannot be derived from the changeable, and thus we should be at once in possession of the idea of the absolute being, founded on itself; that is to say, of the idea of freedom. The condition must have a foundation, and as it is not through the person, and is not therefore absolute, it must be a sequence and a result; and thus, in the second place, we should have arrived at the condition of every independent being, of everything in the process of becoming something else: that is, of the idea of time. "Time is the necessary condition of all processes, of becoming (Werden);" this is an identical proposition, for it says nothing but this: "That something may follow, there must be a succession."

The person which manifested itself in the eternally continuing Ego, or I myself, and only in him, cannot become something or begin in time, because it is much rather time that must begin with him, because the permanent must serve as basis to the changeable. That change may take place, something must change; this something cannot therefore be the change itself. When we say the flower opens and fades, we make of this flower a permanent being in the midst of this transformation; we lend it, in some sort, a personality, in which these two conditions are



manifested. It cannot be objected that man is born, and becomes something; for man is not only a person simply, but he is a person finding himself in a determinate condition. Now our determinate state of condition springs up in time, and it is thus that man, as a phenomenon or appearance, must have a beginning, though in him pure intelligence is eternal. Without time, that is, without a becoming, he would not be a determinate being; his personality would exist virtually no doubt, but not in action. It is not by the succession of its perceptions that the immutable Ego or person manifests himself to himself.

Thus, therefore, the matter of activity, or reality, that the supreme intelligence draws from its own being, must be received by man; and he does, in fact, receive it, through the medium of perception, as something which is outside him in space, and which changes in him in time. This matter which changes in him is always accompanied by the Ego, the personality, that never changes; and the rule prescribed for man by his rational nature is to remain immutably himself in the midst of change, to refer all perceptions to experience, that is, to the unity of knowledge, and to make of each of its manifestations of its modes in time the law of all time. The matter only exists in as far as it changes: he, his personality, only exists in as far as he does not change. Consequently, represented in his perfection, man would be the permanent unity, which remains always the same, among the waves of change.

Now, although an infinite being, a divinity could not become

(or be subject to time), still a tendency ought to be named divine which has for its infinite end the most characteristic attribute of the divinity; the absolute manifestation of power – the reality of all the possible – and the absolute unity of the manifestation (the necessity of all reality). It cannot be disputed that man bears within himself, in his personality, a predisposition for divinity. The way to divinity – if the word "way" can be applied to what never leads to its end – is open to him in every direction.

Considered in itself, and independently of all sensuous matter, his personality is nothing but the pure virtuality of a possible infinite manifestation; and so long as there is neither intuition nor feeling, it is nothing more than a form, an empty power. Considered in itself, and independently of all spontaneous activity of the mind, sensuousness can only make a material man; without it, it is a pure form; but it cannot in any way establish a union between matter and it. So long as he only feels, wishes, and acts under the influence of desire, he is nothing more than the world, if by this word we point out only the formless contents of time. Without doubt, it is only his sensuousness that makes his strength pass into efficacious acts, but it is his personality alone that makes this activity his own. Thus, that he may not only be a world, he must give form to matter, and in order not to be a mere form, he must give reality to the virtuality that he bears in him. He gives matter to form by creating time, and by opposing the immutable to change, the diversity of the world to the eternal unity of the Ego. He gives a form to matter by again suppressing

time, by maintaining permanence in change, and by placing the diversity of the world under the unity of the Ego.

Now from this source issue for man two opposite exigencies, the two fundamental laws of sensuous-rational nature. The first has for its object absolute reality; it must make a world of what is only form, manifest all that in it is only a force. The second law has for its object absolute formality; it must destroy in him all that is only world, and carry out harmony in all changes. In other terms, he must manifest all that is internal, and give form to all that is external. Considered in its most lofty accomplishment, this twofold labor brings back to the idea of humanity, which was my starting-point.

## LETTER XII

This twofold labor or task, which consists in making the necessary pass into reality in us and in making out of us reality subject to the law of necessity, is urged upon us as a duty by two opposing forces, which are justly styled impulsions or instincts, because they impel us to realize their object. The first of these impulsions, which I shall call the sensuous instinct, issues from the physical existence of man, or from sensuous nature; and it is this instinct which tends to enclose him in the limits of time, and to make of him a material being; I do not say to give him matter, for to do that a certain free activity of the personality would be necessary, which, receiving matter, distinguishes it from the Ego, or what is permanent. By matter I only understand in this place the change or reality that fills time. Consequently the instinct requires that there should be change, and that time should contain something. This simply filled state of time is named sensation, and it is only in this state that physical existence manifests itself.

As all that is in time is successive, it follows by that fact alone that something is: all the remainder is excluded. When one note on an instrument is touched, among all those that it virtually offers, this note alone is real. When man is actually modified, the infinite possibility of all his modifications is limited to this single mode of existence. Thus, then, the exclusive action of sensuous impulsion has for its necessary consequence

the narrowest limitation. In this state man is only a unity of magnitude, a complete moment in time; or, to speak more correctly, he is not, for his personality is suppressed as long as sensation holds sway over him and carries time along with it.

This instinct extends its domains over the entire sphere of the finite in man, and as form is only revealed in matter, and the absolute by means of its limits, the total manifestation of human nature is connected on a close analysis with the sensuous instinct. But though it is only this instinct that awakens and develops what exists virtually in man, it is nevertheless this very instinct which renders his perfection impossible. It binds down to the world of sense by indestructible ties the spirit that tends higher, and it calls back to the limits of the present, abstraction which had its free development in the sphere of the infinite. No doubt, thought can escape it for a moment, and a firm will victoriously resist its exigencies: but soon compressed nature resumes her rights to give an imperious reality to our existence, to give it contents, substance, knowledge, and an aim for our activity.

The second impulsion, which may be named the formal instinct, issues from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and tends to set free, and bring harmony into the diversity of its manifestations, and to maintain personality notwithstanding all the changes of state. As this personality, being an absolute and indivisible unity, can never be in contradiction with itself, as we are ourselves forever, this impulsion, which tends to maintain personality, can never exact

in one time anything but what it exacts and requires forever. It therefore decides for always what it decides now, and orders now what it orders forever. Hence it embraces the whole series of times, or what comes to the same thing, it suppresses time and change. It wishes the real to be necessary and eternal, and it wishes the eternal and the necessary to be real; in other terms, it tends to truth and justice.

