

[The following selections revise (*again*) an anonymous 19th century translation in
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LETTERS ON
THE AESTHETICAL EDUCATION
OF MAN

Friedrich Schiller

...

LETTER III.

NATURE starts with man no better than with her other works: she acts for 3.1
him so long as he is unable to act himself as a free intelligence. But what
constitutes his humanity is that he does not rest with what nature has made
of him, but possesses the ability to retrace through his reason the steps nature
had anticipated with him, to convert the work of need into a work of
his free choice, and to elevate physical necessity into moral necessity.

He comes to from his slumber in the senses, recognizes himself as human, 3.2
looks around, and finds himself—in the State. He was thrown in
there by the force of necessity, before he could freely choose this position.
But as a moral person he cannot possibly rest satisfied with this State-
by-necessity that arose from his natural qualities and is only calculated for
that condition—and too bad for him if he could be satisfied!...

This natural State (as every political body can be called whose original 3.3
establishment is derived from forces and not laws) conflicts the moral
man, for whom mere lawfulness is to serve as law, but still it is precisely
sufficient for the physical man, who gives himself laws only in order to
come to terms with brute force. Moreover, the physical man is *actual*, and
the moral man only *problematical*....

The major consideration is, therefore, that physical society *in time* not 3.4
stop for a moment, while moral society *in idea* is forming, that its existence
must not be endangered for the sake of the moral dignity of man....
Therefore, a support must be sought for the continuation of society, which
makes it independent of the natural State that is to be dissolved.

This support is not found in the natural character of man, which, being 3.5
selfish and violent, aims much more at the destruction than the preservation
of society. It is as little to be found in his moral character, which, we
are assuming, has yet to be formed and which, because it is free and *because it is never apparent*,
can never be worked upon or safely counted on by the lawgiver. It is important
therefore to separate the power of choice from the physical character and freedom
from the moral character—it is important to make the former conform with laws
and the latter depend on impressions—it is important to remove the former
farther from matter in order to bring the latter somewhat nearer to it—in order
to produce a third

character that, related to both of those, clears the way for a transition from the rule of mere force to the rule of law and without hindering the development of the moral character but rather serving as a pledge in sensation of a morality that is not visible.

...

LETTER IX.

... All improvement in the political sphere must proceed from the ennobling of character. But, subject to the influence of a barbarous political constitution, how can character become ennobled? To this end, one must seek an instrument that the state does not furnish, and to open sources of it that preserve themselves pure and honest in the midst of political corruption. 9.1

I have now reached the point to which my considerations so far have been striving. The instrument is fine art; sources of it open in its undying models. 9.2

...

LETTER XI.

WHEN abstraction climbs as high as it ever can, it reaches two last concepts at which it must stop and acknowledge 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 *condition*. 11.1

Person and condition, the self and its determinations, which we represent as one and the same thing in the necessary being, are eternally distinct in the finite being. Through all persistence of the person, the condition changes; through all change of condition the person persists. We pass from rest to activity, from emotion to indifference, from assent to contradiction, but *we* always are, and what immediately springs from *ourselves* remains. Only in the absolute subject do all determinations persist *with* the personality because they flow from the personality. All *that* Divinity is, it is just *because* it is; consequently it is everything eternally, because it is eternal. 11.2

Since in man, as a finite being, person and condition are distinct, the condition cannot be founded on the person, nor the person on the condition. If the latter were so, the person would have to change; and were the former so, the condition would have to persist. Thus in each case, either the personality or the finiteness would have to cease. It is not because we think, sense, and will that we are; it is not because we are that we think, sense, and will. We are because we are. We sense, think, and will because there is something other apart from us. 11.3

Consequently the person must be its own ground, because the permanent cannot flow from the change, and thus we have in the first place the 11.4

idea of absolute being grounded in itself—that is, of *freedom*. Condition must have a ground, and as it is not through the person, and is therefore not absolute, it must *result*; and thus, in the second place, we have the condition of all dependent being or becoming—that is, *time*. That time is the condition of all becoming is an identical proposition, for it says nothing but this: that consequence is the condition for something to come forth.

The person which is manifested in the eternally persisting *self*, and only 11.5
in this, cannot become something or begin in time, because rather, inversely, time that must begin in it, because change must have its ground in something permanent. For change to take place, something must change; this something cannot therefore itself be change. When we say the flower blooms and fades, we make the flower the permanent in this transformation and grant it, as it were, a personality, in which these two states are manifested....

