ON THE AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF MAN

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS*

* These letters have really been written; but to *whom* is here of no relevance, and will perhaps in time be made known to the reader. As letters, however, they retain little more than their division into a sequence, since it was considered necessary to suppress everything of local connection, without wanting to put anything in its place; which would have been an impropriety easily avoided if one had been less concerned about their authenticity.

FIRST LETTER

So you would like me to give you the results of my investigations *into beauty and art* as a series of letters. I can sense the real gravity, but also the attraction and distinction, of such an enterprise. I will talk of something directly connected with the greater part of our happiness, and something that is not unrelated to the moral nobility of human nature. My presentation of beauty will often need to invoke feelings as well as principles; but the heart which I address does sense the great power of beauty, and acts upon it, relieving me of the most difficult part of my labour.

What I had intended to ask of you as a favour you have generously made a duty, leaving me the appearance of merit when I am merely following my own inclination. The freedom of approach that you prescribe is no constraint, more my own need. I am little used to the ways of formal scholarship, so I will hardly be in danger of offending good taste by their abuse. My ideas have been formed more in continual communion with myself than from extensive worldly experience, or reading; they will be unable to deny their origin, will be guilty of any kind of error but that of sectarianism, will fail more from their own weakness than stand by virtue of authority and a strength they do not themselves possess.

I will not conceal from you that the following assertions will for the most part rest on Kantian principles; but please blame my own inability, and not these principles, if in what follows you should be reminded of any particular philosophical school. No, for me the freedom of your mind must remain inviolate. Your own feeling will give me the facts upon which I build,

your own independent powers of thought will dictate the laws of procedure to which we must adhere.

Only philosophers are divided about the ruling ideas in the practical part of the Kantian system,[1] while I trust I can prove that men and women have always been at one on them. One must only detach these ideas from their technical form for them to stand revealed as primordial statements of common sense, and as facts of the moral instinct which wise nature lent man until such time as clear insight emancipates him from such tutelage. However, while this technical form reveals truth to our understanding, it also conceals truth from our feeling; because, unfortunately, understanding has first to destroy the object of inner reflection if it would really make this object its *own*. Just like the chemist, the philosopher can discover connection only through dissolution, only through the rigours of artifice discover the work of a free nature. To catch hold of fleeting appearance he must shackle it with rules, tear into its fair body with concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a meagre frame of words. Is it any wonder if natural feeling can no longer be found in such an image, and that in the hands of the analyst truth seems to be paradoxical?

So please bear with me if, in the course of the following studies, my approach to an understanding of our object moves it beyond reach of our senses. What has been said of moral experience is even more true for the phenomenon we call beauty. Its entire magic rests upon its secret, and by dissolving the necessary bond between its elements its very being melts away.

SECOND LETTER

But should I not make better use of the liberty you have allowed me, rather than directing your attention to the domain of the fine arts? Is it not somewhat untimely to seek a code of law for the aesthetic world, while the affairs of the moral world raise matters of much more direct interest, and the spirit of philosophical inquiry is expressly challenged by the present circumstances to address the most perfect of all works of art: the construction of a true political liberty?

I would not wish to live in any different century, nor to have worked for any other. We are just as much citizens of our time as we are citizens of our state; and if it appears unseemly, even impermissible, to exempt oneself from the morals and customs of the milieu in which one lives, why should it be any less a duty to allow the needs and tastes of this century a voice in choosing what one does?

But this voice does not seem to favour art; at least not the kind of art to which my study will be devoted. The course of events has lent the spirit of the age a direction that threatens to render the art of the ideal ever more remote from this spirit. This art has to leave the realm of reality, and with proper audacity elevate itself above simple need; for art is a daughter of freedom, responding not to the demands of matter, but to the necessity in our minds. For the present, need prevails, and bends a sunken humanity to its tyrannical yoke. *Utility* is the great idol of the age, to which all powers are in thrall and all talent must pay homage. On this crude scale the spiritual virtues of art have no weight and, bereft of all encouragement, it disappears from the tumultuous market of our century. The

spirit of philosophical inquiry strips the power of imagination from one province after another; the borders of art shrink as science extends its bounds.

