Edmund Burke
A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas Of the Sublime and Beautiful (1756)

1. I. Novelty
THE FIRST and the simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind, is Curiosity. By curiosity, I mean whatever desire we have for, or whatever pleasure we take in, novelty. We see children perpetually running from place to place, to hunt out something new: they catch with great eagerness, and with very little choice, at whatever comes before them; their attention is engaged by everything, because everything has, in that stage of life, the charm of novelty to recommend it. But as those things, which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time, curiosity is the most superficial of all the affections; it changes its object perpetually, it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied; and it has always an appearance of giddiness, restlessness, and anxiety. Curiosity, from its nature, is a very active principle; it quickly runs over the greatest part of its objects, and soon exhausts the variety which is commonly to be met with in nature; the same things make frequent returns, and they return with less and less of any agreeable effect. In short, the occurrences of life, by the time we come to know it a little, would be incapable of affecting the mind with any other sensations than those of loathing and weariness, if many things were not adapted to affect the mind by means of other powers besides novelty in them, and of other passions besides curiosity in ourselves. These powers and passions shall be considered in their place. But whatever these powers are, or upon what principle soever they affect the mind, it is absolutely necessary that they should not be exerted in those things which a daily and vulgar use have brought into a stale unaffecting familiarity. Some degree of novelty must be one of the materials in every instrument which works upon the mind; and curiosity blends itself more or less with all our passions.

1. II. Pain and Pleasure
IT seems then necessary towards moving the passions of people advanced in life to any considerable degree, that the objects designed for that purpose, besides their being in some measure new, should be capable of exciting pain or pleasure from other causes. Pain and pleasure are simple ideas, incapable of definition. People are not liable to be mistaken in their feelings, but they are very frequently wrong in the names they give them, and in their reasonings about them. Many are of the opinion, that pain arises necessarily from the removal of some pleasure; as they think pleasure does from the ceasing or diminution of some pain. For my part, I am rather inclined to imagine, that pain and pleasure, in their most simple and natural manner of affecting, are each of a positive nature, and by no means necessarily dependent on each other for their existence. The human mind is often, and I think it is for the most part, in a state neither of pain nor pleasure, which I call a state of indifference. When I am carried from this state into a state of actual pleasure, it does not appear necessary that I should pass through the medium of any sort of pain. If in such a state of indifference, or ease, or tranquillity, or call it what you please, you were to be suddenly entertained with a concert of music; or suppose some object of a fine shape, and bright, lively colours, to be presented before you; or imagine your smell is gratified with the fragrance of a rose; or if without any previous thirst you were to drink of some pleasant kind of wine, or to
taste of some sweetmeat without being hungry; in all the several senses, of hearing, smelling and tasting, you undoubtedly find a pleasure; yet if I inquire into the state of your mind previous to these gratifications, you will hardly tell me that they found you in any kind of pain; or, having satisfied these several senses with their several pleasures, will you say that any pain has succeeded, though the pleasure is absolutely over? Suppose on the other hand, a man in the same state of indifference, to receive a violent blow, or to drink of some bitter potion, or to have his ears wounded with some harsh and grating sound; here is no removal of pleasure; and yet here is felt in every sense which is affected, a pain very distinguishable. It may be said, perhaps, that the pain in these cases had its rise from the removal of the pleasure which the man enjoyed before, though that pleasure was of so low a degree as to be perceived only by the removal. But this seems to me a subtilty that is not discoverable in nature. For if, previous to the pain, I do not feel any actual pleasure, I have no reason to judge that any such thing exists; since pleasure is only pleasure as it is felt. The same may be said of pain, and with equal reason. I can never persuade myself that pleasure and pain are mere relations, which can only exist as they are contrasted; but I think I can discern clearly that there are positive pains and pleasures, which do not at all depend upon each other. Nothing is more certain to my own feelings than this. There is nothing which I can distinguish in my mind with more clearness than the three states, of indifference, of pleasure, and of pain. Every one of these I can perceive without any sort of idea of its relation to anything else. Caius is afflicted with a fit of the colic; this man is actually in pain; stretch Caius upon the rack, he will feel a much greater pain: but does this pain of the rack arise from the removal of any pleasure? or is the fit of the colic a pleasure or a pain, just as we are pleased to consider it?