If the sensuous instinct only produces accidents, the formal instinct gives laws, laws for every judgment when it is a question of knowledge, laws for every will when it is a question of action. Whether, therefore, we recognize an object or conceive an objective value to a state of the subject, whether we act in virtue of knowledge or make of the objective the determining principle of our state; in both cases we withdraw this state from the jurisdiction of time, and we attribute to it reality for all men and for all time, that is, universality and necessity. Feeling can only say: "That is true for this subject and at this moment," and there may come another moment, another subject, which withdraws the affirmation from the actual feeling. But when once thought pronounces and says: "That is," it decides forever and ever, and the validity of its decision is guaranteed by the personality itself, which defies all change. Inclination can only say: "That is good for your individuality and present necessity"; but the changing current of affairs will sweep them away, and what you ardently desire to-day will form the object of your aversion to-morrow. But when the moral feeling says: "That ought to be," it decides

forever. If you confess the truth because it is the truth, and if you practise justice because it is justice, you have made of a particular case the law of all possible cases, and treated one moment of your life as eternity.

Accordingly, when the formal impulse holds sway and the pure object acts in us, the being attains its highest expansion, all barriers disappear, and from the unity of magnitude in which man was enclosed by a narrow sensuousness, he rises to the unity of idea, which embraces and keeps subject the entire sphere of phenomena. During this operation we are no longer in time, but time is in us with its infinite succession. We are no longer individuals but a species; the judgment of all spirits is expressed by our own, and the choice of all hearts is represented by our own act.

## LETTER XIII

On a first survey, nothing appears more opposed than these two impulsions; one having for its object change, the other immutability, and yet it is these two notions that exhaust the notion of humanity, and a third fundamental impulsion, holding a medium between them, is quite inconceivable. How then shall we re-establish the unity of human nature, a unity that appears completely destroyed by this primitive and radical opposition?

I admit these two tendencies are contradictory, but it should be noticed that they are not so in the same objects. But things that do not meet cannot come into collision. No doubt the sensuous impulsion desires change; but it does not wish that it should extend to personality and its field, nor that there should be a change of principles. The formal impulsion seeks unity and permanence, but it does not wish the condition to remain fixed with the person, that there should be identity of feeling. Therefore these two impulsions are not divided by nature, and if, nevertheless, they appear so, it is because they have become divided by transgressing nature freely, by ignoring themselves, and by confounding their spheres. The office of culture is to watch over them and to secure to each one its proper limits; therefore culture has to give equal justice to both, and to defend not only the rational impulsion against the sensuous, but also the latter against the former. Hence she has to act a twofold part:



first, to protect sense against the attacks of freedom; secondly, to secure personality against the power of sensations. One of these ends is attained by the cultivation of the sensuous, the other by that of reason.

Since the world is developed in time, or change, the perfection of the faculty that places men in relation with the world will necessarily be the greatest possible mutability and extensiveness. Since personality is permanence in change, the perfection of this faculty, which must be opposed to change, will be the greatest possible freedom of action (autonomy) and intensity. The more the receptivity is developed under manifold aspects, the more it is movable and offers surfaces to phenomena, the larger is the part of the world seized upon by man, and the more virtualities he develops in himself. Again, in proportion as man gains strength and depth, and depth and reason gain in freedom, in that proportion man takes in a larger share of the world, and throws out forms outside himself. Therefore his culture will consist, first, in placing his receptivity in contact with the world in the greatest number of points possible, and in raising passivity, to the highest exponent on the side of feeling; secondly, in procuring for the determining faculty the greatest possible amount of independence, in relation to the receptive power, and in raising activity to the highest degree on the side of reason. By the union of these two qualities man will associate the highest degree of self-spontaneity (autonomy) and of freedom with the fullest plenitude of existence, and instead of abandoning

himself to the world so as to get lost in it, he will rather absorb it in himself, with all the infinitude of its phenomena, and subject it to the unity of his reason.

But man can invert this relation, and thus fail in attaining his destination in two ways. He can hand over to the passive force the intensity demanded by the active force; he can encroach by material impulsion on the formal impulsion, and convert the receptive into the determining power. He can attribute to the active force the extensiveness belonging to the passive force, he can encroach by the formal impulsion on the material impulsion, and substitute the determining for the receptive power. In the former case, he will never be an Ego, a personality; in the second case, he will never be a Non-Ego, and hence in both cases he will be neither the one nor the other, consequently he will be nothing.

In fact, if the sensuous impulsion becomes determining, if the senses become lawgivers, and if the world stifles personality, he loses as object what he gains in force. It may be said of man that when he is only the contents of time, he is not and consequently he has no other contents. His condition is destroyed at the same time as his personality, because these are two correlative ideas, because change presupposes permanence, and a limited reality implies an infinite reality. If the formal impulsion becomes receptive, that is, if thought anticipates sensation, and the person substitutes itself in the place of the world, it loses as a subject and autonomous force what it gains as object, because immutability implies change, and that to manifest itself also absolute reality

requires limits. As soon as man is only form, he has no form, and the personality vanishes with the condition. In a word, it is only inasmuch as he is spontaneous, autonomous, that there is reality out of him, that he is also receptive; and it is only inasmuch as he is receptive that there is reality in him, that he is a thinking force.

Consequently these two impulsions require limits, and looked upon as forces, they need tempering; the former that it may not encroach on the field of legislation, the latter that it may not invade the ground of feeling. But this tempering and moderating the sensuous impulsion ought not to be the effect of physical impotence or of a blunting of sensations, which is always a matter for contempt. It must be a free act, an activity of the person, which by its moral intensity moderates the sensuous intensity, and by the sway of impressions takes from them in depth what it gives them in surface or breadth. The character must place limits to temperament, for the senses have only the right to lose elements if it be to the advantage of the mind. In its turn, the tempering of the formal impulsion must not result from moral impotence, from a relaxation of thought and will, which would degrade humanity. It is necessary that the glorious source of this second tempering should be the fulness of sensations; it is necessary that sensuousness itself should defend its field with a victorious arm and resist the violence that the invading activity of the mind would do to it. In a word, it is necessary that the material impulsion should be contained in the limits of propriety by personality, and the formal impulsion by receptivity or nature.