The gaze of both philosopher and man of the world is now fixed expectantly on the political domain, where the very fate of humanity is argued out; or so it is thought. Does not any failure to join with this argument betray a culpable indifference to the welfare of society? However important the substance and consequence of this great legal dispute might be to anyone calling himself a man, the way in which it is conducted should be of especial interest to anyone who can think for himself. A question that would otherwise be settled by the blind right of might now seems to have been brought before the tribunal of pure reason; and whoever remains capable of putting himself at the centre of things, advancing from a mere individual to a representative of the human race, might equally consider himself a member of this tribunal, as he is, as human being and citizen of the world, party at the same time and more or less caught up in its outcome. It is hence not just his own interests that will be decided by this legal process; judgment will also be made according to laws which his rational mind is competent and entitled to dictate.

How inspiring it would be for me to address such things in company with someone who is as witty a thinker as he is a liberal citizen of the world, leaving any decision to a heart so keenly devoted to the welfare of mankind! How pleasantly surprising it would be, given all difference in station and in the great distance imposed by worldly circumstance, to find agreement in the field of ideas with a mind as unprejudiced as yours! That I resist such an alluring temptation and put beauty before liberty can, I think, be justified not only by my own inclination, but also by principles. I hope to convince you that this matter is far less alien to the needs of the age than it is to its taste; and that if one is to resolve this political problem one must in practice take the aesthetic path, for it is by way of beauty that one approaches liberty. This proof cannot be made, however, without my reminding you of the principles by which the exercise of reason is guided in the work of political legislation.

THIRD LETTER

Nature treats man no better than the rest of it works: it acts for him whenever he, as a free and spontaneous agent, is not yet able to act. This is what makes him a man: that he does not settle for what nature made of him, but has the ability to re-enact by means of reason those steps it has taken on his behalf, transforming a work born of need into one of his own free choice, elevating physical necessity to a moral necessity.

He gains consciousness from sensuous slumber, sees that he is a man, looks around and finds himself to be living in a state. Force of need cast him there before he was capable of freely choosing this condition; and need arranged the state according to purely natural laws before *he* was able to do so, making use of the laws of reason. But as a moral person he neither could nor can be satisfied with a provisional state, which was prompted merely by his natural determination, and was intended to serve it alone – and it would be all the worse for him if he were content with this condition! By the same right that makes him a man he thus abandons the rule of blind necessity, parting from it, as in so many other matters, through his freedom; just as, taking only one example, he suppresses through morality, and refines through beauty, the coarse character that the need of sexual love expressed. And so, through artifice, he retrieves his childhood, imagining a *state of nature* as an idea that no experience has given him, but which has been imposed by his determination as a reasoning being. And in this ideal condition he adopts a purpose not known in his real natural state, a choice of which he was not then capable, now proceeding in no other way than as if he were beginning

all over again, as if he had, purely of his own clear insight and free volition, exchanged the condition of independence for one of contract. However skilfully and solidly blind caprice does its work, with what presumption that which it has once created is sustained, in whatever semblance of reverence it might clothe itself – man can nonetheless regard it as something that never happened; for the work of blind caprice has no authority before which liberty must bend, everything has to find its place in the supreme purpose that reason now demands of him as a person. This is the origin and justification of the attempt by an emancipated people to re-form its natural state into a moral order.