1. III. The Difference Between the Removal of Pain, and Positive Pleasure
WE shall carry this proposition yet a step farther. We shall venture to propose, that pain and pleasure are not only not necessarily dependent for their existence on their mutual diminution or removal, but that, in reality, the diminution or ceasing of pleasure does not operate like positive pain; and that the removal or diminution of pain, in its effect, has very little resemblance to positive pleasure. !The former of these propositions will, I believe, be much more readily allowed than the latter; because it is very evident that pleasure, when it has run its career, sets us down very nearly where it found us. Pleasure of every kind quickly satisfies; and when it is over, we relapse into indifference, or rather we fall into a soft tranquillity, which is tinged with the agreeable colour of the former sensation. I own it is not at first view so apparent, that the removal of a great pain does not resemble positive pleasure; but let us recollect in what state we have found our minds upon escaping some imminent danger, or on being released from the severity of some cruel pain. We have on such occasions found, if I am not much mistaken, the temper of our minds in a tenor very remote from that which attends the presence of positive pleasure; we have found them in a state of much sobriety, impressed with a sense of awe, in a sort of tranquillity shadowed with horror. The fashion of the countenance and the gesture of the body on such occasions is so correspondent to this state of mind, that any person, a stranger to the cause of the appearance, would rather judge us under some consternation, than in the enjoyment of anything like positive pleasure.
Iliad. 480.
As when a wretch, who, conscious of his crime,
Pursued for murder from his native clime,
Just gains some frontier, breathless, pale, amazed;
All gaze, all wonder! 1

!!This striking appearance of the man whom Homer supposes to have just escaped an
imminent danger, the sort of mixed passion of terror and surprise, with which he affects
the spectators, paints very strongly the manner in which we find ourselves affected
upon occasions any way similar. For when we have suffered from any violent emotion,
the mind naturally continues in something like the same condition, after the cause
which first produced it has ceased to operate. The tossing of the sea remains after the
storm; and when this remain of horror has entirely subsided, all the passion, which the
accident raised, subsides along with it; and the mind returns to its usual state of
indifference. In short, pleasure (I mean anything either in the inward sensation, or in the
outward appearance, like pleasure from a positive cause) has never, I imagine, its origin
from the removal of pain or danger.

Note 1. Mr. Locke [Essay on the Human Understanding, l. ii. c. 20, sect. 16] thinks that
the removal or lessening of a pain is considered and operates as a pleasure, and the loss
or diminishing of pleasure as a pain. It is this opinion which we consider here.![ back ]