## LETTER XIV

We have been brought to the idea of such a correlation between the two impulsions that the action of the one establishes and limits at the same time the action of the other, and that each of them, taken in isolation, does arrive at its highest manifestation just because the other is active.

No doubt this correlation of the two impulsions is simply a problem advanced by reason, and which man will only be able to solve in the perfection of his being. It is in the strictest signification of the term: the idea of his humanity; accordingly, it is an infinite to which he can approach nearer and nearer in the course of time, but without ever reaching it. "He ought not to aim at form to the injury of reality, nor to reality to the detriment of the form. He must rather seek the absolute being by means of a determinate being, and the determinate being by means of an infinite being. He must set the world before him because he is a person, and he must be a person because he has the world before him. He must feel because he has a consciousness of himself, and he must have a consciousness of himself because he feels." It is only in conformity with this idea that he is a man in the full sense of the word; but he cannot be convinced of this so long as he gives himself up exclusively to one of these two impulsions, or only satisfies them one after the other. For as long as he only feels, his absolute personality and existence remain

a mystery to him, and as long as he only thinks, his condition or existence in time escapes him. But if there were cases in which he could have at once this twofold experience in which he would have the consciousness of his freedom and the feeling of his existence together, in which he would simultaneously feel as matter and know himself as spirit, in such cases, and in such only, would he have a complete intuition of his humanity, and the object that would procure him this intuition would be a symbol of his accomplished destiny and consequently serve to express the infinite to him – since this destination can only be fulfilled in the fulness of time.

Presuming that cases of this kind could present themselves in experience, they would awake in him a new impulsion, which, precisely because the other two impulsions would co-operate in it, would be opposed to each of them taken in isolation, and might, with good grounds, be taken for a new impulsion. The sensuous impulsion requires that there should be change, that time should have contents; the formal impulsion requires that time should be suppressed, that there should be no change. Consequently, the impulsion in which both of the others act in concert – allow me to call it the instinct of play, till I explain the term – the instinct of play would have as its object to suppress time in time, to conciliate the state of transition or becoming with the absolute being, change with identity.

The sensuous instinct wishes to be determined, it wishes to receive an object; the formal instinct wishes to determine itself,

it wishes to produce an object. Therefore the instinct of play will endeavor to receive as it would itself have produced, and to produce as it aspires to receive.

The sensuous impulsion excludes from its subject all autonomy and freedom; the formal impulsion excludes all dependence and passivity. But the exclusion of freedom is physical necessity; the exclusion of passivity is moral necessity. Thus the two impulsions subdue the mind: the former to the laws of nature, the latter to the laws of reason. It results from this that the instinct of play, which unites the double action of the two other instincts, will content the mind at once morally and physically. Hence, as it suppresses all that is contingent, it will also suppress all coercion, and will set man free physically and morally. When we welcome with effusion some one who deserves our contempt, we feel painfully that nature is constrained. When we have a hostile feeling against a person who commands our esteem, we feel painfully the constraint of reason. But if this person inspires us with interest, and also wins our esteem, the constraint of feeling vanishes together with the constraint of reason, and we begin to love him, that is to say, to play, to take recreation, at once with our inclination and our esteem.

Moreover, as the sensuous impulsion controls us physically, and the formal impulsion morally, the former makes our formal constitution contingent, and the latter makes our material constitution contingent, that is to say, there is contingency

in the agreement of our happiness with our perfection, and reciprocally. The instinct of play, in which both act in concert, will render both our formal and our material constitution contingent; accordingly, our perfection and our happiness in like manner. And on the other hand, exactly because it makes both of them contingent, and because the contingent disappears with necessity, it will suppress this contingency in both, and will thus give form to matter and reality to form. In proportion that it will lessen the dynamic influence of feeling and passion, it will place them in harmony with rational ideas, and by taking from the laws of reason their moral constraint, it will reconcile them with the interest of the senses.

## LETTER XV

I approach continually nearer to the end to which I lead you, by a path offering few attractions. Be pleased to follow me a few steps further, and a large horizon will open up to you, and a delightful prospect will reward you for the labor of the way.

The object of the sensuous instinct, expressed in a universal conception, is named Life in the widest acceptance; a conception that expresses all material existence and all that is immediately present in the senses. The object of the formal instinct, expressed in a universal conception, is called shape or form, as well in an exact as in an inexact acceptance; a conception that embraces all formal qualities of things and all relations of the same to the thinking powers. The object of the play instinct, represented in a general statement, may therefore bear the name of living form; a term that serves to describe all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, and what people style, in the widest sense, beauty.

Beauty is neither extended to the whole field of all living things nor merely enclosed in this field. A marble block, though it is and remains lifeless, can nevertheless become a living form by the architect and sculptor; a man, though he lives and has a form, is far from being a living form on that account. For this to be the case, it is necessary that his form should be life, and that his life should be a form. As long as we only think of his form, it is lifeless, a mere abstraction; as long as we only feel his life,



it is without form, a mere impression. It is only when his form lives in our feeling, and his life in our understanding, he is the living form, and this will everywhere be the case where we judge him to be beautiful.

But the genesis of beauty is by no means declared because we know how to point out the component parts, which in their combination produce beauty. For to this end it would be necessary to comprehend that combination itself, which continues to defy our exploration, as well as all mutual operation between the finite and the infinite. The reason, on transcendental grounds, makes the following demand: There shall be a communion between the formal impulse and the material impulse – that is, there shall be a play instinct – because it is only the unity of reality with the form, of the accidental with the necessary, of the passive state with freedom, that the conception of humanity is completed. Reason is obliged to make this demand, because her nature impels her to completeness and to the removal of all bounds; while every exclusive activity of one or the other impulse leaves human nature incomplete and places a limit in it. Accordingly, as soon as reason issues the mandate, "a humanity shall exist," it proclaims at the same time the law, "there shall be a beauty." Experience can answer us if there is a beauty, and we shall know it as soon as she has taught us if a humanity can exist. But neither reason nor experience can tell us how beauty can be and how a humanity is possible.

