

THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL

*He above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a tower; his form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new ris'n
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams; or from behind the moon
In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations; and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs.⁷*

Here is a very noble picture; and in what does this poetical picture consist? in images of a tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists, or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms. The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For separate them, and you lose much of the greatness, and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness. The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind; though in general the effects of poetry, are by no means to be attributed to the images it raises; which point we shall examine more at large hereafter.* But painting, when we have allowed for the pleasure^a of imitation, can only affect simply by the images it presents; and^b even in painting a judicious obscurity in some things contributes to the effect of the picture; because the images in painting are exactly similar to those in nature; and in nature dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those have which are more clear and determinate. But where and when this observation may be applied to practice, and how far it shall be extended, will be better deduced from the nature of the subject, and from the occasion, than from any rules that can be given.

* Part 5.

^a painting, when . . . pleasure] painting, with only the superadded pleasure

^b and] but

⁷ *Paradise Lost*, I, 589-99. (For another view of this passage see R. Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 2nd edn., 1805, III, i, 89.)

CLEARNESS AND OBSCURITY AS THEY AFFECT THE PASSIONS

⁸ <I am sensible that this idea has met with opposition, and is likely still to be rejected by several. But let it be considered that hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea. There is a passage in the book of Job amazingly sublime, and this sublimity is principally due to the terrible uncertainty of the thing described. *In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof; an image was before mine eyes; there was silence; and I heard a voice,—Shall mortal man be more just than God?*⁹ We are first prepared with the utmost solemnity for the vision; we are first terrified, before we are let even into the obscure cause of our emotion; but when this grand cause of terror makes its appearance, what is it? is it not, wrapt up in the shades of its own incomprehensible darkness, more awful, more striking, more terrible, than the liveliest description, than the clearest painting could possibly represent it? When painters have attempted to give us clear representations of these very fanciful and terrible ideas, they have I think almost always failed; insomuch that I have been at a loss, in all the pictures I have seen of hell, whether the painter did not intend something ludicrous. Several painters have handled a subject of this kind, with a view of assembling as many horrid phantoms as their

⁸ *Literary Magazine*, II, 185: "Obscurity, our author observes, increases the sublime, which is certainly very just; but from thence erroneously infers, that clearness of imagery is unnecessary to affect the passions; but surely nothing can move but what gives ideas to the mind. . . . Our author . . . combats the opinion of the *Abbé du Bos* . . . but surely the reason he gives is not a very good one: he gives the preference to poetry on account of its obscurity. Whereas it should be on account of its greater perspicuity, its amplifications, and its being at liberty to select a greater variety of circumstances, in order to make its exhibitions more vivid and striking." *Monthly Review*, XVI, 477 n.: "Distinctness of imagery has ever been held productive of the sublime. . . ."

⁹ *Job*, IV, 13-17.

imagination could suggest; but all the designs I have chanced to meet of the temptations of St. Anthony, were rather a sort of odd wild grotesques, than any thing capable of producing a serious passion.¹⁰ In all these subjects poetry is very happy. Its apparitions, its chimeras, its harpies, its allegorical figures, are grand and affecting; and though Virgil's Fame,¹¹ and Homer's Discord,¹² are obscure, they are magnificent figures. These figures in painting would be clear enough, but I fear they might become ridiculous.

SECTION V

POWER

Besides these things which *directly* suggest the idea of danger, and those which produce a similar effect from a mechanical cause, I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power. And this branch rises as naturally as the other two branches, from terror, the common stock of every thing that is sublime. The idea of power at first view, seems of the class of these indifferent ones, which may equally belong to pain or to pleasure. But in reality, the affection arising from the idea of vast power, is extremely remote from that neutral character. For first, we must remember,* that the idea of pain, in its highest degree, is much stronger than the highest degree of pleasure; and that it preserves the same superiority through all the subordinate gradations. From hence it is, that where the chances for equal degrees of suffering or enjoyment are in any

* Part 1, section 7.

¹⁰ The "Temptations of St. Anthony" was a popular subject for grotesque treatment among Dutch, Flemish, and Spanish painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. Brueghel, Teniers, Ribera). There is also a version by Salvator Rosa. (See A. B. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 1848, II, 381-3.)

¹¹ *Aeneid*, IV, 173 ff.

¹² *Iliad*, IV, 440-5. (Longinus uses this reference as an illustration: *On the Sublime*, IX.)

sort equal, the idea of the suffering must always be prevalent. And indeed the ideas of pain, and above all of death, are so very affecting, that whilst we remain in the presence of whatever is supposed to have the power of inflicting either, it is impossible to be perfectly free from terror. Again, we know by experience, that for the enjoyment of pleasure, no great efforts of power are at all necessary; nay we know, that such efforts would go a great way towards destroying our satisfaction: for pleasure must be stolen, and not forced upon us; pleasure follows the will; and therefore we are generally affected with it by many things of a force greatly inferior to our own. But pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together. Look at a man, or any other animal of prodigious strength, and what is your idea before reflection? Is it that this strength will be subservient to you, to your ease, to your pleasure, to your interest in any sense? No; the emotion you feel is, lest this enormous strength should be employed to the purposes of* rapine and destruction. That power derives all its sublimity from the terror with which it is generally accompanied, will appear evidently from its effect in the very few cases, in which it may be possible to strip a considerable degree of strength of its ability to hurt. When you do this, you spoil it of every thing sublime, and it immediately becomes contemptible. An ox is a creature of vast strength; but he is an innocent creature, extremely serviceable, and not at all dangerous; for which reason the idea of an ox is by no means grand. A bull is strong too; but his strength is of another kind; often very destructive, seldom (at least amongst us) of any use in our business; the idea of a bull is therefore great, and it has frequently a place in sublime descriptions, and elevating comparisons. Let us look at another strong animal in the two distinct lights in which we may consider him. The horse in the light of an useful beast, fit for the plough, the road, the draft, in every social useful light the horse has nothing of the sublime; but is it thus that we are affected with him, *whose neck is clothed with thunder, the glory*

* Vide Part 3, section 21.

of whose nostrils is terrible, who swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage, neither believeth that it is the sound of the trumpet?¹³ In this description the useful character of the horse entirely disappears, and the terrible and sublime blaze out together. We have continually about us animals of a strength that is considerable, but not pernicious. Amongst these we never look for the sublime: it comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros. Whenever strength is only useful, and employed for our benefit or our pleasure, then it is never sublime; for nothing can act agreeably to us, that does not act in conformity to our will; but to act agreeably to our will, it must be subject to us; and therefore can never be the cause of a grand and commanding conception. The description of the wild ass, in Job, is worked up into no small sublimity, merely by insisting on his freedom, and his setting mankind at defiance; otherwise the description of such an animal could have had nothing noble in it. *Who hath loosed (says he) the bands of the wild ass? whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the voice of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture.*¹⁴ The magnificent description of the unicorn and of leviathan in the same book, is full of the same heightening circumstances. *Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee? canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? wilt thou trust him because his strength is great?—Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?*¹⁵ In short, where-soever we find strength, and in what light soever we look upon power, we shall all along observe the sublime the concomitant of terror, and contempt the attendant on a strength that is subservient and innoxious. The race of dogs in many of their

¹³ Job, XXXIX, 19b, 20b, 24 (misquoted). Lowth quotes this passage to prove his contention that Job "is adapted in every respect to the incitement of terror; and . . . is universally animated with the true spirit of sublimity" (*Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, transl. G. Gregory, 1787, II, 428, 424).