This natural state (as any political body that derives its original existence from forces and not from laws can be called) does stand in contradiction to moral man, for whom the only law should be to act in conformity with the law; but it is sufficient for physical man, who gives himself laws only so that he might come to terms with forces. However, physical man *actually* exists, while moral man is merely *a problem yet to be solved*. Once reason abolishes the natural state, as it must necessarily do if it is to assume its place, it risks physical, actual man for the sake of a moral man as yet unformed, risks the existence of society for a merely potential ideal society (if also a morally necessary one). Reason takes from man something that he really possesses, and without which he would have nothing, pointing him towards something that he could, and should, possess; and if this turns out to be asking too much of him reason would, for the sake of a humanity that he still lacks, a lack that does his existence no harm, tear him from that animal existence which is actually the condition of his humanity. Before man had time to align his will with the law, reason would have snatched the ladder of nature out from under his feet.

The great problem is that physical society cannot cease to exist for a moment *in time* while moral society is forming *as an idea*; that man's sheer existence cannot be endangered for the sake of his moral dignity. When a craftsman repairs a timepiece he can still its wheels; but the living clockwork of the

state has to be repaired while it continues to strike, the turning wheel has to be replaced while still in motion. Support has to be found to secure the continuation of society, rendering it independent of the natural state that one seeks to transcend.

This support cannot be found in the natural character of man, for this character is selfish and violent, more inclined to the destruction of society than to its preservation. Nor can it be found in his moral character, for, as we have seen, this must first be cultivated; and the legislator could never act, nor ever depend with any degree of certainty upon this character, because it is free and *never made manifest*. One must therefore part licence from man's physical character, and freedom from his moral character, bringing the first into conformity with law and making the second dependent upon sense-impressions. This would remove the former rather further from matter, while bringing the latter somewhat closer, so that a third character might be created which, related to both, could create a path from the rule of naked force to the rule of laws; and which, without hindering the development of moral character, served instead as a sensible pledge of an invisible morality.

FOURTH LETTER

This much is certain: only a preponderance of this kind of character among a people can render harmless the transformation of a state according to moral principles, and only this character can secure its persistence. The formation of a moral state will require that the moral order be a motivating force; free will is to be drawn into the causal domain in which everything is connected with strict necessity and constancy. However, we know that the human will is ruled by contingency, and that only in the Supreme Being do physical and moral necessity coincide. If then we are to count on man's moral conduct with as much certainty as we count upon *natural* events, then this conduct must *be* his nature, and he must be led by these impulses to conduct which is always of a moral character. Human will has a completely free choice between duty and inclination, and this sovereign right of his person can and should be infringed by no physical compulsion. If he is to retain this capacity to choose, while remaining all the same a dependable link in the causal connection of powers, this can happen only if the effects of both duty and inclination are indistinguishable in the empire of appearances; and, for all the difference of form, the content of his volition remains the same – that therefore his impulses coincide sufficiently with his reason for universal legislation to be possible.

It can be said that every individual carries within himself, by disposition and vocation, a purely ideal man, the great task of his existence being to reconcile all his shifts and changes

with its immutable unity.*[1] This pure man, visible more or less clearly in every subject, is represented by the state: the objective and also canonical form in which the diversity of subjects seeks unity.[2] Now there are two distinct ways in which we might imagine how temporal man coincides with the idea of man, and just as many ways in which the state can manifest itself in individuals: either through the pure man suppressing empirical man (the state suppressing individuality), or by the individual *becoming* the state (temporal man *refining* himself into the idea of man).

In a unilateral moral evaluation this difference collapses, for reason is satisfied as long as its laws are unconditionally observed. But in entirely anthropological terms, where both form and content are of importance and living sensation also has a voice, this difference becomes all the more important. Reason furthers unity, but nature furthers diversity; both lay claim to man. The law of reason is imprinted upon him by an incorruptible consciousness, the law of nature by an ineradicable feeling. It will be proof of a deficiency of upbringing if moral character can prevail only by sacrificing the natural; and the constitution of a state will be very incomplete if it can bring about unity only by suppressing diversity. The state should honour in individuals not only the objective and generic but also their subjective and specific character, and ensure that, in extending the invisible empire of morals, the empire of appearance is not depleted.