We know that man is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively

spirit. Accordingly, beauty as the consummation of humanity, can neither be exclusively mere life, as has been asserted by sharp-sighted observers, who kept too close to the testimony of experience, and to which the taste of the time would gladly degrade it; Nor can beauty be merely form, as has been judged by speculative sophists, who departed too far from experience, and by philosophic artists, who were led too much by the necessity of art in explaining beauty; it is rather the common object of both impulses, that is of the play instinct. The use of language completely justifies this name, as it is wont to qualify with the word play what is neither subjectively nor objectively accidental, and yet does not impose necessity either externally or internally. As the mind in the intuition of the beautiful finds itself in a happy medium between law and necessity, it is, because it divides itself between both, emancipated from the pressure of both. The formal impulse and the material impulse are equally earnest in their demands, because one relates in its cognition to things in their reality and the other to their necessity; because in action the first is directed to the preservation of life, the second to the preservation of dignity, and therefore both to truth and perfection. But life becomes more indifferent when dignity is mixed up with it, and duty no longer coerces when inclination attracts. In like manner the mind takes in the reality of things, material truth, more freely and tranquilly as soon as it encounters formal truth, the law of necessity; nor does the mind find itself strung by abstraction as soon as immediate

intuition can accompany it. In one word, when the mind comes into communion with ideas, all reality loses its serious value because it becomes small; and as it comes in contact with feeling, necessity parts also with its serious value because it is easy.

But perhaps the objection has for some time occurred to you, Is not the beautiful degraded by this, that it is made a mere play? and is it not reduced to the level of frivolous objects which have for ages passed under that name? Does it not contradict the conception of the reason and the dignity of beauty, which is nevertheless regarded as an instrument of culture, to confine it to the work of being a mere play? and does it not contradict the empirical conception of play, which can coexist with the exclusion of all taste, to confine it merely to beauty?

But what is meant by a mere play, when we know that in all conditions of humanity that very thing is play, and only that is play which makes man complete and develops simultaneously his twofold nature? What you style limitation, according to your representation of the matter, according to my views, which I have justified by proofs, I name enlargement. Consequently I should have said exactly the reverse: man is serious only with the agreeable, with the good, and with the perfect, but he plays with beauty. In saying this we must not indeed think of the plays that are in vogue in real life, and which commonly refer only to his material state. But in real life we should also seek in vain for the beauty of which we are here speaking. The actually present beauty is worthy of the really, of the actually present

play-impulse; but by the ideal of beauty, which is set up by the reason, an ideal of the play-instinct is also presented, which man ought to have before his eyes in all his plays.

Therefore, no error will ever be incurred if we seek the ideal of beauty on the same road on which we satisfy our play-impulse. We can immediately understand why the ideal form of a Venus, of a Juno, and of an Apollo, is to be sought not at Rome, but in Greece, if we contrast the Greek population, delighting in the bloodless athletic contests of boxing, racing, and intellectual rivalry at Olympia, with the Roman people gloating over the agony of a gladiator. Now the reason pronounces that the beautiful must not only be life and form, but a living form, that is, beauty, inasmuch as it dictates to man the twofold law of absolute formality and absolute reality. Reason also utters the decision that man shall only play with beauty, and he shall only play with beauty.

For, to speak out once for all, man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays. This proposition, which at this moment perhaps appears paradoxical, will receive a great and deep meaning if we have advanced far enough to apply it to the twofold seriousness of duty and of destiny. I promise you that the whole edifice of aesthetic art and the still more difficult art of life will be supported by this principle. But this proposition is only unexpected in science; long ago it lived and worked in art and in the feeling of the Greeks, her most accomplished masters; only

they removed to Olympus what ought to have been preserved on earth. Influenced by the truth of this principle, they effaced from the brow of their gods the earnestness and labor which furrow the cheeks of mortals, and also the hollow lust that smoothes the empty face. They set free the ever serene from the chains of every purpose, of every duty, of every care, and they made indolence and indifference the envied condition of the godlike race; merely human appellations for the freest and highest mind. As well the material pressure of natural laws as the spiritual pressure of moral laws lost itself in its higher idea of necessity, which embraced at the same time both worlds, and out of the union of these two necessities issued true freedom. Inspired by this spirit the Greeks also effaced from the features of their ideal, together with desire or inclination, all traces of volition, or, better still, they made both unrecognizable, because they knew how to wed them both in the closest alliance. It is neither charm, nor is it dignity, which speaks from the glorious face of Juno Ludovici; it is neither of these, for it is both at once. While the female god challenges our veneration, the godlike woman at the same time kindles our love. But while in ecstasy we give ourselves up to the heavenly beauty, the heavenly self-repose awes us back. The whole form rests and dwells in itself – a fully complete creation in itself – and as if she were out of space, without advance or resistance; it shows no force contending with force, no opening through which time could break in. Irresistibly carried away and attracted by her womanly charm, kept off at a distance by her

godly dignity, we also find ourselves at length in the state of the greatest repose, and the result is a wonderful impression for which the understanding has no idea and language no name.

## LETTER XVI

From the antagonism of the two impulsions, and from the association of two opposite principles, we have seen beauty to result, of which the highest ideal must therefore be sought in the most perfect union and equilibrium possible of the reality and of the form. But this equilibrium remains always an idea that reality can never completely reach. In reality, there will always remain a preponderance of one of these elements over the other, and the highest point to which experience can reach will consist in an oscillation between two principles, when sometimes reality and at others form will have the advantage. Ideal beauty is therefore eternally one and indivisible, because there can only be one single equilibrium; on the contrary, experimental beauty will be eternally double, because in the oscillation the equilibrium may be destroyed in two ways – this side and that.