¹⁴ Job, XXXIX, 5b-8a (misquoted).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 9a, 10a, 11a; XLI, 1a, 4, 9b.

kinds, have generally a competent degree of strength and swiftness; and they exert these, and other valuable qualities which they possess, greatly to our convenience and pleasure. Dogs are indeed the most social, affectionate, and amiable animals of the whole brute creation; but love approaches much nearer to contempt than is commonly imagined; and accordingly, though we caress dogs, we borrow from them an appellation of the most despicable kind, when we employ terms of reproach; and this appellation is the common mark of the last vileness and contempt in every language. Wolves have not more strength than several species of dogs; but on account of their unmanageable fierceness, the idea of a wolf is not despicable; it is not excluded from grand descriptions and similitudes. Thus we are affected by strength, which is *natural power*. The power which arises from institution in kings and commanders, has the same connection with terror. Sovereigns are frequently addressed with the title of *dread majesty*. And it may be observed, that young persons little acquainted with the world, and who have not been used to approach men in power, are commonly struck with an awe which takes away the free use of their faculties. *When I prepared my seat in the street (says Job) the young men saw me, and hid themselves.*¹⁶ Indeed so natural is this timidity with regard to power, and so strongly does it inhere in our constitution, that very few are able to conquer it, but by mixing much in the business of the great world, or by using no small violence to their natural dispositions. ¹⁷I know some people are of opinion, that no awe, no degree of terror, accompanies the idea of power, and have hazarded to affirm, that we can contemplate the idea of God himself without any such emotion. I purposely avoided when I first considered this subject, to introduce the idea of that great and tremendous being, as an example in an argument so

¹⁶ Job, XXIX, 7b-8a.

¹⁷ *Monthly Review*, XVI, 475 n.: "It is certain, we can have the most sublime ideas of the Deity, without imagining him a God of terror. Whatever raises our esteem of an object described, must be a powerful source of sublimity; and esteem is a passion nearly allied to love: Our astonishment at the sublime as often proceeds from an increased love, as from an increased fear."

light as this; though it frequently occurred to me, not as an objection to, but as a strong confirmation of my notions in this matter. I hope, in what I am going to say, I shall avoid presumption, where it is almost impossible for any mortal to speak with strict propriety. I say then, that whilst we consider the Godhead merely as he is an object of the understanding, which forms a complex idea of power, wisdom, justice, goodness, all stretched to a degree far exceeding the bounds of our comprehension, whilst we consider the divinity in this refined and abstracted light, the imagination and passions are little or nothing affected. But because we are bound by the condition of our nature to ascend to these pure and intellectual ideas, through the medium of sensible images, and to judge of these divine qualities by their evident acts and exertions, it becomes extremely hard to disentangle our idea of the cause from the effect by which we are led to know it. Thus when we contemplate the Deity, his attributes and their operation coming united on the mind, form a sort of sensible image, and as such are capable of affecting the imagination. Now, though in a just idea of the Deity, perhaps none of his attributes are predominant, yet to our imagination, his power is by far the most striking. Some reflection, some comparing is necessary to satisfy us of his wisdom, his justice, and his goodness; to be struck with his power, it is only necessary that we should open our eyes. But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him. And though a consideration of his other attributes may relieve in some measure our apprehensions; yet no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand. If we rejoice, we rejoice with trembling; and even whilst we are receiving benefits, we cannot but shudder at a power which can confer benefits of such mighty importance. When the prophet David contemplated the wonders of wisdom and power, which are displayed in the œconomy of man, he seems to be struck with a sort of divine horror, and cries out, *fearfully and wonderfully am I*

*made!*¹⁸ An heathen poet has a sentiment of a similar nature; Horace looks upon it as the last effort of philosophical fortitude, to behold without terror and amazement, this immense and glorious fabric of the universe.

*Hunc solem, et stellas, et decedentia certis
Tempora momentis, sunt qui formidine nulla
Imbuti spectent.*¹⁹

Lucretius is a poet not to be suspected of giving way to superstitious terrors; yet when he supposes the whole mechanism of nature laid open by the master of his philosophy, his transport on this magnificent view which he has represented in the colours of such bold and lively poetry, is overcast with a shade of secret dread and horror.

*His tibi me rebus quædam Divina voluptas
Percipit, adque horror, quod sic Natura tua vi
Tam manifesta patet ex omni parte relecta.*²⁰

But the scripture alone can supply ideas answerable to the majesty of this subject. In the scripture, wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, every thing terrible in nature is called up to heighten the awe and solemnity of the divine presence. The psalms, and the prophetic books, are crowded with instances of this kind. *The earth shook* (says the psalmist) *the heavens also dropped at the presence of the Lord.*²¹ And what is remarkable, the painting preserves the same character, not only when he is supposed descending to take vengeance upon the wicked, but even when he exerts the like plenitude of power in acts of beneficence to mankind. *Tremble, thou earth! at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters!*²² It were endless to enumerate all the passages both in the sacred

¹⁸ *Psalms*, CXXXIX, 14. (misquoted). Lowth comments on this psalm at the end of a lecture which emphasizes the praise of God's power in Hebrew poetry: "It celebrates the omniscience of the Deity, and the incomparable art and design displayed in the formation of the human body" (*Lectures*, II, 283).

¹⁹ *Epistles*, I, vi, 3-5.

²⁰ *De Rerum Natura*, III, 28-30 (misquoted).

²¹ *Psalms*, LXVIII, 8 (misquoted). ²² *Ibid.*, CXIV, 7-8 (misquoted).

and profane writers, which establish the general sentiment of mankind, concerning the inseparable union of a sacred and reverential awe, with our ideas of the divinity. Hence the common maxim, *primos in orbe deos fecit timor*.²³ This maxim may be, as I believe it is, false with regard to the origin of religion. The maker of the maxim saw how inseparable these ideas were, without considering that the notion of some great power must be always precedent to our dread of it. But this dread must necessarily follow the idea of such a power, when it is once excited in the mind. It is on this principle that true religion has, and must have, so large a mixture of salutary fear; and that false religions have generally nothing else but fear to support them. Before the christian religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the divinity, and brought it somewhat nearer to us, there was very little said of the love of God. The followers of Plato have something of it, and only something.²⁴ The other writers of pagan antiquity, whether poets or philosophers, nothing at all. And they who consider with what infinite attention, by what a disregard of every perishable object, through what long habits of piety and contemplation it is, any man is able to attain an entire love and devotion to the Deity, will easily perceive, that it is not the first, the most natural, and the most striking effect which proceeds from that idea. Thus we have traced power through its several gradations unto the highest of all, where our imagination is finally lost; and we find terror quite throughout the progress, its inseparable companion, and growing along with it, as far as we can possibly trace them. Now as power is undoubtedly a capital source of the sublime, this will point out evidently from whence its energy is derived, and to what class of ideas we ought to unite it.>

²³ Cf. Statius, *Thebaid*, III, 661.

