

Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man  
Elizabeth Wilkinson & L.A. Willoughby, translators  
(Oxford, 1967).

## ELEVENTH LETTER

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

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

3. Since in man, as finite being, Person and Condition are distinct, the Condition can neither be grounded upon the Person, nor the Person upon the Condition. Were the latter the case, the Person would have to change; were the former the case, the Condition would have to persist; hence, in each case, either the Personality or the Finiteness cease to be. Not because we think, will, or feel, do we exist; and not because we exist, do we think, will, or feel. We are because we are; we feel, think and will, because outside of ourselves something other than ourselves exists too.

4. The Person therefore must be its own ground; for what persists cannot proceed from what changes. And so we would, in the first place, have the idea of Absolute Being grounded upon itself, that is to say, Freedom. The Condition, on the other hand, must have a ground other than itself; it must, since it does not owe its existence to the Person, i.e., is not absolute, proceed from something. And so we would, in the second place, have the condition of all contingent being or becoming, that is to say, Time. Time is the

condition of all becoming' is an identical proposition, for it does nothing but assert that 'succession is the condition of things succeeding one upon another'.

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

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

7. Now although an infinite being, a Godhead, cannot become, we must surely call divine any tendency which has as its unending task the realization of that most characteristic attribute of Godhead, viz., absolute manifestation of potential (the actualization of all that

is possible), and absolute unity of manifestation (the necessity of all that is made actual). A disposition to the divine man does indubitably carry within him, in his Personality; the way to the divine (if we can call a way that which never leads to the goal) is opened up to him through the Senses.

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

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

TWELFTH LETTER

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

2. Since everything that exists in time exists as a *succession*, the very fact of something existing at all means that everything else is excluded. When we strike a note on an instrument, only this single note, of all those it is capable of emitting, is actually realized; when man is sensible of the present, the whole infinitude of his possible determinations is confined to this single mode of his being. Wherever, therefore, this drive functions exclusively, we inevitably find the highest degree of limitation. Man in this state is nothing but a unit of quantity, an occupied moment of time—or rather, he is not at all, for his Personality is suspended as long as he is ruled by sensation, and swept along by the flux of time.\*

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

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

4. The second of the two drives, which we may call the *formal drive*, proceeds from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and is intent on giving him the freedom to bring harmony into the diversity of his manifestations, and to affirm his Person among all his changes of Condition. Since this Person, being an absolute and indivisible unity, can never be at variance with itself, since we are to all eternity we ourselves, that drive which insists on affirming the Personality can never demand anything but that which is binding upon it to all eternity; hence it decides for ever as it decides for this moment, and commands for this moment what it commands for ever. Consequently it embraces the whole sequence of time, which is as much as to say: it annuls time and annuls change. It wants the real to be necessary and eternal, and the eternal and the necessary to be real. In other words, it insists on truth and on the right.

5. If the first drive only furnishes cases, this second one gives laws—laws for every judgement, where it is a question of knowledge, laws for every will, where it is a question of action. Whether it is a case of knowing an object, i.e., of attributing objective validity to a condition of our subject, or of acting upon knowledge, i.e., of making an objective principle the determining motive of our condition—in both cases we wrest this our condition from the jurisdiction

in his Self. Consequently, someone who has come out of a faint has merely come to himself, which state is perfectly compatible with being beside oneself.

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of time, and endow it with reality for all men and all times, that is with universality and necessity. Feeling can only say: this is true for this individual and at this moment, and another moment, another individual, can come along and revoke assertions made thus under the impact of momentary sensation. But once thought pronounces: that is, it decides for ever and aye, and the validity of its verdict is guaranteed by the Personality itself, which defies all change. Inclination can only say: this is good for you as an individual and for your present need; but your individuality and your present need will be swept away by change, and what you now so ardently desire will one day become the object of your aversion. But once the moral feeling says: this shall be, it decides for ever and aye—once you confess truth because it is truth, and practise justice because it is justice, then you have made an individual case into a law for all cases, and treated one moment of your life as if it were eternity.

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

## THIRTEENTH LETTER

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

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

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

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

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

to have a say in the realm of feeling. Just by assigning to each of them its own sphere, we are by that very fact excluding the other from it, and setting bounds to each, bounds which can only be transgressed at the risk of detriment to both.