Thus the matter of activity, or reality, which the supreme intelligence 11.6
creates from itself, must first be *received* by man; and he does, in fact, receive it, through the medium of perception, as something outside him situated in space and as something within him changing in time. The changing matter within him is accompanied by his never-changing self—and to remain constantly himself in all change, to make all perceptions into experience, that is, into the unity of knowledge, and to make of each of its ways of appearing in time into a law for all time, this is the rule prescribed for man by his rational nature. Only as he changes does he *exist*; only as he remains unchanged does *he* exist. Man, represented in his completion, would therefore be the persistent unity that, in the tides of change, always remains itself.

Now, although an infinite being, a divinity, cannot *become*, still a ten- 11.7
dency ought to be called divine which has for its infinite task the most essential attribute of divinity, the absolute manifestation of capacity (the actuality of all possibilities) and the absolute unity of appearance (necessity of all that is actual). It cannot be disputed that man bears within himself, in his personality, the predisposition to divinity. The way to divinity—if the word way can be applied to what never leads to its end—is opened to him in his *senses*.

His personality, considered in itself and independently of all matter of 11.8
the senses, is nothing but the predisposition for a possible infinite expression; and so long as he neither perceives [*anschaut*] nor feels, he is nothing more than form and empty capacity. His faculty of sensation, considered in itself and independently of all spontaneous activity of the mind, can do nothing more than make him, who without it is mere form, material, but in no way unite matter with him. So long as he only feels, desires, and acts out of mere appetite, he is yet nothing more than *world*, if by this word we understand merely the formless contents of time. To be sure, it is

his faculty of sensation alone that makes his capacity into active power, but it is only his personality that makes his activity his own. In order, therefore, that he not be mere world, he must give form to matter, and in order that he not to be a mere form, he must give actuality to the predisposition that he bears in him. He actualizes form when he creates time and confronts persistence with change, confronts the eternal unity of the self with the diversity of the world; he gives form to matter when he abrogates time again, maintains permanence in alteration and makes the diversity of the world subject to the unity of his self.

Now from this flow tow opposed demands on man, the two fundamental laws of sensuous-rational nature. The first insists on absolute *reality*: he must turn into a world what is mere form, manifest all its predispositions. The second insists on absolute *formality*: he must destroy in him all that is mere world, and reconcile all its variations; in other words, he must externalize all that is internal, and give form to all that is external. Thought of in their highest fulfillment, both tasks lead back to the concept of divinity, which was where I started. 11.9

LETTER XII.

WE are impelled to fulfill this twofold task, to bring the necessary *in us* into actuality and to subjugate the actuality *outside us* 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 *sensory*, issues from the physical existence of man or from his sensory nature and is devoted to setting him within the limits of time and making him matter—not giving him matter, for that takes a free activity of the person, who receives matter and distinguishes it from himself, the persistent. 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. 12.1

...

The second of these drives, which may be named the *form drive*, issues from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and strives to set him free, to bring harmony into the diversity of appearance [*seines Erscheinens*], 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, *since we are, for all eternity, ourselves*, this drive, which tends to maintain personality, can never demand anything but what it must demand to all eternity. It therefore decides for always what it decides for now and orders for 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 actual to be necessary 12.4

and eternal the eternal and necessary to be actual; in other words, it presses for truth and right.

...

LETTER XIII.

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 drives that exhaust the concept of humanity, and a third *fundamental drive*, that could mediate between them, is an utterly unthinkable concept. How then are we to restore the unity of human nature, a unity that appears completely abolished by this primitive and radical opposition? 13.1

It is true that their *tendencies* are contradictory but, what should be noticed, not in *the same objects*, and things that do not meet cannot come into collision. No doubt the sensory drive demands change; but it does not demand that it should extend to personality and its field, that there should be a change of principles. The form drive presses for unity and persistence—but it does not want the condition to be fixed also with the person himself, that there be identity of sensing...[*] To watch over them and to secure to each one its proper limits is the task of *culture* which, therefore, owes equal justice to both, and has to not only maintain the rational drive against the sensory, but also the latter against the former. Hence its duty is twofold: *first*, to safeguard sensibility against the interventions of freedom; *secondly*, to secure personality against the power of sensation. The former is attained by the cultivation of the faculty of sensing, the latter by cultivation of rational faculty. 13.2

[* At this point, Schiller emphasizes that the drives are not by nature opposed and, in a long footnote, argues that it would be a mistake to subordinate one to the other and, in particular, that matter is required in addition to form. He goes on to assert that this is consistent with the spirit (in not always the letter) of Kant's work. In speaking of Kant's spirit, he may have in mind such things as the slogan "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind" from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75.]