²⁴ E.g. Plotinus: "Because the Soul is different from God, and yet springs from him, she loves him of necessity . . . it is natural for the Soul to love God and to desire union with him, as the daughter of a noble father feels a noble love." (W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 3rd edn., 1941, II, 140.) Burke may well have been led to Plotinus through reading the Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth. Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1743) was among items listed in the Sale Catalogue of Burke's library (item no. 138).

SECTION VI

PRIVATION

All *general* privations are great, because they are all terrible; *Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence*. With what a fire of imagination, yet with what severity of judgment, has Virgil amassed all these circumstances where he knows that all the images of a tremendous dignity ought to be united, at the mouth of hell! where before he unlocks the secrets of the great deep, he seems to be seized with a religious horror, and to retire astonished at the boldness of his own design.

Dii quibus imperium est animarum, umbræq; silentes!
Et Chaos, et Phlegethon! loca nocte silentia late?
Sit mihi fas audita loqui! sit numine vestro
Pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas!
Ibant obscuro, sola sub nocte, per umbram,
Perque domos Ditis^c vacuas, et inania regna.²⁵

Ye subterraneous gods! whose awful sway
The gliding ghosts, and silent shades obey;
O Chaos hoar! and Phlegethon profound!
Whose solemn empire stretches wide around;
Give me, ye great tremendous powers, to tell
Of scenes and wonders in the depth^d of hell;
Give me your mighty secrets to display
From those black realms of darkness to the day.

PITT.²⁶

Obscure they went through dreary shades that led
Along the waste dominions of the dead.

DRYDEN.²⁷

^c *Ditis*] *dites*

^d *depth*] *depths*

²⁵ *Aeneid*, VI, 264-9 (misquoted).

²⁷ *Aeneid* (1697), VI, 378-9.

²⁶ *Aeneid* (1740), VI, 371-8.

SECTION VII
VASTNESS

Greatness† of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime. This is too evident, and the observation too common, to need any illustration; it^e is not so common, to consider in what ways greatness of dimension, vastness of extent, or quantity, has the most striking effect. For certainly, there are ways, and modes, wherein the same quantity of extension shall produce greater effects than it is found to do in others. Extension is either in length, height, or depth. Of these the length strikes least; an hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude. I am apt to imagine likewise, that height is less grand than depth; and that we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than at looking up at an object of equal height, but of that I am not very positive. A perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane; and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished. It would carry us out of our way to enter in this place into the cause of these appearances; but^f certain it is they afford a large and fruitful field of speculation. <However, it may not be amiss to add to these remarks upon magnitude; that, as the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise; when we attend to the infinite divisibility of matter, when we pursue animal life into these excessively small, and yet organized beings, that escape the nicest inquisition of the sense, when we push our discoveries yet downward, and consider those creatures so many degrees yet smaller, and the still diminishing scale of existence, in tracing which the imagination is lost as well as the sense, we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness; nor can we distinguish in its effect this extreme of littleness from the vast itself. For division must be infinite as well as

† Part 4, section 9.

^e illustration; it] illustration; but it
^f enter in . . . but] enter into the cause of these appearances here; but

addition; because the idea of a perfect unity can no more be arrived at, than that of a compleat whole to which nothing may be added.>

SECTION VIII
INFINITY

Another source of the sublime, is *infinity*; if it does not rather belong^g to the last. Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses that are really, and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure.

Whenever^h we repeat any idea frequently, the mind by a sort of mechanism repeats it long after the first cause has ceased to operate.*²⁸ After whirling about; when we sit down, the objects about us still seem to whirl. After a long succession of noises, as the fall of waters, or the beating of forge hammers, the hammers beat and the water roars in the imagination long after the first sounds have ceased to affect it; and they die away at last by gradations which are scarcely perceptible. If you hold up a strait pole, with your eye to one end, it will seem extended

* Part 4, section 12.

^g rather belong] rather in some sort belong

^h at pleasure. Whenever] at pleasure. SECTION IX. The same. Whenever

²⁸ In the passage which follows Burke may have been indebted to David Hartley who—in his *Observations on Man* (5th edn., 1810), I, 9–11—discusses the way that “Sensations remain in the Mind for a short time after the sensible Objects are removed.” It is interesting to note that, in the course of his discussion, Hartley quotes the passage from Newton’s *Opticks* which Burke probably had in mind at p. 138.

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to a length almost incredible.* Placeⁱ a number of uniform and equidistant marks on this pole, they will cause the same deception, and seem multiplied without end. The senses strongly affected in some one manner, cannot quickly change their tenor, or adapt themselves to other things; but they continue in their old channel until the strength of the first mover decays. This is the reason of an appearance very frequent in madmen; that they remain whole days and nights, sometimes whole years, in the constant repetition of some remark, some complaint, or song; which having struck powerfully on their disordered imagination, in the beginning of their phrensy, every repetition reinforces it with new strength; and the hurry of their spirits, unrestrained by the curb of reason, continues^j it to the end of their lives.

SECTION IX^k

SUCCESSION and UNIFORMITY

Succession and *uniformity* of parts, are what constitute the artificial infinite. 1. *Succession*; which is requisite that the parts may be continued so long, and in such a direction, as by their frequent impulses on the sense to impress the imagination with an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits. 2. *Uniformity*; because if the figures of the parts should be changed, the imagination at every change finds a check; you are presented at every alteration with the termination of one idea, and the beginning of another; by which means it becomes impossible to continue that uninterrupted progression, which alone can stamp on bounded objects the character of infinity.† It is in

* Part 4, section 14.²⁰

† Mr. Addison, in the Spectators concerning the pleasures of the
ⁱ *extended to . . . Place*] *extended to almost an incredible length. Place*
^j *spirits, unrestrained . . . continues*] *spirits unrestrained, the curb of reason*
continues

^k SECTION IX.] SECTION X.

²⁰ This note should presumably read: "Part 4, section 13."