I have called attention in the foregoing letters to a fact that can also be rigorously deduced from the considerations that have engaged our attention to the present point; this fact is that an exciting and also a moderating action may be expected from the beautiful. The tempering action is directed to keep within proper limits the sensuous and the formal impulsions; the exciting, to maintain both of them in their full force. But these two modes of action of beauty ought to be completely identified in the idea. The beautiful ought to temper while uniformly exciting the two

natures, and it ought also to excite while uniformly moderating them. This result flows at once from the idea of a correlation, in virtue of which the two terms mutually imply each other, and are the reciprocal condition one of the other, a correlation of which the purest product is beauty. But experience does not offer an example of so perfect a correlation. In the field of experience it will always happen more or less that excess on the one side will give rise to deficiency on the other, and deficiency will give birth to excess. It results from this that what in the beau-ideal is only distinct in the idea is different in reality in empirical beauty. The beau-ideal, though simple and indivisible, discloses, when viewed in two different aspects, on the one hand, a property of gentleness and grace, and on the other, an energetic property; in experience there is a gentle and graceful beauty and there is an energetic beauty. It is so, and it will be always so, so long as the absolute is enclosed in the limits of time, and the ideas of reason have to be realized in humanity. For example, the intellectual man has the ideal of virtue, of truth, and of happiness; but the active man will only practise virtues, will only grasp truths, and enjoy happy days. The business of physical and moral education is to bring back this multiplicity to unity, to put morality in the place of manners, science in the place of knowledge; the business of aesthetic education is to make out of beauties the beautiful.

Energetic beauty can no more preserve a man from a certain residue of savage violence and harshness than graceful beauty can secure him against a certain degree of effeminacy and



weakness. As it is the effect of the energetic beauty to elevate the mind in a physical and moral point of view and to augment its momentum, it only too often happens that the resistance of the temperament and of the character diminishes the aptitude to receive impressions, that the delicate part of humanity suffers an oppression which ought only to affect its grosser part, and that this coarse nature participates in an increase of force that ought only to turn to the account of free personality. It is for this reason that, at the periods when we find much strength and abundant sap in humanity, true greatness of thought is seen associated with what is gigantic and extravagant, and the sublimest feeling is found coupled with the most horrible excess of passion. It is also the reason why, in the periods distinguished for regularity and form, nature is as often oppressed as it is governed, as often outraged as it is surpassed. And as the action of gentle and graceful beauty is to relax the mind in the moral sphere as well as the physical, it happens quite as easily that the energy of feelings is extinguished with the violence of desires, and that character shares in the loss of strength which ought only to affect the passions. This is the reason why, in ages assumed to be refined, it is not a rare thing to see gentleness degenerate into effeminacy, politeness into platitude, correctness into empty sterility, liberal ways into arbitrary caprice, ease into frivolity, calm into apathy, and, lastly, a most miserable caricature treads on the heels of the noblest, the most beautiful type of humanity. Gentle and graceful beauty is therefore a want to the man who suffers the

constraint of manner and of forms, for he is moved by grandeur and strength long before he becomes sensible to harmony and grace. Energetic beauty is a necessity to the man who is under the indulgent sway of taste, for in his state of refinement he is only too much disposed to make light of the strength that he retained in his state of rude savagism.

I think I have now answered and also cleared up the contradiction commonly met in the judgments of men respecting the influence of the beautiful, and the appreciation of aesthetic culture. This contradiction is explained directly we remember that there are two sorts of experimental beauty, and that on both hands an affirmation is extended to the entire race, when it can only be proved of one of the species. This contradiction disappears the moment we distinguish a twofold want in humanity to which two kinds of beauty correspond. It is therefore probable that both sides would make good their claims if they come to an understanding respecting the kind of beauty and the form of humanity that they have in view.

Consequently in the sequel of my researches I shall adopt the course that nature herself follows with man considered from the point of view of aesthetics, and setting out from the two kinds of beauty, I shall rise to the idea of the genus. I shall examine the effects produced on man by the gentle and graceful beauty when its springs of action are in full play, and also those produced by energetic beauty when they are relaxed. I shall do this to confound these two sorts of beauty in the unity of the beau-ideal,

in the same way that the two opposite forms and modes of being of humanity are absorbed in the unity of the ideal man.

## LETTER XVII

While we were only engaged in deducing the universal idea of beauty from the conception of human nature in general, we had only to consider in the latter the limits established essentially in itself, and inseparable from the notion of the finite. Without attending to the contingent restrictions that human nature may undergo in the real world of phenomena, we have drawn the conception of this nature directly from reason, as a source of every necessity, and the ideal of beauty has been given us at the same time with the ideal of humanity.

But now we are coming down from the region of ideas to the scene of reality, to find man in a determinate state, and consequently in limits which are not derived from the pure conception of humanity, but from external circumstances and from an accidental use of his freedom. But, although the limitation of the idea of humanity may be very manifold in the individual, the contents of this idea suffice to teach us that we can only depart from it by two opposite roads. For if the perfection of man consist in the harmonious energy of his sensuous and spiritual forces, he can only lack this perfection through the want of harmony and the want of energy. Thus, then, before having received on this point the testimony of experience, reason suffices to assure us that we shall find the real and consequently limited man in a state of tension or relaxation, according as the

exclusive activity of isolated forces troubles the harmony of his being, or as the unity of his nature is based on the uniform relaxation of his physical and spiritual forces. These opposite limits are, as we have now to prove, suppressed by the beautiful, which re-establishes harmony in man when excited, and energy in man when relaxed; and which, in this way, in conformity with the nature of the beautiful, restores the state of limitation to an absolute state, and makes of man a whole, complete in himself.

Thus the beautiful by no means belies in reality the idea which we have made of it in speculation; only its action is much less free in it than in the field of theory, where we were able to apply it to the pure conception of humanity. In man, as experience shows him to us, the beautiful finds a matter, already damaged and resisting, which robs him in ideal perfection of what it communicates to him of its individual mode of being. Accordingly in reality the beautiful will always appear a peculiar and limited species, and not as the pure genus; in excited minds in a state of tension it will lose its freedom and variety; in relaxed minds, it will lose its vivifying force; but we, who have become familiar with the true character of this contradictory phenomenon, cannot be led astray by it. We shall not follow the great crowd of critics, in determining their conception by separate experiences, and to make them answerable for the deficiencies which man shows under their influence. We know rather that it is man who transfers the imperfections of his individuality over to them, who stands perpetually in the way

of their perfection by his subjective limitation, and lowers their absolute ideal to two limited forms of phenomena.