When the mechanic artisan takes up a shapeless mass to form it for his own ends, he has no reservations about applying force; for the natural material with which he works deserves in itself no consideration, and his concern is not with the whole for the sake of its parts, but with the parts for the sake of the whole. When the artist takes up the same mass, he likewise has little concern about applying force; he wishes only to avoid showing that he does so. He has no more respect for

* I refer here to a text by my friend Fichte which has recently been published, *Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*, in which he illuminates this principle in a manner never before attempted.

the material with which he works than does the mechanic artisan, but he will seek through apparent pliancy to deceive the eye which guards the liberty of this material. It is completely different with educational and political craftsmen, for whom the human being is both material and object of attention. Here purpose becomes material again, and only because the whole serves the parts might the parts align themselves with the whole. The state craftsman must have a consideration for his material quite different from that to which the artist pretends; he must respect its uniqueness and personality not merely subjectively, seeking an illusory impact upon the senses, but objectively, directed to its inner being.

But since the state should be an organization that creates itself for itself, it can only be realized if the parts have been attuned to the idea of the whole. Because the state represents the pure and objective humanity in the hearts of its citizens, it will have to observe with respect to its citizens the same relationship as each has to himself, and will be able to honour their subjective humanity only to the extent that it is refined into objective humanity. If the inner man is at one with himself he will preserve his individuality even when his conduct is subject to the greatest universalization, and the state will simply become the expositor of his finest instinct, the clearer formulation of his inner sense of right. If, on the other hand, subjective man is set against objective man in the character of a people in such a way that the latter can win out only by suppressing the former, the state will then impose the full rigour of the law on its citizens and, so as not to become their victim, trample upon inimical individuality regardless.

However, man can be at odds with himself in two ways: either as a savage, his feelings ruling his principles; or as a barbarian, if his principles destroy his feelings. The savage despises artifice, recognizing nature as his unlimited domain; the barbarian scorns and dishonours nature; but more contemptibly than the savage, he often enough continues to be the slave of his slave. The cultured man makes nature his friend, honouring its freedom by taming only its caprice.

If, therefore, reason introduces moral unity to physical society, it must not harm the diversity of nature. If nature seeks to maintain diversity in the moral construction of society, this must not infringe moral unity; the triumph of form is equidistant from uniformity on the one hand and confusion on the other. A *totality* of character has therefore to be found in the people both capable and worthy of exchanging the state of compulsion for that of liberty.

FIFTH LETTER

Is it this character – that of our present age – that current events show us? I turn straight away to the most prominent object in this vast canvas.

It is true that the standing of opinion has fallen, arbitrary rule has been unmasked and, while still armed with power, it can no longer lay any claim to honour. Man has at last awoken from indolence and self-deception, and with an emphatic majority demands to be restored into his inalienable rights. But man does not only make demands; on both sides of the Atlantic he is rising up to take by force what he thinks has been unlawfully denied him. The fabric of the natural state is tottering, its rotting foundations give way and there seems to be the *physical* possibility of enthroning the law, of finally treating man as an end in himself, and making true liberty the foundation of political association. Vain hope! The *moral* possibility is lacking, and a moment of such possibility finds itself confronted with an unreceptive generation.

Man portrays himself by his deeds, and what kind of image is shaped in the drama of the present! Here a relapse into savagery, there lethargy: the two extremes of human degradation, united in one single epoch.

We observe rough and licentious instincts among the lower and more numerous classes, which, after the dissolution of civil order, hurry with ungovernable fury to their animal gratification. It may therefore be that objective mankind had reason for complaint with the state; nonetheless, subjective mankind has to honour its institutions. Can one blame the state for disregarding the dignity of human nature, so long as its very existence had

to be defended? That it hastened to divide by force of gravity, and bind through force of cohesion, when it was not yet time to think of organic development? Its dissolution was its own justification. Society, loosened of all control, falls back into an elemental domain, instead of hurrying upwards into an organic life.