1. IV. Of Delight and Pleasure as Opposed to Each Other
BUT shall we therefore say, that the removal of pain or its diminution is always simply
painful? or affirm that the cessation or the lessening of pleasure is always attended itself
with a pleasure? By no means. What I advance is no more than this; first, that there are
pleasures and pains of a positive and independent nature; and, secondly, that the
feeling which results from the ceasing or diminution of pain does not bear a sufficient
resemblance to positive pleasure, to have it considered as of the same nature, or to
entitle it to be known by the same name; and, thirdly, that upon the same principle the
removal or qualification of pleasure has no resemblance to positive pain. It is certain
that the former feeling (the removal or moderation of pain) has something in it far from
distressing or disagreeable in its nature. This feeling, in many cases so agreeable, but in
all so different from positive pleasure, has no name which I know; but that hinders not
its being a very real one, and very different from all others. It is most certain that every
species of satisfaction or pleasure, how different soever in its manner of affecting, is of a
positive nature in the mind of him who feels it. The affection is undoubtedly positive;
but the cause may be, as in this case it certainly is, a sort of Privation. And it is very
reasonable that we should distinguish by some term two things so distinct in nature, as
a pleasure that is such simply, and without any relation, from that pleasure which
cannot exist without a relation, and that too a relation to pain. Very extraordinary it
would be, if these affections, so distinguishable in their causes, so different in their
effects, should be confounded with each other, because vulgar use has ranged them
under the same general title. Whenever I have occasion to speak of this species of
relative pleasure, I call it Delight; and I shall take the best care I can to use that word in
no other sense. I am satisfied the word is not commonly used in this appropriated
signification; but I thought it better to take up a word already known, and to limit its
signification, than to introduce a new one, which would not perhaps incorporate so well
with the language. I should never have presumed the least alteration in our words, if
the nature of the language, framed for the purposes of business rather than those of philosophy, and the nature of my subject, that leads me out of the common track of discourse, did not in a manner necessitate me to it. I shall make use of this liberty with all possible caution. As I make use of the world Delight to express the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger; so when I speak of positive pleasure, I shall for the most part call it simply Pleasure.

1. V. Joy and Grief

It must be observed that the cessation of pleasure affects the mind three ways. If it simply ceases, after having continued a proper time, the effect is indifference; if it be abruptly broken off, there ensues an uneasy sense called disappointment; if the object be so totally lost that there is no chance of enjoying it again, a passion arises in the mind, which is called grief. Now there is none of these, not even grief, which is the most violent, that I think has any resemblance to positive pain. The person who grieves, suffers his passion to grow upon him; he indulges it, he loves it: but this never happens in the case of actual pain, which no man ever willingly endured for any considerable time. That grief should be willingly endured, though far from a simply pleasing sensation, is not so difficult to be understood. It is the nature of grief to keep its object perpetually in its eye, to present it in its most pleasurable views, to repeat all the circumstances that attend it, even to the last minuteness; to go back to every particular enjoyment, to dwell upon each, and to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before; to the last minuteness; to go back to every particular enjoyment, to dwell upon each, and to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before; in grief, the pleasure is still uppermost; and the affliction we suffer has no resemblance to absolute pain, which is always odious, and which we endeavor to shake off as soon as possible. The Odyssey of Homer, which abounds with so many natural and affecting images, has none more striking than those which Menelaus raises of the calamitous fate of his friends, and his own manner of feeling it. He owns, indeed, that he often gives himself some intermission from such melancholy reflections; but he observes, too, that, melancholy as they are, they give him pleasure.

Hom. Od. [Greek]. 100.
Still in short intervals of pleasing woe,
Regardful of the friendly dues I owe,
I to the glorious dead, for ever dear,
Indulge the tribute of a grateful tear.

On the other hand, when we recover our health, when we escape an imminent danger, is it with joy that we are affected? The sense on these occasions is far from that smooth and voluptuous satisfaction which the assured prospect of pleasure bestows. The delight which arises from the modifications of pain confesses the stock from whence it sprung, in its solid, strong, and severe nature.

1. VI. Of the Passions Which Belong to Self-Preservation

Most of the ideas which are capable of making a powerful impression on the mind, whether simply of Pain or Pleasure, or of the modifications of those, may be reduced very nearly to these two heads, self-preservation and society; to the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer. The passions which concern self-preservation, turn mostly on pain or danger. The ideas of pain, sickness, and death, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but life and health, though they put us in a
capacity of being affected with pleasure, make no such impression by the simple enjoyment. The passions therefore which are conversant about the preservation of the individual turn chiefly on pain and danger, and they are the most powerful of all the passions.

1. VII. Of the Sublime
WHATEVER is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasure which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy. Nay, I am in great doubt whether any man could be found, who would earn a life of the most perfect satisfaction, at the price of ending it in the torments, which justice inflicted in a few hours on the late unfortunate regicide in France. But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience. The cause of this I shall endeavour to investigate hereafter.