It was advanced that soft beauty is for an unstrung mind, and the energetic beauty for the tightly strung mind. But I apply the term unstrung to a man when he is rather under the pressure of feelings than under the pressure of conceptions. Every exclusive sway of one of his two fundamental impulses is for man a state of compulsion and violence, and freedom only exists in the co-operation of his two natures. Accordingly, the man governed preponderately by feelings, or sensuously unstrung, is emancipated and set free by matter. The soft and graceful beauty, to satisfy this twofold problem, must therefore show herself under two aspects – in two distinct forms. First, as a form in repose, she will tone down savage life, and pave the way from feeling to thought. She will, secondly, as a living image, equip the abstract form with sensuous power, and lead back the conception to intuition and law to feeling. The former service she does to the man of nature, the second to the man of art. But because she does not in both cases hold complete sway over her matter, but depends on that which is furnished either by formless nature or unnatural art, she will in both cases bear traces of her origin, and lose herself in one place in material life and in another in mere abstract form.

To be able to arrive at a conception how beauty can become a means to remove this twofold relaxation, we must explore its source in the human mind. Accordingly, make up your mind to

dwell a little longer in the region of speculation, in order then to leave it forever, and to advance with securer footing on the ground of experience.

## LETTER XVIII

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

From this statement it would appear to follow that between matter and form, between passivity and activity, there must be a middle state, and that beauty plants us in this state. It actually happens that the greater part of mankind really form this conception of beauty as soon as they begin to reflect on its operations, and all experience seems to point to this conclusion. But, on the other hand, nothing is more unwarrantable and contradictory than such a conception, because the aversion of matter and form, the passive and the active, feeling and thought, is eternal, and cannot be mediated in any way. How can we remove this contradiction? Beauty weds the two opposed conditions of feeling and thinking, and yet there is absolutely no medium between them. The former is immediately certain through experience, the other through the reason.

This is the point to which the whole question of beauty leads, and if we succeed in settling this point in a satisfactory way, we have at length found the clue that will conduct us through the whole labyrinth of aesthetics.

But this requires two very different operations, which must necessarily support each other in this inquiry. Beauty, it is said,



weds two conditions with one another which are opposite to each other, and can never be one. We must start from this opposition; we must grasp and recognize them in their entire purity and strictness, so that both conditions are separated in the most definite manner; otherwise we mix, but we do not unite them. Secondly, it is usual to say, beauty unites those two opposed conditions, and therefore removes the opposition. But because both conditions remain eternally opposed to one another, they cannot be united in any other way than by being suppressed. Our second business is therefore to make this connection perfect, to carry them out with such purity and perfection that both conditions disappear entirely in a third one, and no trace of separation remains in the whole; otherwise we segregate, but do not unite. All the disputes that have ever prevailed and still prevail in the philosophical world respecting the conception of beauty have no other origin than their commencing without a sufficiently strict distinction, or that it is not carried out fully to a pure union. Those philosophers who blindly follow their feeling in reflecting on this topic can obtain no other conception of beauty, because they distinguish nothing separate in the totality of the sensuous impression. Other philosophers, who take the understanding as their exclusive guide, can never obtain a conception of beauty, because they never see anything else in the whole than the parts; and spirit and matter remain eternally separate, even in their most perfect unity. The first fear to suppress beauty dynamically, that is, as a working power, if they must separate what is united in

the feeling. The others fear to suppress beauty logically, that is, as a conception, when they have to hold together what in the understanding is separate. The former wish to think of beauty as it works; the latter wish it to work as it is thought. Both therefore must miss the truth; the former, because they try to follow infinite nature with their limited thinking power; the others, because they wish to limit unlimited nature according to their laws of thought. The first fear to rob beauty of its freedom by a too strict dissection, the others fear to destroy the distinctness of the conception by a too violent union. But the former do not reflect that the freedom in which they very properly place the essence of beauty is not lawlessness, but harmony of laws; not caprice, but the highest internal necessity. The others do not remember that distinctness, which they with equal right demand from beauty, does not consist in the exclusion of certain realities, but the absolute including of all; that is not therefore limitation but infinitude. We shall avoid the quicksands on which both have made shipwreck if we begin from the two elements in which beauty divides itself before the understanding, but then afterwards rise to a pure aesthetic unity by which it works on feeling, and in which both those conditions completely disappear.

## LETTER XIX

Two principal and different states of passive and active capacity of being determined [Bestimmbarkeit] can be distinguished in man; in like manner two states of passive and active determination [Bestimmung]. The explanation of this proposition leads us most readily to our end.

The condition of the state of man before destination or direction is given him by the impression of the senses is an unlimited capacity of being determined. The infinite of time and space is given to his imagination for its free use; and, because nothing is settled in this kingdom of the possible, and therefore nothing is excluded from it, this state of absence of determination can be named an empty infiniteness, which must not by any means be confounded with an infinite void.

Now it is necessary that his sensuous nature should be modified, and that in the indefinite series of possible determinations one alone should become real. One perception must spring up in it. That which, in the previous state of determinableness, was only an empty potency becomes now an active force, and receives contents; but, at the same time, as an active force it receives a limit, after having been, as a simple power, unlimited. Reality exists now, but the infinite has disappeared. To describe a figure in space, we are obliged to limit infinite space; to represent to ourselves a change in time, we

are obliged to divide the totality of time. Thus we only arrive at reality by limitation, at the positive, at a real position, by negation or exclusion; to determination, by the suppression of our free determinableness.

But mere exclusion would never beget a reality, nor would a mere sensuous impression ever give birth to a perception, if there were not something from which it was excluded, if by an absolute act of the mind the negation were not referred to something positive, and if opposition did not issue out of non-position. This act of the mind is styled judging or thinking, and the result is named thought.

Before we determine a place in space, there is no space for us; but without absolute space we could never determine a place. The same is the case with time. Before we have an instant, there is no time to us: but without infinite time – eternity – we should never have a representation of the instant. Thus, therefore, we can only arrive at the whole by the part, to the unlimited through limitation; but reciprocally we only arrive at the part through the whole, at limitation through the unlimited.

It follows from this, that when it is affirmed of beauty that it mediates for man, the transition from feeling to thought, this must not be understood to mean that beauty can fill up the gap that separates feeling from thought, the passive from the active. This gap is infinite; and, without the interposition of a new and independent faculty, it is impossible for the general to issue from the individual, the necessary from the contingent.