SECTION I
Of BEAUTY¹

IT is my design to consider beauty as distinguished from the sublime; and in the course of the enquiry, to examine how far it is consistent with it. But previous to this, we must take a short review of the opinions already entertained of this quality; which I think are hardly to be reduced to any fixed principles; because men are used to talk of beauty in a figurative manner, that is to say, in a manner extremely uncertain, and indeterminate. By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it. <I confine this definition to the merely sensible qualities of things, for the sake of preserving the utmost simplicity in a subject which must always distract us, whenever we take in those various causes of sympathy which attach us to any persons or things from secondary considerations, and not from the direct force which they have merely on being viewed. I likewise distinguish love, by which I mean that satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating any thing beautiful, of whatsoever nature it may be, from desire or lust; which is an energy of the mind, that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects, that do not affect us as they are beautiful, but by means altogether different. We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty; whilst the greatest beauty in men, or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire. Which shews that beauty, and the passion caused by beauty, which I call love, is different from desire, though desire may sometimes operate along with it; but it is to this latter that we must attribute those violent and tempestuous passions, and the consequent emotions of the body which attend what is called love in some of its ordinary acceptations, and not to the effects of beauty merely as it is such.>

¹ *Part III. . . . BEAUTY.] Part III. Of BEAUTY. SECTION I.*

SECTION II

Proportion not the cause of BEAUTY
in VEGETABLES

Beauty hath usually been said^u to consist in certain proportions of parts. On^v considering the matter, I have great reason to doubt, whether beauty be at all an idea belonging to proportion.¹ Proportion relates almost wholly to convenience, as every idea of order seems to do; and it must therefore be considered as a creature of the understanding, rather than a primary cause acting on the senses and imagination. It is not by the force of long attention and enquiry that we find any object to be beautiful; beauty demands no assistance from our reasoning; even the will is unconcerned; the appearance of beauty as effectually causes some degree of love in us, as the application of ice or fire produces the ideas of heat or cold. To gain something like a satisfactory conclusion in this point, it were well to examine, ²<what proportion is; since several who make use of that word, do not always seem to understand very clearly the force of the term, nor to have very distinct ideas concerning the thing itself. Proportion is the measure of relative quantity. Since all quantity is divisible, it is evident that every distinct part into which any quantity is divided, must bear some relation to the other parts or to the whole. These relations give an origin to the idea of proportion. They are discovered by mensuration, and they are the objects of mathematical enquiry.

^u *Beauty hath . . . said*] *Beauty is usually said* ^v *parts. On*] *parts; on*

¹ Plotinus rejects the notion that symmetry is the essence of beauty (W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, II, 214 ff). See p. 70 n.

² *Critical Review*, III, 366-7: "Proportion is not limited to one relation of parts, or one set of dimensions. Proportion is symmetry, and symmetry may be maintained under a variety of figures." *Literary Magazine*, II, 187: "Proportion is not beauty itself but one of its efficient qualities. A partial beauty may be seen, that is to say an handsome face, or an handsome leg, but, we apprehend, a beautiful and entire whole never existed without proportion and fitness. This we think so apparent that it need not be insisted on."

But whether any part of any determinate quantity be a fourth, or a fifth, or a sixth, or a moiety of the whole; or whether it be of equal length with any other part, or double its length, or but one half, is a matter merely indifferent to the mind; it stands neuter in the question: and it is from this absolute indifference and tranquillity of the mind, that mathematical speculations derive some of their most considerable advantages; because there is nothing to interest the imagination; because the judgment sits free and unbiassed to examine the point. All proportions, every arrangement of quantity is alike to the understanding, because the same truths result to it from all; from greater, from lesser; from equality and inequality. But surely beauty is no idea belonging to mensuration; nor has it any thing to do with calculation and geometry. If it had, we might then point out some certain measures which we could demonstrate to be beautiful, either as simply considered, or as related to others; and we could call in those natural objects, for whose beauty we have no voucher but the sense, to this happy standard, and confirm the voice of our passions by the determination of our reason. But since we have not this help, let us see whether proportion can in any sense be considered as the cause of beauty, as hath been so generally, and by some so confidently affirmed. If proportion be one of the constituents of beauty, it must derive that power either from some natural properties inherent in certain measures, which operate mechanically; from the operation of custom; or from the fitness which some measures have to answer some particular ends of convenience. Our business therefore is to enquire, whether the parts of those objects which are found beautiful in the vegetable or animal kingdoms, are constantly so formed according to such certain measures, as may serve to satisfy us that their beauty results from those measures, on the principle of a natural mechanical cause; or from custom; or in fine, from their fitness for any determinate purposes. I intend to examine this point under each of these heads in their order. But before I proceed further, I hope it will not be thought amiss, if I lay down the rules which governed me in this enquiry, and which have misled me in it if I have gone astray. 1. If two bodies produce the same or a similar effect on the mind, and on examination

they are found to agree in some of their properties, and to differ in others; the common effect is to be attributed to the properties in which they agree, and not to those in which they differ. 2. Not to account for the effect of a natural object from the effect of an artificial object. 3. Not to account for the effect of any natural object from a conclusion of our reason concerning its uses, if a natural cause may be assigned. 4. Not to admit any determinate quantity, or any relation of quantity, as the cause of a certain effect, if the effect is produced by different or opposite measures and relations; or if these measures and relations may exist, and yet the effect may not be produced. These are the rules which I have chiefly followed, whilst I examined into the power of proportion considered as a natural cause; and these, if he thinks them just, I request the reader to carry with him throughout the following discussion; whilst we enquire in the first place,* in what things we find this quality of beauty; next, to see whether in these, we can find any assignable proportions, in such a manner as ought to convince us, that our idea of beauty results from them. We shall consider this pleasing power, as it appears in vegetables, in the inferior animals, and in man. Turning our eyes to the vegetable creation, we find nothing there so beautiful as flowers; but flowers are almost of every sort of shape, and of every sort of disposition; they are turned and fashioned into an infinite variety of forms; and from these forms, botanists have given them their names, which are almost as various. What proportion do we discover between the stalks and the leaves of flowers, or between the leaves and the pistils? How does the slender stalk of the rose agree with the bulky head under which it bends? but the rose is a beautiful flower; and can we undertake to say that it does not owe a great deal of its beauty even to that disproportion? the rose is a large flower, yet it grows upon a small shrub; the flower of the apple is very small, and it grows upon a large tree; yet the rose and the apple blossom are both beautiful, and the plants that bear them are most engagingly attired notwithstanding this disproportion. What by general consent is allowed to be a more beautiful object than an orange tree, flourishing at once with its leaves, its blossoms,

* in the first place,] first,

and its fruit? but it is in vain that we search here for any proportion between the height, the breadth, or any thing else concerning the dimensions of the whole, or concerning the relation of the particular parts to each other. I grant that we may observe in many flowers, something of a regular figure, and of a methodical disposition of the leaves. The rose has such a figure and such a disposition of its petals; but in an oblique view, when this figure is in a good measure lost, and the order of the leaves confounded, it yet retains its beauty; the rose is even more beautiful before it is full blown; in the bud; before this exact figure is formed; and this is not the only instance wherein method and exactness, the soul of proportion, are found rather prejudicial than serviceable to the cause of beauty.