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

draw the latter into himself in all its infinitude of phenomena, and subject it to the unity of his reason.

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

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

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

3. It would be no less difficult to determine which does more to impede the practice of brotherly love: the violence of our passions, which disturbs it, or the rigidity of our principles, which chills it—the egotism of our senses or the egotism of our reason. If we are to become compassionate, helpful, effective human beings, feeling and character must unite, even as wide-open senses must combine with vigour of intellect if we are to acquire experience. How can we, however laudable our precepts, how can we be just, kindly, and human towards others, if we lack the power of receiving into ourselves, faithfully and truly, natures unlike ours, of feeling our way into the situation of others, of making other people's feelings our own? But in the education we receive, no less than

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

6. Both drives, therefore, need to have limits set to them and, inasmuch as they can be thought of as energies, need to be relaxed;

in that we give ourselves, this power gets repressed in exactly the measure that we seek to break the force of passions, and strengthen character by means of principles. Since it costs effort to remain true to one's principles when feeling is easily stirred, we take the easier way out and try to make character secure by blunting feeling; for it is, of course, infinitely easier to have peace and quiet from an adversary you have disarmed than to master a spirited and active foe. And this, for the most part, is the operation that is meant when people speak of forming character; and that, even in the best sense of the word, where it implies the cultivation of the inner, and not merely of the outer, man. A man so formed will, without doubt, be immune from the danger of being crude nature or of appearing as such; but he will at the same time be armoured by principle against all natural feeling, and be equally inaccessible to the claims of humanity from without as he is to those of humanity from within.

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

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

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## FOURTEENTH LETTER

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

2. Such reciprocal relation between the two drives is, admittedly, but a task enjoined upon us by Reason, a problem which man is only capable of solving completely in the perfect consummation of his existence. It is, in the most precise sense of the word, the Idea of his Human Nature, hence something Infinite, to which in the course of time he can approximate ever more closely, but without ever being able to reach it. 'He is not to strive for form at the cost of reality, nor for reality at the cost of form; rather is he to seek absolute being by means of a determinate being, and a determinate being by means of infinite being. He is to set up a world over against himself because he is Person, and he is to be Person because a world stands over against him. He is to feel because he is conscious of himself, and be conscious of himself because he feels.'—That he does actually conform to this Idea, that he is consequently, in the fullest sense of the word, a human being, is never brought home to him as long as he satisfies only one of these two drives to the exclusion of the other, or only satisfies them one after the other. For as long as he only feels, his Person, or his absolute existence, remains a mystery to him; and as long as he only thinks, his existence in time, or his Condition, does likewise. Should there, however, be cases in which he were to have this twofold experience simultaneously, in which he were to be at once conscious of his freedom and sensible of his existence, were, at one and the same time, to feel himself matter and come to know himself as mind, then he would in such cases, and in such cases only, have a complete intuition of his human nature, and the object which afforded him this vision would become for him a symbol of his accomplished destiny and, in consequence (since that is only to be attained in the totality of time), serve him as a manifestation of the Infinite.

3. Assuming that cases of this sort could actually occur in

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

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

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

6. Since, moreover, the sense-drive exerts a physical, the form-drive a moral constraint, the first will leave our formal, the second

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

#### FIFTEENTH LETTER

1. I AM drawing ever nearer the goal towards which I have been leading you by a not exactly encouraging path. If you will consent to follow me a few steps further along it, horizons all the wider will unfold and a pleasing prospect perhaps requite you for the labour of the journey.

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

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

4. But because we know how to specify the elements which when combined produce beauty, this does not mean that its genesis has as yet in any way been explained; for that would require us to



understand the actual manner of their combining, this, like all reciprocal action between finite and infinite, remains for ever inaccessible to our probing. Reason, on transcendental grounds, makes the following demand: Let there be a bond of union between the form-drive and the material drive; that is to say, let there be a play-drive, since only the union of reality with form, contingency with necessity, passivity with freedom, makes the concept of human nature complete. Reason must make this demand because it is reason—because it is its nature to insist on perfection and on the abolition of all limitation, and because any exclusive activity on the part of either the one drive or the other leaves human nature incomplete and gives rise to some limitation within it. Consequently, as soon as reason utters the pronouncement: Let humanity exist, it has by that very pronouncement also promulgated the law: Let there be beauty. Experience can provide an answer to the question whether there is such a thing as beauty, and we shall know the answer once experience has taught us whether there is such a thing as humanity. But how there can be beauty, and how humanity is possible, neither reason nor experience can tell us.