Thought is the immediate act of this absolute power, which, I admit, can only be manifested in connection with sensuous impressions, but which in this manifestation depends so little on the sensuous that it reveals itself specially in an opposition to it. The spontaneity or autonomy with which it acts excludes every foreign influence; and it is not in as far as it helps thought – which comprehends a manifest contradiction but only in as far as it procures for the intellectual faculties the freedom to manifest themselves in conformity with their proper laws. It does it only because the beautiful can become a means of leading man from matter to form, from feeling to laws, from a limited existence to an absolute existence.

But this assumes that the freedom of the intellectual faculties can be balked, which appears contradictory to the conception of an autonomous power. For a power which only receives the matter of its activity from without can only be hindered in its action by the privation of this matter, and consequently by way of negation; it is therefore a misconception of the nature of the mind to attribute to the sensuous passions the power of oppressing positively the freedom of the mind. Experience does indeed present numerous examples where the rational forces appear compressed in proportion to the violence of the sensuous forces. But instead of deducing this spiritual weakness from the energy of passion, this passionate energy must rather be explained by the weakness of the human mind. For the sense can only have a sway such as this over man when the mind has spontaneously

neglected to assert its power.

Yet in trying by these explanations to move one objection, I appear to have exposed myself to another, and I have only saved the autonomy of the mind at the cost of its unity. For how can the mind derive at the same time from itself the principles of inactivity and of activity, if it is not itself divided, and if it is not in opposition with itself?

Here we must remember that we have before us, not the infinite mind, but the finite. The finite mind is that which only becomes active through the passive, only arrives at the absolute through limitation, and only acts and fashions in as far as it receives matter. Accordingly, a mind of this nature must associate with the impulse towards form or the absolute, an impulse towards matter or limitation, conditions without which it could not have the former impulse nor satisfy it. How can two such opposite tendencies exist together in the same being? This is a problem that can no doubt embarrass the metaphysician, but not the transcendental philosopher. The latter does not presume to explain the possibility of things, but he is satisfied with giving a solid basis to the knowledge that makes us understand the possibility of experience. And as experience would be equally impossible without this autonomy in the mind, and without the absolute unity of the mind, it lays down these two conceptions as two conditions of experience equally necessary without troubling itself any more to reconcile them. Moreover, this immanence of two fundamental impulses does not in any degree contradict

the absolute unity of the mind, as soon as the mind itself, its selfhood, is distinguished from those two motors. No doubt, these two impulses exist and act in it, but itself is neither matter nor form, nor the sensuous nor reason, and this is a point that does not seem always to have occurred to those who only look upon the mind as itself acting when its acts are in harmony with reason, and who declare it passive when its acts contradict reason.

Arrived at its development, each of these two fundamental impulsions tends of necessity and by its nature to satisfy itself; but precisely because each of them has a necessary tendency, and both nevertheless have an opposite tendency, this twofold constraint mutually destroys itself, and the will preserves an entire freedom between them both. It is therefore the will that conducts itself like a power – as the basis of reality – with respect to both these impulses; but neither of them can by itself act as a power with respect to the other. A violent man, by his positive tendency to justice, which never fails in him, is turned away from injustice; nor can a temptation of pleasure, however strong, make a strong character violate its principles. There is in man no other power than his will; and death alone, which destroys man, or some privation of self-consciousness, is the only thing that can rob man of his internal freedom.

An external necessity determines our condition, our existence in time, by means of the sensuous. The latter is quite involuntary, and directly it is produced in us we are necessarily passive. In the same manner an internal necessity awakens our personality

in connection with sensations, and by its antagonism with them; for consciousness cannot depend on the will, which presupposes it. This primitive manifestation of personality is no more a merit to us than its privation is a defect in us. Reason can only be required in a being who is self-conscious, for reason is an absolute consecutiveness and universality of consciousness; before this is the case he is not a man, nor can any act of humanity be expected from him. The metaphysician can no more explain the limitation imposed by sensation on a free and autonomous mind than the natural philosopher can understand the infinite, which is revealed in consciousness in connection with these limits. Neither abstraction nor experience can bring us back to the source whence issue our ideas of necessity and of universality: this source is concealed in its origin in time from the observer, and its super-sensuous origin from the researches of the metaphysician. But, to sum up in a few words, consciousness is there, and, together with its immutable unity, the law of all that is for man is established, as well as of all that is to be by man, for his understanding and his activity. The ideas of truth and of right present themselves inevitable, incorruptible, immeasurable, even in the age of sensuousness; and without our being able to say why or how, we see eternity in time, the necessary following the contingent. It is thus that, without any share on the part of the subject, the sensation and self-consciousness arise, and the origin of both is beyond our volition, as it is out of the sphere of our knowledge.



But as soon as these two faculties have passed into action, and man has verified by his experience, through the medium of sensation, a determinate existence, and through the medium of consciousness its absolute existence, the two fundamental impulses exert their influence directly their object is given. The sensuous impulse is awakened with the experience of life – with the beginning of the individual; the rational impulsion with the experience of law – with the beginning of his personality; and it is only when these two inclinations have come into existence that the human type is realized. Up to that time, everything takes place in man according to the law of necessity; but now the hand of nature lets him go, and it is for him to keep upright humanity, which nature places as a germ in his heart. And thus we see that directly the two opposite and fundamental impulses exercise their influence in him, both lose their constraint, and the autonomy of two necessities gives birth to freedom.

## LETTER XX

That freedom is an active and not a passive principle results from its very conception; but that liberty itself should be an effect of nature (taking this word in its widest sense), and not the work of man, and therefore that it can be favored or thwarted by natural means, is the necessary consequence of that which precedes. It begins only when man is complete, and when these two fundamental impulsions have been developed. It will then be wanting whilst he is incomplete, and while one of these impulsions is excluded, and it will be re-established by all that gives back to man his integrity.

Thus it is possible, both with regard to the entire species as to the individual, to remark the moment when man is yet incomplete, and when one of the two exclusions acts solely in him. We know that man commences by life simply, to end by form; that he is more of an individual than a person, and that he starts from the limited or finite to approach the infinite. The sensuous impulsion comes into play therefore before the rational impulsion, because sensation precedes consciousness; and in this priority of sensuous impulsion we find the key of the history of the whole of human liberty.