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LETTER XIV.

WE have now been led to the idea of an interaction of the two drives which is such that the effectiveness of one at the same time founds and limits the action of the other, and that each of them by itself arrives at its highest manifestation just through the other being active. 14.1

The reciprocal relation of the two drives is admittedly merely a task for 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, something infinite 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 through a determinate being, 14.2

and determinate being through an infinite being. He should set a world before himself because he is a person, and he should be a person because a world stands before him. He should sense because he is conscious of himself, and he should be consciousness of himself because he senses.” He cannot discover 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 senses, his person 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 acquired this twofold experience *simultaneously*, in which he was at once conscious of his freedom and felt his existence, in which he at once felt himself as matter and came to know himself as spirit, in such cases, and simply 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 fulness of time—serve as a representation of the infinite.

Assuming that cases of this kind could occur in experience, they would 14.3
awaken in him a new drive, which, precisely because the other two drives would cooperate in it, would be opposed to each of them considered individually, and would rightly count as a new drive. The sensory drive requires that there should be change, that time should have content; the form drive requires that time should be annulled, that there should be no change. Consequently, the drive in which both 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.

The sensory drive wants to *be* determined, it wants to receive its object; 14.4
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.

The sensory drive excludes from its subject all autonomy and freedom; 14.5
the form drive excludes all dependence, all passivity. But 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 laws of 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 *coercion of nature*. When we have a hostile feeling towards another who compells our respect, we feel painfully the *coercion 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

him—that is, to play at once with our inclination and our respect.

...

LETTER XV.

...

The object of the sensory drive, expressed in a general concept, is termed *Life* in the widest sense; 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 general concept, is termed *form* [*Gestalt*], in a metaphoric as well as a literal sense, a conception that embraces all formal qualities of things and all relations of these to the intellectual powers. The object of the play drive, represented in a general pattern, may therefore be called *living form*, a term that serves to describe all aesthetic qualities of phenomena, and, in a word, what people call, in the widest sense, *beauty*. 15.2

On this explanation, if it is one, 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 through the architect and sculptor; a man, though he lives and has a form, is far from being a living form on that account. That would take his form being life, and his life being form. As long as we think only of his form, it is lifeless, mere abstraction; as long as we only sense his life, it is formless, mere impression. It is only when his form lives in our sensing, and his life forms in our understanding, that he is living form, and this will everywhere be the case where we judge him to be beautiful. 15.3

...

... [Beauty] is the common object of both drives, that is, of the play drive. This term is completely justified by linguistic usage, which is accustomed to indicate with the word play what is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent and yet neither externally nor internally coerced.... 15.5

But perhaps you have long been tempted to object to me: Does not making the beautiful into mere play degrade it and reduce it to the level of frivolous objects which have for ages held that name? Does it not contradict the rational concept and the dignity of beauty, which is after all regarded as an instrument of culture, to limit it to a *mere game*? and does it not contradict the empirical concept of play, which can coexist with the exclusion of all taste, to limit it merely to beauty? 15.6

But what is meant by a *mere game*, when we know that in all conditions of humanity that it is play, and *only* play, that makes man complete and opens out at the same time his twofold nature? What you call *limitation* according to your representation of the matter, according to mine, which I have justified by proofs, I call *enlargement*. Consequently I should have said exactly the reverse: with the agreeable, with the good, and with the perfect, man is *only* serious, but with beauty he plays. Of course, we must 15.7

not think of the games that are in vogue in actual life and that are commonly directed to very material objects; but in actual life we should also seek in vain for the beauty of which we are here speaking. The actually available beauty is worthy of the actually available play drive; but through the ideal of beauty, which is established by reason, an ideal of the play drive is also presented, which man ought to have before his eyes in all his games.

... Now reason pronounces that the beautiful must be not mere life and not mere form, but rather living form, that is, beauty, inasmuch as it dictates to man the twofold law of absolute formality and absolute reality. Consequently, it also pronounces the aphorism: with beauty, man shall *only play*, and he shall play *only with beauty*. 15.8

For, to say it once for all, man plays only when, in the full meaning of the word, he is human, and *he is fully human only when he plays*. This proposition, which at this moment perhaps appears paradoxical, will receive a great and deep meaning when we reach the point of applying it to the twofold seriousness of duty and of destiny. It will, I promise you, carry the whole edifice of aesthetic art and the still more difficult art of life.... 15.9

...