1. VIII. Of the Passions Which Belong to Society
THE OTHER head under which I class our passions, is that of society, which may be divided into two sorts. I. The society of the sexes, which answers the purposes of propagation; and next, that more general society, which we have with men and with other animals, and which we may in some sort be said to have even with the inanimate world. The passions belonging to the preservation of the individual turn wholly on pain and danger: those which belong to generation have their origin in gratifications and pleasures; the pleasure most directly belonging to this purpose is of a lively character, rapturous and violent, and confessedly the highest pleasure of sense; yet the absence of this so great an enjoyment scarce amounts to an uneasiness; and, except at particular times, I do not think it affects at all. When men describe in what manner they are affected by pain and danger, they do not dwell on the pleasure of health and the comfort of security, and then lament the loss of these satisfactions: the whole turns upon the actual pains and horrors which they endure. But if you listen to the complaints of a forsaken lover, you observe that he insists largely on the pleasures which he enjoyed, or hoped to enjoy, and on the perfection of the object of his desires; it is the loss which is always uppermost in his mind. The violent effects produced by love, which has sometimes been even wrought up to madness, is no objection to the rule which we seek to establish. When men have suffered their imaginations to be long affected with any idea, it so wholly engrosses them as to shut out by degrees almost every other, and to break down every partition of the mind which would confine it. Any idea is sufficient for the purpose, as is evident from the infinite variety of causes, which give rise to madness: but this at most can only prove, that the passion of love is capable of
producing very extraordinary effects, not that its extraordinary emotions have any connexion with positive pain.

1. IX. The Final Cause of the Difference Between the Passions Belonging to Self-Preservation and Those Which Regard the Society of the Sexes

THE FINAL cause of the difference in character between the passions which regard self-preservation, and those which are directed to the multiplication of the species, will illustrate the foregoing remarks yet further; and it is, I imagine, worthy of observation even upon its own account. As the performance of our duties of every kind depends upon life, and the performing them with vigour and efficacy depends upon health, we are very strongly affected with whatever threatens the destruction of either: but as we are not made to acquiesce in life and health, the simple enjoyment of them is not attended with any real pleasure, lest, satisfied with that, we should give ourselves over to indolence and inaction. On the other hand, the generation of mankind is a great purpose, and it is requisite that men should be animated to the pursuit of it by some great incentive. It is therefore attended with a very high pleasure; but as it is by no means designed to be our constant business, it is not fit that the absence of this pleasure should be attended with any considerable pain. The difference between men and brutes, in this point, seems to be remarkable. Men are at all times pretty equally disposed to the pleasures of love, because they are to be guided by reason in the time and manner of indulging them. Had any great pain arisen from the want of this satisfaction, reason, I am afraid, would find great difficulties in the performance of its office. But brutes, who obey laws, in the execution of which their own reason has but little share, have their stated seasons; at such times it is not improbable that the sensation from the want is very troublesome, because the end must be then answered, or be missed in many, perhaps for ever; as the inclination returns only with its season.

1. X. Of Beauty

THE PASSION which belongs to generation, merely as such, is lust only. This is evident in brutes, whose passions are more unmixed, and which pursue their purposes more directly than ours. The only distinction they observe with regard to their mates, is that of sex. It is true, that they stick severally to their own species in preference to all others. But this preference, I imagine, does not arise from any sense of beauty which they find in their species, as Mr. Addison supposes, but from a law of some other kind, to which they are subject; and this we may fairly conclude, from their apparent want of choice amongst those objects to which the barriers of their species have confined them. But man, who is a creature adapted to a greater variety and intricacy of relation, connects with the general passion the idea of some social qualities, which direct and heighten the appetite which he has in common with all other animals; and as he is not designed like them to live at large, it is fit that he should have something to create a preference, and fix his choice; and this in general should be some sensible quality; as no other can so quickly, so powerfully, or so surely produce its effect. The object therefore of this mixed passion, which we call love, is the beauty of the sex. Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal beauty. I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them, (and there are many that do so,) they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary.
But to what end, in many cases, this was designed, I am unable to discover; for I see no greater reason for a connexion between man and several animals who are attired in so engaging a manner, than between him and some others who entirely want this attraction, or possess it in a far weaker degree. But it is probable, that Providence did not make even this distinction, but with a view to some great end; though we cannot perceive distinctly what it is, as his wisdom is not our wisdom, nor our ways his ways.