There is a moment, in fact, when the instinct of life, not yet opposed to the instinct of form, acts as nature and as necessity; when the sensuous is a power because man has not begun;

for even in man there can be no other power than his will. But when man shall have attained to the power of thought, reason, on the contrary, will be a power, and moral or logical necessity will take the place of physical necessity. Sensuous power must then be annihilated before the law which must govern it can be established. It is not enough that something shall begin which as yet was not; previously something must end which had begun. Man cannot pass immediately from sensuousness to thought. He must step backwards, for it is only when one determination is suppressed that the contrary determination can take place. Consequently, in order to exchange passive against active liberty, a passive determination against an active, he must be momentarily free from all determination, and must traverse a state of pure determinability. He has then to return in some degree to that state of pure negative indetermination in which he was before his senses were affected by anything. But this state was absolutely empty of all contents, and now the question is to reconcile an equal determination and a determinability equally without limit, with the greatest possible fulness, because from this situation something positive must immediately follow. The determination which man received by sensation must be preserved, because he should not lose the reality; but at the same time, in so far as finite, it should be suppressed, because a determinability without limit would take place. The problem consists then in annihilating the determination of the mode of existence, and yet at the same time in preserving it, which is only

possible in one way: in opposing to it another. The two sides of a balance are in equilibrium when empty; they are also in equilibrium when their contents are of equal weight.

Thus, to pass from sensation to thought, the soul traverses a medium position, in which sensibility and reason are at the same time active, and thus they mutually destroy their determinant power, and by their antagonism produce a negation. This medium situation in which the soul is neither physically nor morally constrained, and yet is in both ways active, merits essentially the name of a free situation; and if we call the state of sensuous determination physical, and the state of rational determination logical or moral, that state of real and active determination should be called the aesthetic.

## LETTER XXI

I have remarked in the beginning of the foregoing letter that there is a twofold condition of determinableness and a twofold condition of determination. And now I can clear up this proposition.

The mind can be determined – is determinable – only in as far as it is not determined; it is, however, determinable also, in as far as it is not exclusively determined; that is, if it is not confined in its determination. The former is only a want of determination – it is without limits, because it is without reality; but the latter, the aesthetic determinableness, has no limits, because it unites all reality.

The mind is determined, inasmuch as it is only limited; but it is also determined because it limits itself of its own absolute capacity. It is situated in the former position when it feels, in the second when it thinks. Accordingly the aesthetic constitution is in relation to determinableness what thought is in relation to determination. The latter is a negative from internal and infinite completeness, the former a limitation from internal infinite power. Feeling and thought come into contact in one single point, the mind is determined in both conditions, the man becomes something and exists – either as individual or person – by exclusion; in other cases these two faculties stand infinitely apart. Just in the same manner the aesthetic determinableness comes in

contact with the mere want of determination in a single point, by both excluding every distinct determined existence, by thus being in all other points nothing and all, and hence by being infinitely different. Therefore if the latter, in the absence of determination from deficiency, is represented as an empty infiniteness, the aesthetic freedom of determination, which forms the proper counterpart to the former, can be considered as a completed infiniteness; a representation which exactly agrees with the teachings of the previous investigations.

Man is therefore nothing in the aesthetic state, if attention is given to the single result, and not to the whole faculty, and if we regard only the absence or want of every special determination. We must therefore do justice to those who pronounce the beautiful, and the disposition in which it places the mind, as entirely indifferent and unprofitable, in relation to knowledge and feeling. They are perfectly right; for it is certain that beauty gives no separate, single result, either for the understanding or for the will; it does not carry out a single intellectual or moral object; it discovers no truth, does not help us to fulfil a single duty, and, in one word, is equally unfit to found the character or to clear the head. Accordingly, the personal worth of a man, or his dignity, as far as this can only depend on himself, remains entirely undetermined by aesthetic culture, and nothing further is attained than that, on the part of nature, it is made profitable for him to make of himself what he will; that the freedom to be what he ought to be is restored perfectly to him.

But by this something infinite is attained. But as soon as we remember that freedom is taken from man by the one-sided compulsion of nature in feeling, and by the exclusive legislation of the reason in thinking, we must consider the capacity restored to him by the aesthetical disposition, as the highest of all gifts, as the gift of humanity. I admit that he possesses this capacity for humanity, before every definite determination in which he may be placed. But, as a matter of fact, he loses it with every determined condition into which he may come; and if he is to pass over to an opposite condition, humanity must be in every case restored to him by the aesthetic life.

It is therefore not only a poetical license, but also philosophically correct, when beauty is named our second creator. Nor is this inconsistent with the fact that she only makes it possible for us to attain and realize humanity, leaving this to our free will. For in this she acts in common with our original creator, nature, which has imparted to us nothing further than this capacity for humanity, but leaves the use of it to our own determination of will.

## LETTER XXII

Accordingly, if the aesthetic disposition of the mind must be looked upon in one respect as nothing – that is, when we confine our view to separate and determined operations – it must be looked upon in another respect as a state of the highest reality, in as far as we attend to the absence of all limits and the sum of powers which are commonly active in it. Accordingly we cannot pronounce them, again, to be wrong who describe the aesthetic state to be the most productive in relation to knowledge and morality. They are perfectly right, for a state of mind which comprises the whole of humanity in itself must of necessity include in itself also – necessarily and potentially – every separate expression of it. Again, a disposition of mind that removes all limitation from the totality of human nature must also remove it from every special expression of the same. Exactly because its "aesthetic disposition" does not exclusively shelter any separate function of humanity, it is favorable to all without distinction; nor does it favor any particular functions, precisely because it is the foundation of the possibility of all. All other exercises give to the mind some special aptitude, but for that very reason give it some definite limits; only the aesthetical leads him to the unlimited. Every other condition in which we can live refers us to a previous condition, and requires for its solution a following condition; only the aesthetic is a complete whole in itself, for it unites in itself



all conditions of its source and of its duration. Here alone we feel ourselves swept out of time, and our humanity expresses itself with purity and integrity as if it had not yet received any impression or interruption from the operation of external powers.

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