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5. Man, as we know, is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively mind. Beauty, as the consummation of his humanity, can therefore be neither exclusively life nor exclusively form. Not mere life, as acute observers, adhering too closely to the testimony of experience, have maintained, and to which the taste of our age would fain degrade it; not mere form, as it has been adjudged by philosophers whose speculations led them too far away from experience, or by artists who, philosophizing on beauty, let themselves be too exclusively guided by the needs of their craft.\* It is the object common to both drives, that is to say, the object of the play-drive. This term is fully justified by linguistic usage, which is wont to designate as 'play' everything which is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes no kind of constraint either from within

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

or from without. Since, in contemplation of the beautiful, the psyche finds itself in a happy medium between the realm of law and the sphere of physical exigency, it is, precisely because it is divided between the two, removed from the constraint of the one as of the other. The material drive, like the formal drive, is wholly earnest in its demands; for, in the sphere of knowledge, the former is concerned with the reality, the latter with the necessity of things; while in the sphere of action, the first is directed towards the preservation of life, the second towards the maintenance of dignity: both, therefore, towards truth and towards perfection. But life becomes of less consequence once human dignity enters in, and duty ceases to be a constraint once inclination exerts its pull; similarly our psyche accepts the reality of things, or material truth, with greater freedom and serenity once this latter encounters formal truth, or the law of necessity, and no longer feels constrained by abstraction once this can be accompanied by the immediacy of intuition. In a word: by entering into association with ideas all reality loses its earnestness because it then becomes of small account; and by coinciding with feeling necessity divests itself of its earnestness because it then becomes of light weight.

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

7. But how can we speak of mere play, when we know that it is precisely play and play alone, which of all man's states and conditions is the one which makes him whole and unfolds both sides of his nature at once? What you, according to your idea of the matter, call limitation, I, according to mine—which I have justified by proof—call expansion. I, therefore, would prefer to put it exactly the opposite way round and say: the agreeable, the good, the perfect, with these man is merely in earnest; but with beauty

he plays. True, we must not think here of the various forms of *play*, which are in vogue in actual life, and are usually directed to very material objects. But then in actual life we should also seek in vain for the kind of beauty with which we are here concerned. The beauty we find in actual existence is precisely what the play-drive we find in actual existence deserves; but with the ideal of Beauty that is set up by Reason, an ideal of the play-drive, too, is enjoined upon man, which he must keep before his eyes in all his forms of play.

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8. We shall not go far wrong when trying to discover a man's ideal of beauty if we inquire how he satisfies his play-drive. If at the Olympic Games the peoples of Greece delighted in the bloodless combats of strength, speed, and agility, and in the nobler rivalry of talents, and if the Roman people regaled themselves with the death throes of a vanquished gladiator or of his Libyan opponent, we can, from this single trait, understand why we have to seek the ideal forms of a Venus, a Juno, an Apollo, not in Rome, but in Greece.\* Reason, however, declares: The beautiful is to be neither mere life, nor mere form, but living form, i.e., Beauty; for it imposes upon man the double law of absolute formality and absolute reality. Consequently Reason also makes the pronouncement: With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play.

9. For, to mince matters no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays. This proposition, which at the moment may sound like a paradox, will take on both weight and depth of meaning once we have got as far as applying it to the two-fold earnestness of duty and of destiny. It will, I promise you, prove capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful, and