1. XI. Society and Solitude
THE SECOND branch of the social passions is that which administers to society in general. With regard to this, I observe, that society, merely as society, without any particular heightenings, gives us no positive pleasure in the enjoyment; but absolute and entire solitude, that is, the total and perpetual exclusion from all society, is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived. Therefore in the balance between the pleasure of general society and the pain of absolute solitude, pain is the predominant idea. But the pleasure of any particular social enjoyment outweighs very considerably the uneasiness caused by the want of that particular enjoyment; so that the strongest sensations relative to the habitudes of particular society are sensations of pleasure. Good company, lively conversation, and the endearments of friendship, fill the mind with great pleasure; a temporary solitude, on the other hand, is itself agreeable. This may perhaps prove that we are creatures designed for contemplation as well as action; since solitude as well as society has its pleasures; as from the former observation we may discern, that an entire life of solitude contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror.

1. XII. Sympathy, Imitation, and Ambition
UNDER this denomination of society, the passions are of a complicated kind, and branch out into a variety of forms, agreeably to that variety of ends they are to serve in the great chain of society. The three principal links in this chain are sympathy, imitation, and ambition.

1. XIII. Sympathy
ITis by the first of these passions that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost anything which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected; so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which regard self-preservation, and turning upon pain may be a source of the sublime or it may turn upon ideas of pleasure; and then whatever has been said of the social affections, whether they regard society in general, or only some particular modes of it, may be applicable here. It is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself. It is a common observation, that objects which in the reality would shock, are in tragical, and such like representations, the source of a very high species of pleasure. This, taken as a fact, has been the cause of much reasoning. The satisfaction has been commonly attributed, first, to the comfort we receive in considering that so melancholy a story is no more than a fiction; and, next, to the contemplation of our own freedom from the evils which we see represented. I am afraid it is a practice much too common in inquiries of this nature, to attribute the cause of feelings which merely arise from the mechanical structure of our
bodies, or from the natural frame and constitution of our minds, to certain conclusions of the reasoning faculty on the objects presented to us; for I should imagine, that the influence of reason in producing our passions is nothing near so extensive as it is commonly believed.

1. XIV The Effects of Sympathy in the Distresses of Others
TO examine this point concerning the effect of tragedy in a proper manner, we must previously consider how we are affected by the feelings of our fellow-creatures in circumstances of real distress. I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others; for let the affection be what it will in appearance, if it does not make us shun such objects, if on the contrary it induces us to approach them, if it makes us dwell upon them, in this case I conceive we must have a delight or pleasure of some species or other in contemplating objects of this kind. Do we not read the authentic histories of scenes of this nature with as much pleasure as romances or poems, where the incidents are fictitious? The prosperity of no empire, nor the grandeur of no king, can so agreeably affect in the reading, as the ruin of the state of Macedon, and the distress of its unhappy prince. Such a catastrophe touches us in history as much as the destruction of Troy does in fable. Our delight, in cases of this kind, is very greatly heightened, if the sufferer be some excellent person who sinks under an unworthy fortune. Scipio and Cato are both virtuous characters; but we are more deeply affected by the violent death of the one, and the ruin of the great cause he adhered to, than with the deserved triumphs and uninterrupted prosperity of the other; for terror is a passion which always produce delight when it does not press too closely; and pity is a passion accompanied with pleasure, because it arises from love and social affection. Whenever we are formed by nature to any active purpose, the passion which animates us to it is attended with delight, or a pleasure of some kind, let the subject-matter be what it will; and as our Creator has designed that we should be united by the bond of sympathy, he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight; and there most where our sympathy is most wanted,—in the distresses of others. If this passion was simply painful, we would shun with the greatest care all persons and places that could excite such a passion; as some, who are so far gone in indolence as not to endure any strong impression, actually do. But the case is widely different with the greater part of mankind; there is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity; so that whether the misfortune is before our eyes, or whether they are turned back to it in history, it always touches with delight. This is not an unmixed delight, but blended with no small uneasiness. The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer; and all this antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes without our concurrence.