On the other hand, the civilized classes present the even more repugnant spectacle of lethargy and a depraved character which is all the more disgusting because culture itself is its source. I no longer recall which of the old or new philosophers remarked that the more refined a thing, the more repulsive its decay; but this is also true of the moral sphere. If the child of nature breaks loose, he becomes a madman; the pupil of art, despicable. The enlightenment of understanding that the finer ranks not unjustly praise has on the whole had so little refining influence on resolve that it has instead tended to reinforce corruption through principle. We disown nature in its proper domain only to experience its tyranny in the moral sphere, and while we resist the impression nature makes upon us, we adopt its principles as our own. The pretended decency of our manners refuses nature the *first* (pardonable) word, only to give it, in our materialist moral philosophy, the decisive *last* word. Egoism has established its system at the heart of the most elaborated sociability, and in the absence of its very own sociable heart we experience all the contagion and affliction of society. We subordinate our free judgement to the despotic opinion of society, our feeling to its bizarre customs, our will to its seductions – it is only our impulsiveness that we maintain in the face of its divine laws. A complacent egoism seizes the heart of the man of the world, a heart that in the primitive natural man often beats in sympathy, and each seeks to save just himself, as those fleeing a burning town seek to rescue their meagre property from destruction. It is thought that only by completely abjuring sensibility can we find protection against its aberrations, and the ridicule that often serves to chasten and rein in the enthusiast is directed with equal disregard to the most refined feeling. Culture, far from setting us free, develops in every capacity with which we are cultivated merely a new

need; physical bonds lace themselves ever tighter around us, such that our fear of losing what we have extinguishes even the fiery impulse for improvement, and the maxim of passive obedience is taken for supreme wisdom. The spirit of the age thus vacillates between perversity and brutality, between unnatural and bare nature, between superstition and moral unbelief, and it is only the balance of evil that sets a temporary limit.

SIXTH LETTER

Does this image of the age really go too far? I do not expect this objection to be made; rather another, that I have in this way proved too much. You will tell me that this image does resemble contemporary mankind, but it also resembles all cultured peoples, since all of them, without exception, must be led away from nature by sophistry before they can return to nature through reason.

Yet closer attention to the character of the age will make us wonder about the contrast between the form taken by mankind today and that of earlier forms, especially that of the Greeks.[1] Our reputation for education and refinement, which we rightly value by comparison with all other *merely* natural humanity, is pulled up short by the natural humanity of the Greeks, for they freely embraced all the delights of art and worthiness of wisdom, though without being seduced by them as we have been. The Greeks not only shame us by a simplicity that is alien to our age; they are also our rivals, even our models, in respect of those very advantages in which we seek consolation and reassurance for our unnatural manners. At once complete in form and substance, at once philosophical and creative, at once gentle and energetic, the Greeks united the youth of imagination with the manhood of reason in a glorious humanity.

At that beautiful time of the awakening of spiritual powers, sense and spirit had as yet no clearly separate domains; there had been no dissent that might have prompted them to form hostile, strictly demarcated camps. Poetry had not yet wooed wit, speculation had not yet ruined itself through sophistry. If need be they could exchange functions, for each honoured

truth in its own way. However high the flight of reason, it made sure to retain its substance; however finely and sharply it made distinctions, it cut no corners. It did pull human nature apart and projected each element, enlarged, into the wonderful world of its gods; although this human nature was not merely broken into fragments, but combined in different proportions, no single deity lacking humanity in its entirety. How different are we moderns! The image of the human species in each of us has been enlarged, shattered and scattered as shards, not in proportioned admixtures; so that one has to go from one individual to another to reconstitute the totality of the species. One might almost say that in practice our faculties express themselves as fragments corresponding to the analytical distinctions of the psychologist; not only individual subjects but entire classes of men realize only one part of their endowments, while the remainder remain stunted, leaving hardly a dull trace of themselves.