SECTION III

Proportion not the cause of BEAUTY
in ANIMALS

That proportion has but a small share in the formation of beauty, is full as evident among animals. Here the greatest variety of shapes, and dispositions of parts are well fitted, to excite this idea. The swan, confessedly a beautiful bird, has a neck longer than the rest of his body, and but a very short tail; is this a beautiful proportion? we must allow that it is. But then what shall we say to the peacock, who has comparatively but a short neck, with a tail longer than the neck and the rest of the body taken together? How many birds are there that vary infinitely from each of these standards, and from every other which you can fix, with proportions different, and often directly opposite to each other! and yet many of these birds are extremely beautiful; when upon considering them we find nothing in any one part that might determine us, *a priori*, to say what the others ought to be, nor indeed to guess any thing about them, but what experience might shew to be full of disappointment and mistake. And with regard to the colours either of birds or flowers, for there is something similar in the colouring of both, whether they are considered in their extension or

gradation, there is nothing of proportion to be observed. Some are of but one single colour; others have all the colours of the rainbow; some are of the primary colours, others are of the mixt; in short, an attentive observer may soon conclude, that there is as little of proportion in the colouring as in the shapes of these objects. Turn next to beasts; examine the head of a beautiful horse; find what proportion that bears to his body, and to his limbs, and what relation these have to each other; and when you have settled these proportions as a standard of beauty, then take a dog or cat, or any other animal, and examine how far the same proportions between their heads and their necks, between those and the body, and so on, are found to hold; I think we may safely say, that they differ in every species, yet that there are individuals found in a great many species so differing, that have a very striking beauty. ³⟨Now if it be allowed that very different, and even contrary forms and dispositions are consistent with beauty, it amounts I believe to a concession, that no certain measures operating from a natural principle, are necessary to produce it, at least so far as the brute species is concerned.⟩

SECTION IV

Proportion not the cause of BEAUTY
in the human species

There are some parts of the human body, that are observed to hold certain proportions to each other; but before it can be proved, that the efficient cause of beauty lies in these, it must be shewn, that wherever these are found exact, the person to whom they belong is beautiful. I mean in the effect produced on the view, either of any member distinctly considered, or of the whole body together. It must be likewise shewn, that these parts stand in such a relation to each other, that the comparison between them may be easily made, and that the affection of the mind may naturally result from it. For my part, I have at several times very carefully examined many of those propor-

³ See p. 92 n.: *Critical Review*, III, 366-7. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 367: "... we may observe that there are degrees of beauty in different kinds of symmetry."

tions, and found them hold very nearly, or altogether alike in many subjects, which were not only very different from one another, but where one has been very beautiful, and the other very remote from beauty. With regard to the parts which are found so proportioned, they are often so remote from each other, in situation, nature, and office, that I cannot see how they admit of any comparison, nor consequently how any effect owing to proportion can result from them. The neck, say they, in beautiful bodies should measure with the calf of the leg; it should likewise be twice the circumference of the wrist. And an infinity of observations of this kind are to be found in the writings, and conversations of many.⁴ ⟨But what relation has the calf of the leg to the neck; or either of these parts to the wrist?⟩ These proportions are certainly to be found in handsome bodies. They are as certainly in ugly ones, as any who will take the pains to try, may find. Nay, I do not know but they may be least perfect in some of the most beautiful. ⁵⟨You may assign any proportions you please to every part of the human body; and I undertake, that a painter shall religiously observe them all, and notwithstanding produce if he pleases, a very ugly figure. The same painter shall considerably deviate from these proportions, and produce a very beautiful one. And indeed it may be observed in the masterpieces of the ancient and modern statuary, that several of them differ very widely from the proportions of others, in parts very conspicuous, and of great consideration; and that they differ no less from the proportions we find in living men, of forms extremely striking and agreeable. And after all,⟩ how are the partizans of proportional beauty agreed amongst themselves about the proportions of the human body? some hold it to be seven heads;

^{*} *agreed amongst . . . about*] *agreed about*

⁴ E.g. Leonardo da Vinci. (See J. P. Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 1883, I, 167-201.) Burke may have had some first-hand knowledge of Leonardo; item no. 221 in the Catalogue of the sale of his library reads: "Da Vinci, Della Pittura, con la Vita da Du Fresne, Par., 1651."

⁵ *Critical Review*, III, 367: "Proportion alone will not constitute beauty in every object; but it must always be an ingredient in the beauty of certain objects, particularly in statuary, painting, architecture and music."

some make it eight; whilst others extend it even to ten;⁶ a vast difference in such a small number of divisions! Others take other methods of estimating the proportions, and all with equal success. But are these proportions exactly the same in all handsome men? or are they at all the proportions found in beautiful women? nobody will say that they are; yet both sexes are undoubtedly capable of beauty, and the female of the greatest; which advantage I^a believe will hardly be attributed to the superior exactness of proportion in the fair sex. ⁷Let us rest a moment on this point; and consider how much difference there is between the measures that prevail in many similar parts of the body, in the two sexes of this single species only. If you assign any determinate proportions to the limbs of a man, and if you limit human beauty to these proportions, when you find a woman who differs in the make and measures of almost every part, you must conclude her not to be beautiful in spite of the suggestions of your imagination; or in obedience to your imagination you must renounce your rules; you must lay by the scale and compass, and look out for some other cause of beauty. For if beauty be attached to certain measures which operate from a *principle in nature*, why should similar parts with different measures of proportion be found to have beauty, and this too in the very same species? But to open our view a little, it is worth observing, that almost all animals have parts of very much the same nature, and destined nearly to the same purposes; an head, neck, body, feet, eyes, ears, nose and mouth; yet Providence to provide in the best manner for their several wants, and to display the riches of his wisdom and goodness in his creation, has worked out of these few and similar organs,

^v heads; some . . . vast] heads; others make it eight; a vast

^z are undoubtedly . . . the] are capable of beauty, but the

^a which advantage I] which I

⁶ Vitruvius (*De Architectura*, III, i, 2) gives 8 heads as the norm and he is followed in this by Leonardo (see J. P. Richter, *op. cit.*, I, 172). Dürer, in his *Four Books of Proportion* (Nürnberg, 1528), gives drawings of bodies ranging from 7 to 10 heads (see W. M. Conway, *Literary Remains of Albrecht Dürer*, Cambridge, 1889, pp. 232-9).

