

LETTERS ON THE AESTHETICAL EDUCATION OF MAN

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LETTER XII.

12.1

We are impelled to fulfill this twofold task, making the necessary *in us* pass into reality and in making reality *outside us* subject to the law of necessity, by two opposing forces that it is entirely proper to term drives because they drive us to realize their object. The first of these drives, which I shall call the *sensuous*, issues from the physical existence of man or from his sensuous nature and has as its concern to set him within the limits of time, and to make him material—not to give him matter, for that involves a free activity of the person, which receives matter and distinguishes it from itself. By matter here we understand nothing but the change or reality that fills time. Consequently this drive demands that there should be change, and that time should have content. This condition, consisting merely of time with content, is called sensation, and it is through it alone that physical existence makes itself known.

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12.4

The second drive, which may be named the *form drive*, issues from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and strives to set free, and bring harmony into the diversity of his manifestations, and to assert his personality through all the changes of his state. As this personality, being an absolute and indivisible unity, can never be in contradiction with itself, *as we are ourselves forever*, this drive, 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 annuls time, annuls 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 presses for truth and justice.

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LETTER XIII.

13.1

At first sight, nothing appears more opposed than the tendencies of these two drives; one pressing for change, the other for immutability,

and yet it is these two notions that exhaust the concept of humanity, and a third *fundamental drive*, that might mediate between them, is an utterly unthinkable concept. How then are we to restore the unity of human nature, a unity that appears completely dissolved by this primitive and radical opposition?

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LETTER XIV.

14.1

We have now been led to the idea of such an interplay between the two drives that the action of the one at the same time establishes and limits the action of the other, and that each of them by itself arrives at its highest manifestation just because the other is active.

14.2

The reciprocal relation of the two drives is admittedly merely a problem advanced of reason that man is in a position to solve fully only in the perfection of his being. It is in the strictest signification of the term: *the idea of his humanity*, consequently, an infinite to which he can approach nearer and nearer in the course of time, but without ever reaching it. "He should not strive for form at the expense of his reality, nor for reality at the expense of form; he should rather seek absolute being by means of a determinate being, and determinate being by means of an infinite being. He should set a world before himself because he is a person, and he should be a person because he faces a world. He should feel because he is conscious of himself, and he should be consciousness of himself because he feels." He cannot come to know that he really conforms to this idea and is, consequently, human in the fullest sense of the word so long as he satisfies only *one* of these two drives exclusively or satisfies them one after another; for so long as he only feels, his personhood or absolute existence remains a secret to him, and so long as he only thinks, his temporal existence or condition remains a secret. But if there were cases in which he could have this twofold experience *at the same time*, in which he were at once the conscious of his freedom and the sensible of his existence, in which he were at once to feel himself matter and come to know himself as spirit, in such cases, and absolutely in them alone, he would have a complete intuition of his humanity, and the object that provided him this intuition would serve him as a symbol of his *accomplished destiny* and consequently—since this can be reached only in the fullness of time—serve him as a representation of the infinite.

14.3

Assuming that cases of this kind could occur in experience, they would awaken in him a new drive, which, precisely because the other

two drives would co-operate in it, would be opposed to each of them considered individually, and would rightly count as a new drive. The sensuous drive requires that there should be change, that time should have contents; the form drive requires that time should be annulled, that there should be no change. Consequently, the drive in which both of the others act in concert—allow me to call it the *play drive*, till I have justified the term—the play drive would have as its object to annul time *in time*, to reconcile becoming with the absolute being, change with identity.

14.4

The sensuous drive wants to *be* determined, it wishes to receive its object; the form drive wants *itself* to determine, it wants to bring forth its object; the play drive will thus endeavor to receive as it would itself have produced, and to bring forth as sense aspires to receive.

14.5

The sensuous drive excludes from its subject all autonomy and freedom; the form drive excludes all dependence, all passivity. Exclusion of freedom is physical necessity; exclusion of passivity is moral necessity. Both drives thus compel the mind: the former through laws of nature, the latter through reason. Therefore, the play drive, as that in which both act conjointly, will compel the mind at once morally and physically. Hence, as it annuls all contingency, also annuls all constraint, and will set man free physically and morally. When we embrace with passion someone who deserves our contempt, we feel painfully the *constraint of nature*. When we have a hostile feeling towards another who compells our esteem, we feel painfully the *constraint of reason*. But as soon as this person at once interests our inclination and wins our respect, both the compulsion of feeling and the compulsion of reason vanish, and we begin to love—that is to say, to play at once with our inclination and our respect.

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LETTER XV.