LETTER XVIII.

...

... Beauty combines the two opposed conditions of sensing and thinking, and yet there is absolutely no mean between them. The former is through experience, the latter through reason immediately certain. 18.2

This is the real point to which the whole question of beauty leads, and if we succeed in settling this point in a satisfactory way, we have at the same time found the clue that will conduct us through the whole labyrinth of aesthetics. 18.3

But this concerns two very different operations, which must necessarily support each other in this inquiry. Beauty, it is said, combines two conditions with one another which *are opposed to each other* and can never be one. We must start from this opposition; we must grasp and recognize it in their full purity and strictness, so that both conditions are separated in the most definite manner; otherwise we mix, but we do not unite. Secondly, it is said that 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 abrogated. Our second business is therefore to make this connection perfect, to carry it 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 isolate, but do not unite. All the disputes that have ever prevailed and partly still prevail in the philosophical world respecting the conception of beauty have no other origin than in commencing the in- 18.4

quiry without a sufficiently strict distinction or not carrying it out fully to a pure union....

LETTER XIX.

TWO different states of passive and active determinability can be distinguished in man and so can just as many states of passive and active determination. The explanation of this proposition leads us most readily to our goal. 19.1

The condition of the human spirit *before* any determination that is given it by the impressions of the senses is an unlimited determinability. The infinity of time and space is given to its imagination for its free use; and, because by assumption nothing is settled in this wide domain of the possible, and therefore nothing is excluded from it, this condition of undetermination can be termed an *empty infinity*, which must not by any means be confounded with an infinite emptiness. 19.2

Now his sense is to be stirred, and from the infinite set of possible determinations one alone becomes actual. A representation is to spring up in him. That which, in the previous state of mere determinability, was only an empty capacity becomes now an active power that acquires a content; but, at the same time, as an active power, it receives a limit after having been, as a mere capacity, unlimited. Reality thus exists now, but infinity is lost. 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 *positing* or actual establishment by *negation* or exclusion, at determination by the abrogation of our free determinability. 19.3

But mere exclusion would never in all eternity become a reality, nor would a mere sensory impression ever in all eternity become a representation, if there were not something available *from which* it was excluded, if by an absolute act of the mind the negation were not related to something positive and out of non-position arose opposition; this act of the mind is styled judging or thinking, and the result is called *thought*. 19.4

Before we determine a place in space, there is no space for us; but without absolute space we could never determine a place. It is the same with time. Before we have an instant, there is no time at all for us; but without infinite time we would never have a representation of an instant. Thus we can, of course, only arrive at the whole by the part, at the unlimited only through limitation; but we also only arrive at the part through the whole, at limitation only through the unlimited. 19.5

It follows from this, that when it is maintained of beauty that it mediates for man a transition from sensing to thought, this must not be understood to mean that beauty can fill up the gap that separates sensing from thought, the passive from the active. This gap is infinite; and, without the interposition of a new and independent faculty, nothing general to issue in 19.6

all eternity from the individual, nothing necessary from the contingent, nothing constant from the momentary. Thought is the direct action of this absolute faculty, which, admittedly, can only be manifested in connection with the senses, but which in this manifestation depends so little on the sensory that it rather reveals itself in an opposition to it. The independence with which it acts excludes every foreign influence; and it is not insofar as it *helps* thought—which contains a manifest contradiction—but only insofar as it procures for the intellectual faculties the freedom to manifest themselves in conformity with their own laws that the beautiful can become a means of leading man from matter to form, from sensing to laws, from a limited to an absolute existence.

...