⁷ *Critical Review*, III, 367: “. . . contrary to our author’s opinion, we insist upon it, that the well proportioned parts of the human body are constantly found beautiful.”

and members, a diversity hardly short of infinite in their disposition, measures, and relation. But, as we have before observed, amidst this infinite diversity, one particular is common to many species; several of the individuals which compose them, are capable of affecting us with a sense of loveliness; and whilst they agree in producing this effect, they differ extremely in the relative measures of those parts which have produced it. These considerations were sufficient to induce me to reject the notion of any particular proportions that operated by nature to produce a pleasing effect; but those who will agree with me with regard to a particular proportion, are strongly pre-possessed in favour of one more indefinite. They imagine, that although beauty in general is annexed to no certain measures common to the several kinds of pleasing plants and animals; yet that there is a certain proportion in each species absolutely essential to the beauty of that particular kind. If we consider the animal world in general, we find beauty confined to no certain measures; but as some peculiar measure and relation of parts, is what distinguishes each peculiar class of animals, it must of necessity be, that the beautiful in each kind will be found in the measures and proportions of that kind; for otherwise it would deviate from its proper species, and become in some sort monstrous: however, no species is so strictly confined to any certain proportions, that there is not a considerable variation amongst the individuals; and as it has been shewn of the human, so it may be shewn of the brute kinds, that beauty is found indifferently in all the proportions which each kind can admit, without quitting its common form; and it is this idea of a common form that makes the proportion of parts at all regarded, and not the operation of any natural cause; indeed a little consideration will make it appear that it is not measure, but manner, that creates all the beauty which belongs to shape. What lights do we borrow from these boasted proportions, when we study ornamental design? It seems amazing to me, that artists, if they were as well convinced as they pretend to be, that proportion is a principal cause of beauty, have not by them at all times accurate measurements of all sorts of beautiful animals to help them to proper proportions when they would contrive any thing elegant, especially

as they frequently assert, that it is from an observation of the beautiful in nature they direct their practice. I know that it has been said long since, and echoed backward and forward from one writer to another a thousand times, that the proportions of building have been taken from those of the human body. To make this forced analogy complete, they represent a man with his arms raised and extended at full length, and then describe a sort of square, as it is formed by passing lines along the extremities of this strange figure.⁸ But it appears very clearly to me, that the human figure never supplied the architect with any of his ideas. For in the first place, men are very rarely seen in this strained posture; it is not natural to them; neither is it at all becoming. Secondly, the view of the human figure so disposed, does not naturally suggest the idea of a square, but rather of a cross; as that large space between the arms and the ground, must be filled with something before it can make any body think of a square. Thirdly, several buildings are by no means of the form of that particular square, which are notwithstanding planned by the best architects, and produce an effect altogether as good, and perhaps a better. And certainly nothing could be more unaccountably whimsical, than for an architect to model his performance by the human figure, since no two things can have less resemblance or analogy, than a man, and an house or temple; do we need to observe, that their purposes are entirely different? What I am apt to suspect is this: that these analogies were devised to give a credit to the works of art, by shewing a conformity between them and the noblest works in nature, not that the latter served at all to supply hints for the perfection of the former. And I am the more fully convinced, that the patrons of proportion have transferred their artificial ideas to nature, and not borrowed from thence the proportions they use in works of art; because in any discussion of this subject, they always quit as soon as possible the open field of natural beauties, the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and fortify themselves within the artificial lines and angles of architecture. For there is in mankind an

⁸ The "analogy" is found in Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, III, i, 3. For the drawing by Leonardo illustrating Vitruvius's idea, see J. P. Richter, *op. cit.*, Plate XVIII.

unfortunate propensity to make themselves, their views, and their works, the measure of excellence in every thing whatsoever. Therefore having observed, that their dwellings were most commodious and firm when they were thrown into regular figures, with parts answerable to each other; they transferred these ideas to their gardens; they turned their trees into pillars, pyramids, and obelisks; they formed their hedges into so many green walls, and fashioned the walks into squares, triangles, and other mathematical figures, with exactness and symmetry; and they thought if they were not imitating, they were at least improving nature, and teaching her to know her business.⁹ But nature has at last escaped from their discipline and their fetters; and our gardens, if nothing else, declare, we begin to feel that mathematical ideas are not the true measures of beauty. And surely they are full as little so in the animal, as the vegetable world. For it is not extraordinary, that in these fine descriptive pieces, these innumerable odes and elegies, which are in the mouths of all the world, and many of which have been the entertainment of ages, that in these pieces which describe love with such a passionate energy, and represent its object in such an infinite variety of lights, not one word is said of proportion, if it be what some insist it is, the principal component of beauty; whilst at the same time, several other qualities are very frequently and warmly mentioned? But if proportion has not this power, it may appear odd how men came originally to be so prepossessed in its favour. It arose, I imagine, from the fondness I have just mentioned, which men bear so remarkably to their own works and notions; it arose from false reasonings on the effects of the customary figure of animals; it arose from the Platonic theory of fitness and aptitude.¹⁰ For which reason in the next section, I shall consider the effects of custom in the figure of animals; and afterwards the idea of fitness; since if proportion does not operate by a natural power attending some measures, it must be either by custom, or the idea of utility; there is no other way.

⁹ Ridicule of the formal garden was old-fashioned by 1759. Cf. Addison, *Spectator* No. 414 (25 June 1712); Pope, *Guardian* No. 173 (29 Sept. 1713) and *Moral Essay* No. IV (1731), ll. 113-20.

¹⁰ Cf. *Gorgias*, 474-5.

SECTION V

Proportion further considered

If I am not mistaken, a great deal of the prejudice in favour of proportion has arisen, not so much from the observation of any certain measures found in beautiful bodies, as from a wrong idea of the relation which deformity bears to beauty, to which it has been considered as the opposite; on this principle it was concluded, that where the causes of deformity were removed, beauty must naturally and necessarily be introduced. This^b I believe is a mistake. For *deformity* is opposed, not to beauty, but to the *complete, common form*. If one of the legs of a man be found shorter than the other, the man is deformed; because there is something wanting to complete the whole idea we form of a man; and this has the same effect in natural faults, as maiming and mutilation produce from accidents. So if the back be humped, the man is deformed; because his back has an unusual figure, and what carries with it the idea of some disease or misfortune; so if a man's neck be considerably longer or shorter than usual, we say he is deformed in that part, because men are not commonly made in that manner. But surely every hour's experience may convince us, that a man may have his legs of an equal length, and resembling each

^b *sex. Let . . . (p. 98, l. 9—p. 102, l. 7) . . . This] sex. In fine, take the head as the measure of proportion in any species of animals, as in men; and having found what relation that bears to the other parts, examine the beautiful animals of the winged and four-footed kinds by this rule; and it will shew evidently what a fallacious standard we have chosen; the same will happen if you take any other part of any other animal whatsoever, as your rule to measure by. The proportions of animals are relative to the usual form in which we see them; if this is changed, we are shocked in the same manner that we are when any thing happens contrary to expectation. It must not be denied, that if the parts of any animal are so formed that they do not well support each other, the effect is disagreeable; but to have them simply otherwise, that is, not burthensome to one another, does not by any means produce beauty.*

SECTION V. Proportion further considered.