1. XV. Of the Effects of Tragedy
IT is thus in real calamities. In imitated distresses the only difference is the pleasure resulting from the effects of imitation; for it is never so perfect, but we can perceive it is imitation, and on that principle are somewhat pleased with it. And indeed in some cases we derive as much or more pleasure from that source than from the thing itself. But then I imagine we shall be much mistaken, if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to the consideration that tragedy is a deceit, and its representations no realities. The nearer it approaches the reality, and the farther it
removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect is its power. But be its power of
what kind it will, it never approaches to what it represents. Choose a day on which to
represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite
actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations, unite the greatest efforts of
poetry, painting, and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the
moment when their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state
criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a
moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of
the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy. I believe that this
notion of our having a simple pain in the reality, yet a delight in the representation,
arises from hence, that we do not sufficiently distinguish what we would by no means
choose to do, from what we should be eager enough to see if it was once done. The
delight in seeing things, which, so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see
redressed. This noble capital, the pride of England and of Europe, I believe no man is so
strangely wicked as to desire to see destroyed by a conflagration or an earthquake,
though he should be removed himself to the greatest distance from the danger. But
suppose such a fatal accident to have happened, what numbers from all parts would
crowd to behold the ruins, and amongst many who would have been content never to
have seen London in its glory! Nor is it, either in real or fictitious distresses, our
immunity from them which produces our delight; in my own mind I can discover
nothing like it. I apprehend that this mistake is owing to a sort of sophism, by which we
are frequently imposed upon; it arises from our not distinguishing between what is
indeed a necessary condition to our doing or suffering anything in general, and what is
the cause of some particular act. If a man kills me with a sword, it is a necessary
condition to this that we should have been both of us alive before the fact; and yet it
would be absurd to say, that our being both living creatures was the cause of his crime
and of my death. So it is certain, that it is absolutely necessary my life should be out of
any imminent hazard, before I can take a delight in the sufferings of others, real or
imaginary, or indeed in anything else from any cause whatsoever. But then it is a
sophism to argue from thence, that this immunity is the cause of my delight either on
these or on any occasions. No one can distinguish such a cause of satisfaction in his own
mind, I believe; nay, when we do not suffer any very acute pain, nor are exposed to any
imminent danger of our lives, we can feel for others, whilst we suffer ourselves; and
often then most when we are softened by affliction; we see with pity even distresses
which we would accept in the place of our own.