A necessity *outside us* determines our condition, our existence in time, by means of sensation. The latter is quite involuntary, and as it acts on us we are necessarily passive. In the same manner a necessity *inside us* awakens our personality, at the command of that sensation and by opposition to it; for self-consciousness cannot depend on the will, which presupposes it. This primitive manifestation of personality is not to our credit and its privation is not a defect in us.... It is thus that, wholly without act of the subject, sensation and self-consciousness arise, and the origin of both lies as far beyond our volition as it lies beyond our sphere of knowledge. 19.11

But as soon as these two faculties have passed into action, and man has, through the medium of sensation, experience of a determinate existence, and through the medium of consciousness his own absolute existence, the two fundamental drives will be active with their objects. The sensory drive is awakened with the experience of life (with the beginning of the individual), the rational drive with the experience of law (with the beginning of personality); and it is only when these two inclinations have come into existence that his humanity established. Until this happens, everything takes place in man according to the law of necessity; but now the hand of *nature* leaves him, and it is *his* business to maintain the humanity to which nature established and disclosed in him. As soon then as the two opposed fundamental drives are active in him, both lose their constraint, and the opposition of two necessities gives birth to *freedom*.* 19.12

* In order to prevent all misinterpretation, I will state that, whenever I speak here of freedom, I do not mean the freedom which necessarily attaches to man regarded as intelligence, and which can neither be given to, nor taken from him; but the freedom which is based on his mixed nature. By simply acting rationally, man displays a freedom of the first sort; by acting rationally within material limits, and acting materially under the laws of reason, he displays a freedom of the second sort. The latter might be accounted for simply as a natural possibility of the former.

...

LETTER XXI.

THERE is, as I remarked in the beginning of the foregoing letter, a twofold 21.1

condition of determinability and a twofold condition of determination. And now I can clarify this proposition.

The mind is determinable only insofar as it is not at all determined; it is, however, determinable also, insofar as it is not exclusively determined; that is, if it is not confined in its determination. The former is mere lack of determination (it is without limits because it is without reality); the latter is aesthetic determinability (it has no limits because it unites all reality). 21.2

The mind is determined, insofar as it is at all limited; but it is also determined because it limits itself of its own absolute capacity. It finds itself in the former position when it senses, in the second when it thinks. Accordingly, what thought is in relation to determination the aesthetic constitution is in relation to determinability. The former is a limitation from internal infinite power, the latter a negation from internal infinite abundance. Just as sensing and thought touch in a single point, that in both states the mind determines, that man is exclusively something—either individual or person—but are otherwise infinitely separate from each other; just in the same manner the aesthetic determinability coincides with the mere lack of determination in a single point, that both exclude every determined existence, while, in all other points, are as everything and nothing, they are therefore infinitely different. If, therefore, the latter, undetermination by deficiency, is conceived as an *empty infinity*, the aesthetic freedom of determination, which forms the proper counterpart to the former, can be considered as a *full infinity*; an idea which agrees exactly with what the foregoing inquiry has taught. 21.3

Man is therefore *null* in the aesthetic condition, if we give attention to a single result and not to the whole faculty and hold in regard the absence in him of special determination. We must therefore grant to be wholly right those who pronounce the beautiful, and the mood in which it places the mind, as entirely indifferent and unfruitful in regard to *knowledge* and *attitude*. They are perfectly right; for it is certain that beauty gives no single result, either for the understanding or for the will; it leads to no single intellectual or moral purpose; it discovers no single truth, helps us fulfil no 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 possible for him to make of himself what he will—that the freedom to be what he ought to be is restored perfectly to him. 21.4

But just by this something infinite is attained. For as soon as we remember that freedom is taken from man by the one-sided compulsion of nature in sensing, and by the exclusive legislation of the reason in thinking, we must regard the capacity restored to him by the aesthetical disposition as the highest of all gifts, as the gift of humanity. Certainly, he possesses this capacity for humanity, before every definite condition in which 21.5

he may be placed. But, as a matter of fact, he loses it with every determinate condition into which he comes; 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 no mere poetical license, but also philosophically correct, 21.6 if we call beauty our second creator. For, although she only makes humanity possible for us, and, for the rest, puts it to our free will to what extent we will make it actual, she has this in common with our original creator, nature, which has imparted to us nothing further than the 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 22.1 upon in one respect as *null*—as soon, that is, as we confine our view to separate and determined operations—it is to be looked upon in another respect as a state of the *highest reality*, in so far as we attend to the absence of all limits and the sum of powers which act in community in it.... Every other condition into which we can come refers us to a previous condition, and requires for its solution a following one; only the aesthetic is a 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.

... If we have surrendered ourselves to the enjoyment of genuine 22.2 beauty, we are at such a moment of our passive and active powers in the same degree master, and we shall turn with ease to the serious and to the playful, to rest and to movement, to submission and to resistance, to abstract thought and to perception.