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

of the still more difficult art of living. But it is, after all, only in philosophy that the proposition is unexpected; it was long ago alive and operative in the art and in the feeling of the Greeks, the most distinguished exponents of both; only they transferred to Olympus what was meant to be realized on earth. Guided by the truth of that same proposition, they banished from the brow of the blessed gods all the earnestness and effort which furrow the cheeks of mortals, no less than the empty pleasures which preserve the smoothness of a vacuous face; freed those ever-contented beings from the bonds inseparable from every purpose, every duty, every care, and made idleness and indifference the enviable portion of divinity—merely a more human name for the freest, most sublime state of being. Both the material constraint of natural laws and the spiritual constraint of moral laws were resolved in their higher concept of Necessity, which embraced both worlds at once; and it was only out of the perfect union of those two necessities that for them true Freedom could proceed. Inspired by this spirit, the Greeks effaced from the features of their ideal physiognomy, together with inclination, every trace of volition too; or rather they made both indiscernible, for they knew how to fuse them in the most intimate union. It is not Grace, nor is it yet Dignity, which speaks to us from the superb countenance of a Juno Ludovisi; it is neither the one nor the other because it is both at once. While the woman-god demands our veneration, the god-like woman kindles our love; but even as we abandon ourselves in ecstasy to her heavenly grace, her celestial self-sufficiency makes us recoil in terror. The whole figure reposes and dwells in itself, a creation completely self-contained, and, as if existing beyond space, neither yielding nor resisting; here is no force to contend with force, no frailty where temporality might break in. Irresistibly moved and drawn by those former qualities, kept at a distance by these latter, we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for which mind has no concept nor speech any name.

## SIXTEENTH LETTER

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

2. I observed in one of the preceding Letters—and it follows with strict necessity from the foregoing argument—that we must expect from beauty at once a releasing and a tensing effect: a releasing effect in order to keep both the sense-drive and the form-drive within proper bounds; a tensing effect, in order to keep both at full strength. Ideally speaking, however, these two effects must be reducible to a single effect. Beauty is to release by tensing both natures uniformly, and to tense by releasing both natures uniformly. This already follows from the concept of a reciprocal action, by virtue of which both factors necessarily condition each other and are at the same time conditioned by each other, and the purest product of which is beauty. But experience offers us no single example of such perfect reciprocal action; for here it will always happen that, to a greater or lesser degree, a preponderance entails a deficiency, and a deficiency a preponderance. What, then, in the case of ideal beauty is but a distinction which is made in the mind, is in the

case of actual beauty a difference which exists in fact. Ideal Beauty, though one and indivisible, exhibits under different aspects a melting as well as an energizing attribute; but in experience there actually is a melting and an energizing type of beauty. So it is, and so it always will be, in all those cases where the Absolute is set within the limitations of time, and the ideas of Reason have to be realized in and through human action. Thus man, when he reflects, can conceive of Virtue, Truth, Happiness; but man, when he acts, can only practise virtues, comprehend truths, and enjoy happy hours. To refer these experiences back to those abstractions—to replace morals by Morality, happy events by Happiness, the facts of knowledge by Knowledge itself—that is the business of physical and moral education. To make Beauty out of a multiplicity of beautiful objects is the task of aesthetic education.

3. Energizing beauty can no more preserve man from a certain residue of savagery and hardness than melting beauty can protect him from a certain degree of effeminacy and enervation. For since the effect of the former is to brace his nature, both physical and moral, and to increase its elasticity and power of prompt reaction, it can happen all too easily that the increased resistance of temperament and character will bring about a decrease in receptivity to impressions; that our gentler humanity, too, will suffer the kind of repression which ought only to be directed at our brute nature, and our brute nature profit from an increase of strength which should only be available to our free Person. That is why in periods of vigour and exuberance we find true grandeur of conception coupled with the gigantic and the extravagant, sublimity of thought with the most frightening explosions of passion; that is why in epochs of discipline and form we find nature as often suppressed as mastered, as often outraged as transcended. And because the effect of melting beauty is to relax our nature, physical and moral, it happens no less easily that energy of feeling is stifled along with violence of appetite, and that character too shares the loss of power which should only overtake passion. That is why in so-called refined epochs, we see gentleness not infrequently degenerating into softness, plainness into platitude, correctness into emptiness, liberality into

arbitrariness, lightness of touch into frivolity, calmness into apathy, and the most despicable caricatures in closest proximity to the most splendid specimens of humanity. The man who lives under the constraint of either matter or forms is, therefore, in need of melting beauty; for he is moved by greatness and power long before he begins to be susceptible to harmony and grace. The man who lives under the indulgent sway of taste is in need of energizing beauty; for he is only too ready, once he has reached a state of sophisticated refinement, to trifle away the strength he brought with him from the state of savagery.

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

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