1. XVI. Imitation
THE SECOND passion belonging to society is imitation, or, if you will, a desire of
imitating, and consequently a pleasure in it. This passion arises from much the same
cause with sympathy. For as sympathy makes us take a concern in whatever men feel,
so this affection prompts us to copy whatever they do; and consequently we have a
pleasure in imitating, and in whatever belongs to imitation, merely as it is such, without
any intervention of the reasoning faculty, but solely from our natural constitution,
which Providence has framed in such a manner as to find either pleasure or delight,
according to the nature of the object, in whatever regards the purposes of our being. It is
by imitation far more than by precept, that we learn everything; and what we learn
thus, we acquire not only more effectually, but more pleasantly. This forms our
manners, our opinions, our lives. It is one of the strongest links of society; it is a species
of mutual compliance, which all men yield to each other, without constraint to
themselves, and which is extremely flattering to all. Herein it is that painting and many other agreeable arts have laid one of the principal foundations of their power. And since, by its influence on our manners and our passions, it is of such great consequence, I shall here venture to lay down a rule, which may inform us with a good degree of certainty when we are to attribute the power of the arts to imitation, or to our pleasure in the skill of the imitator merely, and when to sympathy, or some other cause in conjunction with it. When the object represented in poetry or painting is such as we could have no desire of seeing in the reality, then I may be sure that its power in poetry or painting is owing to the power of imitation, and to no cause operating in the thing itself. So it is with most of the pieces which the painters call still-life. In these a cottage, a dunghill, the meanest and most ordinary utensils of the kitchen, are capable of giving us pleasure. But when the object of the painting or poem is such as we should run to see if real, let it affect us with what odd sort of sense it will, we may rely upon it, that the power of the poem or picture is more owing to the nature of the thing itself than to the mere effect of imitation, or to a consideration of the skill of the imitator, however excellent. Aristotle has spoken so much and so boldly upon the force of imitation in his Poetics, that it makes any further discourse upon this subject the less necessary.

1. XVII. Ambition
ALTHOUGH imitation is one of the great instruments used by Providence in bringing our nature towards its perfection, yet if men gave themselves up to imitation entirely, and each followed the other, and so on in an eternal circle, it is easy to see that there never could be any improvement amongst them. Men must remain as brutes do, the same at the end that they are at this day, and that they were in the beginning of the world. To prevent this, God has planted in man a sense of ambition, and a satisfaction arising from the contemplation of his excelling his fellows in something deemed valuable amongst them. It is this passion that drives men to all the ways we see in use of signalizing themselves, and that tends to make whatever excites in a man the idea of this distinction so very pleasant. It has been so strong as to make very miserable men take comfort, that they were supreme in misery; and certain it is, that, where we cannot distinguish ourselves by something excellent, we begin to take a complacency in some singular infirmities, follies, or defects of one kind or other. It is on this principle that flattery is so prevalent; for flattery is no more than what raises in a man’s mind an idea of a preference which he has not. Now, whatever, either on good or upon bad grounds, tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph, that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects; the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates. Hence proceeds what Longinus has observed of that glorying sense of inward greatness, that always fills the reader of such passages in poets and orators as are sublime; it is what every man must have felt in himself upon such occasions.

1. XVIII. The Recapitulation
TO draw the whole of what has been said into a few distinct points:-The passions which belong to self-preservation turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called
pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call sublime. The passions belonging to self-preservation are the strongest of all the passions.

The second head to which the passions are referred with relation to their final cause, is society. There are two sorts of societies. The first is, the society of sex. The passion belonging to this is called love, and it contains a mixture of lust; its object is the beauty of women. The other is the great society with man and all other animals. The passion subservient to this is called likewise love, but it has no mixture of lust, and its object is beauty; which is a name I shall apply to all such qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness, or some other passion the most nearly resembling these. The passion of love has its rise in positive pleasure; it is, like all things which grow out of pleasure, capable of being mixed with a mode of uneasiness, that is, when an idea of its object is excited in the mind with an idea at the same time of having irretrievably lost it. This mixed sense of pleasure I have not called pain, because it turns upon actual pleasure, and because it is, both in its cause and in most of its effects, of a nature altogether different.

Next to the general passion we have for society, to a choice in which we are directed by the pleasure we have in the object, the particular passion under this head called sympathy has the greatest extent. The nature of this passion is, to put us in the place of another in whatever circumstance he is in, and to affect us in a like manner; so that this passion may, as the occasion requires, turn either on pain or pleasure; but with the modifications mentioned in some cases in sect. II. As to imitation and preference, nothing more need be said.