This high equanimity and freedom of mind, united with power and 22.3 vigour, is the disposition in which a true work of art ought to leave us, and there is no better test of true aesthetic excellence. If after an enjoyment of this kind we find ourselves specially disposed to a particular mode of feeling or action, and unfit for other modes, this serves as an infallible proof that we have not experienced any *pure aesthetic* effect, whether this is owing to the object or to our own mode of feeling or, as generally happens, to both together.

As in reality no purely aesthetical effect can be met with—for man can 22.4 never leave his dependence on material forces—the excellence of a work of art can only consist in its greater approximation to that ideal of aesthetic purity, and however we may enhance the freedom of this effect, we shall always leave it in a specific mood and with a particular direction. The more general the mood and the less narrow the direction presented to our mind by a definite genre of art and by a definite work of that genre, the nobler is that genre and the more excellent such a product. One can try

this with works in various arts, and also with different works in the same branch. We leave beautiful music with our feelings excited, a beautiful poem with a quickened imagination, a beautiful statue or building with an awakened understanding; but someone who invited us to abstract thinking immediately after a high musical enjoyment, or to attend to a prosaic affair of common life immediately after a high poetical enjoyment, or to kindle our imagination and astonish our feelings immediately after inspecting a fine statue or edifice would not have chosen a good moment. The reason of this is, that music, *by its material*, even when most spiritual, presents a greater affinity with the senses than is permitted by aesthetic liberty; it is because even the most happy poetry, having the arbitrary and contingent play of the imagination *for its medium*, always shares in it more than the intimate necessity of the really beautiful allows; it is because the best sculpture touches on severe science *by what is determinateness of its concept*. However, these particular affinities are lost in proportion as the works of these three kinds of art rise to a greater elevation, and it is a natural and necessary consequence of their perfection, that, without confounding their objective limits, the different arts come to resemble each other more and more, *in the action which they exercise on the mind*. At its highest degree of ennobling, music ought to become a form, and act on us with the calm power of an classical statue; in its most elevated perfection, plastic art [e.g. sculpture or architecture] ought to become music and move us by the immediate action exercised on the mind by the senses; in its most complete development, poetry ought both to stir us powerfully like music and like plastic art to surround us with a peaceful clarity. In each art, the perfect style consists exactly in knowing how to remove specific limits, while sacrificing at the same time the particular advantages of the art, and to give it by a wise use of what belongs to it specially a more general character.

Nor is it only the limits inherent in the specific character of each kind of art that the artist ought to overstep in putting his hand to the work; he must also triumph over those which are inherent in the particular subject of which he treats. In a really beautiful work of art, the substance ought to be inoperative, the form should do everything; for by the form the whole man is acted on; the substance acts on nothing but isolated forces. Thus, however vast and sublime it may be, the substance always exercises a restrictive action on the mind, and true aesthetic liberty can only be expected from the form. Consequently the true search of the matter consists in destroying matter by the form; and the triumph of art is great in proportion as it overcomes matter and maintains its sway over those who enjoy its work. It is great particularly in destroying matter when most imposing, ambitious, and attractive, when therefore matter has most power to produce the effect proper to it, or, again, when it leads those who consider it more closely to enter directly into relation with it. The mind of the specta-

22.5

tor and of the hearer must remain perfectly free and intact; it must issue pure and entire from the magic circle of the artist, as from the hands of the Creator. The most frivolous subject ought to be treated in such a way that we preserve the faculty to exchange it immediately for the most serious work. The arts which have passion for their object, as a tragedy for example, do not present a difficulty here; for, in the first place, these arts are not entirely free, because they are in the service of a particular end (the pathetic), and then no connoisseur will deny that even in this class a work is perfect in proportion as amidst the most violent storms of passion it respects the liberty of the soul. There is a fine art of passion, but an impassioned fine art is a contradiction in terms, for the infallible effect of the beautiful is emancipation from the passions. The idea of an instructive fine art (didactic art) or improving (moral) art is no less contradictory, for nothing agrees less with the idea of the beautiful than to give a determinate tendency to the mind.