Now if it be allowed, that almost every sort of form, and every manner of arrangement is consistent with beauty, I imagine it amounts to a concession that no particular proportions are necessary to it. But if I am not mistaken, a great deal of the opinions concerning proportion have arisen from this; that deformity has been considered as the opposite to beauty; and that the removal of the former of these qualities gave birth to the latter. This

other in all respects, and his neck of a just size, and his back quite strait, without having at the same time the least perceivable beauty. <Indeed beauty is so far from belonging to the idea of custom, that in reality what affects us in that manner is extremely rare and uncommon. The beautiful strikes us as much by its novelty as the deformed itself. It is thus in those species of animals with which we are acquainted; and if one of a new species were presented, we should by no means wait until custom had settled an idea of proportion before we decided concerning its beauty or ugliness. Which shews that the general idea of beauty, can be no more owing to customary than to natural proportion.> Deformity arises from the want of the common proportions; but the necessary result of their existence in any object is not beauty. If we suppose proportion in natural things to be relative^c to custom and use, the nature of use and custom will shew, that beauty, which is a *positive*^d and powerful quality, cannot result from it. We are so wonderfully formed, that whilst we^e are creatures vehemently desirous of novelty, we are as strongly attached to habit and custom. But it is the nature of things which hold us by custom to affect us very little whilst we are in possession of them, but strongly when they are absent. I remember to have frequented a certain place, every day for a long time together; and I may truly say, that so far from finding pleasure in it, I^f was affected with a sort of weariness and disgust; I came, I went, I returned without pleasure; yet if by any means I passed by the usual time of my going thither, I was remarkably uneasy, and was not quiet till I had got into my old track.¹¹ They who use snuff take it almost without being sensible that they take it, and the acute

^c *beauty. If . . . relative] beauty. I say the common proportions in each species of animals, because these proportions vary in all of them; there can be no absolute proportion assigned which constitutes an universal beauty; and a proportion which cannot be assigned, is, in other words, no proportion at all. But if proportion in natural things be relative*

^d *positive] positive*

^e *that whilst we] that at the same time that we*

^f *it, I] it, that I*

¹¹ Dixon Wecker suggests that this may be an allusion to the Grecian Coffee-house near Temple Bar, "a haunt of dramatists, critics, and actors rather than of dignified barristers". ("The Missing Years in Burke's Biography", *P.M.L.A.*, LIII, 1119, n 48.)

sense of smell is deadened, so as to feel hardly any thing from so sharp a stimulus; yet deprive the snuff-taker of his box, and he is the most uneasy mortal in the world. <Indeed so far are use and habit from being causes of pleasure, merely as such; that the effect of constant use is to make all things of whatever kind entirely unaffecting. For as use at last takes off the painful effect of many things, it reduces the pleasurable effect of others in the same manner, and brings both to a sort of mediocrity and indifference. Very justly is use called a second nature; and our natural and common state is one of absolute indifference, equally prepared for pain or pleasure. But when we are thrown out of this state, or deprived of any thing requisite to maintain us in it; when this chance does not happen by pleasure from some mechanical cause, we are always hurt. It is so with the second nature, custom, in all things which relate to it.> Thus^a the want of the usual proportions^b in men and other animals is sure to disgust, though their presence is by no means any cause of real pleasure. It is true, that the proportions laid down as causes of beauty in the human body are frequently found in beautiful ones, because they are generally found in all mankind; but if it can be shewn too that they are found without beauty, and that beauty frequently exists without them, and that this beauty, where it exists, always can be assigned to other less equivocal causes, it will naturally lead us to conclude, that proportion and beauty are not ideas of the same nature. The true opposite to beauty is not disproportion or deformity, but *ugliness*; and as it proceeds from causes opposite to those of positive beauty, we cannot consider it until we come to treat of that. Between beauty and ugliness there is a sort of mediocrity, in which the assigned proportions are most commonly found, but this has no effect upon the passions.

SECTION VI

FITNESS not the cause of BEAUTY

It is said that the idea of utility, or of a part's being well adapted to answer its end, is the cause of beauty, or indeed

^a Thus] So^b proportions] proportion

beauty itself.¹² <If it were not for this opinion, it had been impossible for the doctrine of proportion to have held its ground very long; the world would be soon weary of hearing of measures which related to nothing, either of a natural principle, or of a fitness to answer some end; the idea which mankind most commonly conceive of proportion, is the suitableness of means to certain ends, and where this is not the question, very seldom trouble themselves about the effect of different measures of things. Therefore it was necessary for this theory to insist, that not only artificial, but natural objects took their beauty from the fitness of the parts for their several purposes. But in framing this theory, I am apprehensive that experience was not sufficiently consulted. For on that principle,> the wedge-likeⁱ snout of a swine, with its tough cartilage at the end, the little sunk eyes, and the whole make of the head, so^k well adapted to its offices of digging, and rooting, would be extremely beautiful. The great bag hanging to the bill of a pelican, a thing highly useful to this animal, would be likewise as beautiful in our eyes. The hedgehog, so well secured against all assaults by his prickly hide, and^l the porcupine with his missile quills, would be then considered as creatures of no small elegance.^m There are few animals, whose parts are better contrived than those of a monkey;¹³ he has the hands of a man, joined to the springy limbs of a beast; heⁿ is admirably calculated for running, leaping, grappling, and climbing: and yet there are few animals which seem to have less beauty in the eyes of all mankind.^o <I need say little on the trunk of the elephant, of such various usefulness, and which is so far from contributing to his beauty. How well fitted is the wolf for

ⁱ itself. If . . . (p. 105, ll. 1-13) . . . wedge-like] itself. This notion is closely allied to the former one of proportion, but surely never arose from experience. For at that rate, the wedge-like^j the] its ^k make of . . . so] make so ^l and] or ^m elegance.] beauty.ⁿ he] and^o animals which . . . mankind.] animals seem to us to have less beauty.¹² See Introduction, pp. lxii-lxiii.¹³ The comment on the monkey which follows is somewhat reminiscent of Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, II, 502 a-b. (For the tradition to which it is linked see William C. McDermott, *The Ape in Antiquity*, Baltimore, 1938.)

running and leaping? how admirably is the lion armed for battle? But will any one therefore call the elephant, the wolf, and the lion, beautiful animals? I believe nobody will think the form of a man's legs so well adapted to running, as those of an horse, a dog, a deer, and several other creatures; at least they have not that appearance: yet I believe a well-fashioned human leg will be allowed far to exceed all these in beauty. If the fitness of parts was what constituted the loveliness of their form, the actual employment of them would undoubtedly much augment it; but this, though it is sometimes so upon another principle, is far from being always the case. A bird on the wing is not so beautiful as when it is perched; nay, there are several of the domestic fowls which are seldom seen to fly, and which are nothing the less beautiful on that account; yet birds are so extremely different in their form from the beast and human kinds, that you cannot on the principle of fitness allow them any thing agreeable, but in consideration of their parts being designed for quite other purposes. I never in my life chanced to see a peacock fly; and yet before, very long before I considered any aptitude in his form for the aerial life, I was struck with the extreme beauty which raises that bird above many of the best flying fowls in the world; though for any thing I saw, his way of living was much like that of the swine, which fed in the farm-yard along with him. The same may be said of cocks, hens, and the like; they are of the flying kind in figure; in their manner of moving not very different from men and beasts. > To leave these foreign examples; if beauty in our own species was annexed to use, men would be much more lovely than women; and strength and agility would be considered as the only beauties. But to call strength by the name of beauty, to have but one denomination for the qualities of a Venus and Hercules, so totally different in almost all respects, is surely a strange confusion of ideas, or abuse of words. The cause of this confusion, I imagine, proceeds from our frequently perceiving the parts of the human and other animal bodies to be at once very beautiful, and very well adapted to their purposes; and we are deceived by a sophism, which makes us take that for a cause which is only a concomitant; this is the sophism of the fly; who imagined he raised a great dust, because he stood upon the chariot that