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15.2

The object of the sensuous drive, expressed in a universal conception, is named Life in the widest acceptation; a conception that expresses all material existence and all that is immediately present in the senses. The object of the form drive, expressed in a universal conception, is called shape or form, as well in an exact as in an inexact acceptation; a conception that embraces all formal qualities of things and all relations of the same to the thinking powers. The object of the play drive, represented in a general statement, may therefore bear the name of liv-

ing form; a term that serves to describe all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, and what people style, in the widest sense, beauty.

15.3

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.

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LETTER XXIII.

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23.2

The transition from the passivity of sensuousness to the activity of thought and of will can be effected only by the intermediary state of aesthetic liberty; and though in itself this state decides nothing respecting our opinions and our sentiments, and therefore it leaves our intellectual and moral value entirely problematical, it is, however, the necessary condition without which we should never attain to an opinion or a sentiment. In a word, there is no other way to make a reasonable being out of a sensuous man than by making him first aesthetic.

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LETTER XXIV.

24.1

Accordingly three different moments or stages of development can be distinguished, which the individual man, as well as the whole race, must of necessity traverse in a determinate order if they are to fulfil the circle of their determination. No doubt, the separate periods can be lengthened or shortened, through accidental causes which are inherent either in the influence of external things or under the free caprice of men: but neither of them can be overstepped, and the order of their sequence cannot be inverted either by nature or by the will. Man, in his physical condition, suffers only the power of nature; he gets rid of this power in the aesthetical condition, and he rules them in the moral state.

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LETTER XXV.

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25.7

Henceforth we need no longer be embarrassed to find a transition from dependent feeling to moral liberty, because beauty reveals to us the fact that they can perfectly coexist, and that to show himself a spirit, man need not escape from matter. But if on one side he is free, even in his relation with a visible world, as the fact of beauty teaches, and if on the other side freedom is something absolute and supersensuous, as its idea necessarily implies, the question is no longer how man succeeds in raising himself from the finite to the absolute, and opposing himself in his thought and will to sensuality, as this has already been produced in the fact of beauty. In a word, we have no longer to ask how he passes from virtue to truth which is already included in the former, but how he opens a way for himself from vulgar reality to aesthetic reality, and from the ordinary feelings of life to the perception of the beautiful.

LETTER XXVI.

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26.4

Extreme stupidity and extreme intelligence have a certain affinity in only seeking the real and being completely insensible to mere appearance. The former is only drawn forth by the immediate presence of an object in the senses, and the second is reduced to a quiescent state only by referring conceptions to the facts of experience. In short, stupidity cannot rise above reality, nor the intelligence descend below truth. Thus, in as far as the want of reality and attachment to the real are only the consequence of a want and a defect, indifference to the real and an interest taken in appearances are a real enlargement of humanity and a decisive step towards culture. In the first place it is the proof of an exterior liberty, for as long as necessity commands and want solicits, the fancy is strictly chained down to the real: it is only when want is satisfied that it develops without hinderance. But it is also the proof of an internal liberty, because it reveals to us a force which, independent of an external substratum, sets itself in motion, and has sufficient energy to remove from itself the solicitations of nature. The reality of things is effected by things, the appearance of things is the work of man, and a soul that takes pleasure in appearance does not take pleasure in what it receives but in what it makes.

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26.7

The play drive likes appearance, and directly it is awakened it is followed by the imitative drive to create which treats appearance as an independent thing. Directly man has come to distinguish the appearance from the reality, the form from the body, he can separate, in fact he has already done so. Thus the faculty of the art of imitation is given with the faculty of form in general. The inclination that draws us to it reposes on another tendency I have not to notice here. The exact period when the drive to art develops depends entirely on the attraction that mere appearance has for men.

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LETTER XXVII.

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27.8

In the midst of the formidable realm of forces, and of the sacred empire of laws, the aesthetic drive to create builds by degrees a third and a joyous realm, that of play and of the appearance, where she emancipates man from fetters, in all his relations, and from all that is named constraint, whether physical or moral.

27.9

If in the dynamic state of rights men mutually move and come into collision as forces, in the moral (ethical) state of duties, man opposes to man the majesty of the laws, and chains down his will. In this realm of the beautiful or the aesthetic state, man ought to appear to man only as a form, and an object of free play. To give freedom through freedom is the fundamental law of this realm.

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27.12

Does such a state of beauty in appearance exist, and where? It must be in every finely-harmonized soul; but as a fact, only in select circles, like the pure ideal of the church and state—in circles where manners are not formed by the empty imitations of the foreign, but by the very beauty of nature; where man passes through all sorts of complications in all simplicity and innocence, neither forced to trench on another's freedom to preserve his own, nor to show grace at the cost of dignity.