1. XIX. The Conclusion
I BELIEVED that an attempt to range and methodize some of our most leading passions would be a good preparative to such an inquiry as we are going to make in the ensuing discourse. The passions I have mentioned are almost the only ones which it can be necessary to consider in our present design; though the variety of the passions is great, and worthy in every branch of that variety, of an attentive investigation. The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we everywhere find of his wisdom who made it. If a discourse on the use of the parts of the body may be considered as an hymn to the Creator; the use of the passions, which are the organs of the mind, cannot be barren of praise to him, nor unproductive to ourselves of that noble and uncommon union of science and admiration, which a contemplation of the works of infinite wisdom alone can afford to a rational mind: whilst, referring to him whatever we find of right or good or fair in ourselves, discovering his strength and wisdom even in our own weakness and imperfection, honouring them where we discover them clearly, and adoring their profundity where we are lost in our search, we may be inquisitive without impertinence, and elevated without pride; we may be admitted, if I may dare to say so, into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works. The elevation of the mind ought to be the principal end of all our studies; which if they do not in some measure effect, they are of very little service to us. But, beside this great purpose, a consideration of the rationale of our passions seems to me very necessary for all who would affect them upon solid and sure principles. It is not enough to know them in general: to affect them after a delicate manner, or to judge properly of any work designed to affect them, we should know the exact boundaries of their several
jurisdictions; we should pursue them through all their variety of operations, and pierce
into the inmost, and what might appear inaccessible, parts of our nature,

Quod latet arcand non enarrabile fibrâ.

Without all this it is possible for a man, after a confused manner, sometimes to satisfy
his own mind of the truth of his work; but he can never have a certain determinate rule
to go by, nor can he ever make his propositions sufficiently clear to others. Poets, and
orators, and painters, and those who cultivate other branches of the liberal arts, have,
without this critical knowledge, succeeded well in their several provinces, and will
succeed: as among artificers there are many machines made and even invented without
any exact knowledge of the principles they are governed by. It is, I own, not uncommon
to be wrong in theory, and right in practice; and we are happy that it is so. Men often
act right from their feelings, who afterwards reason but ill on them from principle: but
as it is impossible to avoid an attempt at such reasoning, and equally impossible to
prevent its having some influence on our practice, surely it is worth taking some pains
to have it just, and founded on the basis of sure experience. We might expect that the
artists themselves would have been our surest guides: but the artists have been too
much occupied in the practice: the philosophers have done little; and what they have
done, was mostly with a view to their own schemes and systems: and as for those called
critics, they have generally sought the rule of the arts in the wrong place; they sought it
among poems, pictures, engravings, statues, and buildings. But art can never give the
rules that make an art. This is, I believe, the reason why artists in general, and poets
principally, have been confined in so narrow a circle: they have been rather imitators of
one another than of nature; and this with so faithful an uniformity, and to so remote an
antiquity, that it is hard to say who gave the first model. Critics follow them, and
therefore can do little as guides. I can judge but poorly of anything, whilst I measure it
by no other standard than itself. The true standard of the arts is in every man’s power;
and an easy observation of the most common, sometimes of the meanest, things in
nature, will give the truest lights, where the greatest sagacity and industry, that slights
such observation, must leave us in the dark, or, what is worse, amuse and mislead us by
false lights. In an inquiry it is almost everything to be once in a right road. I am satisfied
I have done but little by these observations considered in themselves; and I never
should have taken the pains to digest them, much less should I have ever ventured to
publish them, if I was not convinced that nothing tends more to the corruption of
science than to suffer it to stagnate. These waters must be troubled, before they can
exert their virtues. A man who works beyond the surface of things, though he may be
wrong himself, yet he clears the way for others, and may chance to make even his errors
subservient to the cause of truth. In the following parts I shall inquire what things they
are that cause in us the affections of the sublime and beautiful, as in this I have
considered the affections themselves. I only desire one favour,—that no part of this
discourse may be judged of by itself, and independently of the rest; for I am sensible I
have not disposed my materials to abide the test of a captious controversy, but of a
sober and even forgiving examination, that they are not armed at all points for battle,
but dressed to visit those who are willing to give a peaceful entrance to truth.