really raised it.¹⁴ The stomach, the lungs, the liver, as well as other parts, are incomparably well adapted to their purposes; yet they are far from having any beauty. Again, many things are very beautiful, in which it is impossible to discern any idea of use. And I appeal to the first and most natural feelings of mankind, whether on beholding a beautiful eye, or a well-fashioned mouth, or a well-turned leg, any ideas of their being well fitted for seeing, eating, or running, ever present themselves. What idea of use is it that flowers excite, the most beautiful part of the vegetable world? It is true, that the infinitely wise and good Creator has, of his bounty, frequently joined beauty to those things which he has made useful to us; but this does not prove that an idea of use and beauty are the same thing, or that they are any way dependent on each other.

SECTION VII

The real effects of FITNESS

When I excluded proportion and fitness from any share in beauty, I did not by any means intend to say that they were of no value, or that they ought to be disregarded in works of art. Works of art are the proper sphere of their power; and here it is that they have their full effect. Whenever the wisdom of our Creator intended that we should be affected with any thing, he did not confide the execution of his design to the languid and precarious operation of our reason; but he endued it with powers and properties that prevent the understanding, and even the will, which seizing upon the senses and imagination, captivate the soul before the understanding is ready either to join with them or to oppose them. It is by a long deduction and much study that we discover the adorable wisdom of God

¹⁴ The "sophism" is attributed by Bacon (Essay LIV, "Of Vain Glory") to Aesop, but it is in fact no. 16 of the fables of Laurentius Abstemius (Lorenzo Bevilaqua, *fl. c.* 1500): "De musca quae quadrigis insidens pulverem se excitasse dicebat." If Burke read Abstemius (and not merely Bacon) his source may have been either a very common schoolbook, *Aesopi phrygis fabulae . . . una cum nonnullis variorum autorum fabulis* (edn. Cambridge, 1670, p. 62), or Roger L'Estrange, *Fables of Aesop and other eminent mythologists with moral reflections* (8th edn., 1738, no. 270).

THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL

in his works: when we discover it, the effect is very different, not only in the manner of acquiring it, but in its own nature, from that which strikes us without any preparation from the sublime or the beautiful. How different is the satisfaction of an anatomist, who discovers the use of the muscles and of the skin, the excellent contrivance of the one for the various movements of the body, and the wonderful texture of the other, at once a general covering, and at once a general outlet as well as inlet; how different is this from the affection which possesses an ordinary man at the sight of a delicate smooth skin, and all the other parts of beauty which require no investigation to be perceived? In the former case, whilst we look up to the Maker with admiration and praise, the object which causes it may be odious and distasteful; the latter very often so touches us by its power on the imagination, that we examine but little into the artifice of its contrivance; and we have need of a strong effort of our reason to disentangle our minds from the allurements of the object to a consideration of that wisdom which invented so powerful a machine. The effect of proportion and fitness, at least so far as they proceed from a mere consideration of the work itself, produce approbation, the acquiescence of the understanding, but not love, nor any passion of that species. When we examine the structure of a watch, when we come to know thoroughly the use of every part of it, satisfied as we are with the fitness of the whole, we are far enough from perceiving any thing like beauty in the watch-work itself; but let us look on the case, the labour of some curious artist in engraving, with little or no idea of use, we shall have a much livelier idea of beauty than we ever could have had from the watch itself, though the master-piece of Graham.¹⁵ In beauty, as I said, the effect is previous to any knowledge of the use; but to judge of proportion, we must know the end for which any work is designed. According to the end the proportion varies. Thus there is one proportion of a tower, another of an house; one proportion of a gallery, another of an hall, another of a

¹⁵ George Graham (1673-1751), one of a succession of great English clock and watch makers. Invented the mercurial pendulum and the dead-beat escapement. (See F. J. Britten, *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers*, 1911.)

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chamber. To judge of the proportions of these, you must be first acquainted with the purposes for which they were designed. Good sense and experience acting together, find out what is fit to be done in every work of art. We are rational creatures, and in all our works we ought to regard their end and purpose; the gratification of any passion, how innocent soever, ought only to be of secondary consideration. Herein is placed the real power of fitness and proportion; they operate on the understanding considering them, which *approves* the work and acquiesces in it. The passions, and the imagination which principally raises them, have here very little to do. When a room appears in its original nakedness, bare walls and a plain ceiling; let its proportion be ever so excellent, it pleases very little; a cold approbation is the utmost we can reach; a much worse proportioned room, with elegant mouldings and fine festoons, glasses, and other merely ornamental furniture, will make the imagination revolt against the reason; it will please much more than the naked proportion of the first room which the understanding has so much approved, as admirably fitted for its purposes. What I have here said and before concerning proportion, is by no means to persuade people absurdly to neglect the idea of use in the works of art. It is only to shew that these excellent things, beauty and proportion, are not the same; not that they should either of them be disregarded.

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On the whole; if such parts in human bodies as are found proportioned, were likewise constantly found beautiful, as they certainly are not; or if they were so situated, as that a pleasure might flow from the comparison, which they seldom are; or if any assignable proportions were found, either in plants or animals, which were always attended with beauty, which never was the case; or if, where parts were well adapted to their purposes, they were constantly beautiful, and when no use appeared, there was no beauty, which is contrary to all experience; we might conclude, that beauty consisted in proportion

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or utility. But since, in all respects, the case is quite otherwise; we may be satisfied, that beauty does not depend on these, let it owe its origin to what else it will.

SECTION IX

Perfection not the cause of BEAUTY

There is another notion current, pretty closely allied to the former; that *Perfection* is the constituent cause of beauty.¹⁶ This opinion has been made to extend much further than to sensible objects. But in these, so far is perfection, considered as such, from being the cause of beauty; that this quality, where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this; for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness. In all this, they are guided by nature. Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty. Blushing has little less power; and modesty in general, which is a tacit allowance of imperfection, is itself considered as an amiable quality, and certainly heightens every other that is so. I know, it is in every body's mouth, that we ought to love perfection. This is to me a sufficient proof, that it is not the proper object of love. Who ever said, we *ought* to love a fine woman, or even any of these beautiful animals, which please us? Here to be affected, there is no need of the concurrence of our will.

SECTION X

How far the idea of BEAUTY may be applied to the qualities of the MIND

Nor is this remark in general less applicable to the qualities of the mind. Those virtues which cause admiration, and are of the sublimer kind, produce terror rather than love. Such as fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like. Never was any man amiable by force of these qualities. Those which engage our

¹⁶ See Introduction, p. lxiii. See also M. Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (7th edn., 1765), I, 360-76.