However, from the fact that a work produces effects only by its substance, it must not always be inferred that there is a want of form in this work; this conclusion may quite as well testify to a want of form in the observer. If his mind is too stretched or too relaxed, if it is only accustomed to receive things either by the senses or the intelligence, even in the most perfect combination, it will only stop to look at the parts, and it will only see matter in the most beautiful form. Only sensible of the coarse elements, he must first destroy the aesthetic organization of a work to find enjoyment in it, and carefully disinter the details which genius has caused to vanish, with infinite art, in the harmony of the whole. The interest he takes in the work is either solely moral or exclusively physical; the only thing wanting to it is to be exactly what it ought to be—aesthetical. The readers of this class enjoy a serious and pathetic poem as they do a sermon: a simple and playful work, as an inebriating draught; and if on the one hand they have so little taste as to demand edification from a tragedy or from an epos, even such as the “Messias,” on the other hand they will be infallibly scandalized by a piece after the fashion of Anacreon and Catullus. 22.6

LETTER XXIII.

I TAKE up the thread of my research, which I broke off only to apply the principles laid down to practical art and the appreciation of its works. 23.1

The transition from the passive state of sensation to the active one of thought and will can thus be effected only by the intermediary state of aesthetic liberty; and, though in itself this state decides nothing respecting either our insights or our dispositions, and therefore it leaves our intellectual and moral value utterly problematical, it is, however, the necessary condition without which we should never attain to an insight or a disposition. In a word, there is no other way to make the sensuous man rational 23.2

than by making him first aesthetic.

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LETTER XXIV.

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 fill the whole range of their destiny. Through accidental reasons lying either in the influence of external things or under the free choice of men, the separate periods can no doubt be now lengthened, now shortened, but none 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* state, suffers only the power of nature; he shakes off this power in the *aesthetical* state, and he masters it in the *moral* state. 24.1

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LETTER XXV.

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Henceforth we need no longer be in need of finding a transition from dependent sensation 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 he is already free, even in his community with sensibility, as the fact of beauty teaches, and if freedom is something absolute and supersensible, as its concept necessarily implies, the question is no longer how man succeeds in raising himself from the limited to the absolute, in opposing himself in his thought and will to sensibility, as this has already been occurred in beauty. In a word, we have no longer to ask how he passes from beauty to truth, which as a capacity already lies in the former, but rather how he opens a way for himself from a common actuality to an aesthetic actuality, and from the mere feeling of life to the feeling of beauty. 25.7

LETTER XXVI.

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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 torn from rest by the immediate presence of an object in the senses, and the second is brought to rest only by referring its concepts to the facts of experience. In short, stupidity cannot rise above actuality, nor the intellect come to a stop beneath truth. What the lack of imagination brings about in the former, the absolute mastery of imagination brings about in the latter. Thus, in as far as the need for reality and devotion to the actual are only the consequence of defect, indifference to the real and interest in appearance are a real enlargement of humanity and a decisive step towards culture. In the first place it testifies to an outer lib- 26.4

erty, for as long as necessity commands and need presses, the imagination is bound to the real with strong chains: it is only when want is satisfied that it develops its unhindered capacities. But it is also testifies to an internal liberty, because it reveals to us a force which, independent of external material, sets itself in motion and has sufficient energy to hold off surging matter. The reality of things is the work of things, the appearance of things is the work of people, and a mind that revels in appearance no longer delights in what it receives but rather in what it does.

...

... As soon as he begins to enjoy with the eye, and seeing acquires for him a value in itself, he is aesthetically free and the play drive has developed. 26.6

Equally, as stirs the play drive, which takes pleasure in appearance, there follows the drive to imitate, which treats appearance as a value in itself. As soon as the human has come to distinguish appearance from reality, form from body, he is in a position to separate one from the other, for he has already done so. Thus the capacity for imitative art is given with the capacity for form at all.... 26.7

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LETTER XXVII.

...

In the midst of the formidable realm of forces, and of the sacred realm of laws, the aesthetic drive to create builds unnoticed a third joyous realm of play and of the appearance, where she emancipates man from the fetters of circumstance and delivers him from everything that goes by the name of constraint, whether physical or moral. 27.8

If in the *dynamic* state of rights the human meets another as a force and restricts his activity—if in the *ethical* state of duties, with the majesty of law opposes him and chains his will—in the *aesthetic* state, ought to appear only as form, stand opposite only as object of free play. *To give freedom through freedom* is the fundamental law of this state. 27.9

...

Does such a state of beautiful appearance exist, and where is it to be found? As a need, it must be in every finely tuned soul; as a fact, we might find it only, like the pure church and pure republic, in a few select circles where it is not the empty imitations of foreign customs, but one's own beautiful nature that directs behavior, where man passes through the most complex circumstances with bold simplicity and quiet innocence and has need neither to injure another's freedom to maintain his own nor to throw away dignity in order to display elegance. 27.12