I am not overlooking the advantages that the human race today enjoys with respect to the best of their predecessors, taken as a whole and weighed on the scales of understanding; but in any such contest like must be measured in turn against like. Which modern man is prepared to challenge any one Athenian to debate the prize of humanity?

Why should individuals be so disadvantaged, given all the advantages of the species? How did an individual Greek come to be representative of his era, and why does no modern man claim this distinction? Because the first was formed as a unity by nature, and the second by an intellect that divided and subdivided.

It was culture itself that wounded modern humanity in this way. On the one hand, the extension of empirical knowledge and sharper thinking rendered a more precise distinction of the sciences necessary, while on the other the elaborate machinery of the state demanded a more consistent separation of ranks and occupations; the inner unity of human nature was torn apart, and a ruinous dispute set its harmonious powers at odds. Intuitive and speculative understanding became inimical and occupied their own domains, whose border they now began

to patrol with jealous mistrust; and the spheres within which their activities were confined were now ruled by a master they had themselves chosen, who not infrequently sought to suppress as inessential all other human endowments. While here an excessive imagination laid waste to the hard-won fruits of understanding, elsewhere the spirit of abstraction consumed the fire at which the heart should have warmed itself, and imagination been kindled.

The collapse which art and learning first brought about within man was made complete and universal by the new spirit of government. Of course, it was not to be expected that the simple organization of the first republics would survive the simplicity of initial manners and conditions, but instead of rising to a higher animalistic life, it descended into a crude and clumsy mechanism. Greek states resembled a colony of polyps,[2] for within them individuals enjoyed an independent life, although in time of necessity they could form into a whole; this now gave way to the artifice of a clockwork mechanism, the joining together of an infinite number of lifeless parts to create a new mechanically driven whole.[3] State and Church, laws and manners were now torn apart; pleasure was separated from work, means from end, effort from reward. Eternally shackled to one small fragment of the whole, man imagined himself to be a fragment, in his ear the constant and monotonous noise of the wheel that he turned; never capable of developing the harmony of his being, and instead of marking the humanity in his nature, he simply became the impress of his occupation, his particular knowledge.[4] But not even that bare fragmentary union still attaching the individual parts to the whole depended upon forms that they were able to determine themselves (for who would voluntarily surrender his liberty to a mechanism so artificial and shy of light?); any such autonomy was spurious, since the forms were in fact prescribed for them, inhibiting any free insight. Dead letters represent living intellect, a practised memory being a more reliable guide than genius and sensibility.

If the commonweal makes office the measure of the man, if it prizes in one citizen only his memory, in another only mathematical understanding, in a third only mechanical skill; if it is

here indifferent to character and only interested in particular knowledge, but there by contrast a sense of order and lawful conduct is thought enough compensation for the most occult thinking – if at the same time these individual skills are to be pushed to such a degree of intensity as the subject allows in extension – should we be surprised that all other faculties of the mind are neglected, so that the one single faculty prized above all others should be exclusively rewarded? We do know that the powerful genius does not take the limits of his occupation to be the limits of his activity, but the mediocre talent uses up the entirety of his meagre powers in pursuing the occupation that has fallen to him; and anyone who has time left over for his own pursuits once his occupational duties are fulfilled must already be uncommonly gifted. Moreover, the state seldom thinks it any recommendation when powers exceed tasks; nor if the higher intellectual needs of the man of genius compete with the demands of office. The state jealously guards a monopoly over its servants; it would rather its man dallied with passions of the flesh than with those of the mind, and who could blame it for so doing?[5]

And, quite gradually, real individual life is extinguished, so that the threadbare existence of the abstract idea of the whole might prevail; the state remains for ever alien to its citizens, finding no feeling for it. Forced to deal with the diversity of its citizens through their classification, experiencing humanity only through representation, hence at second hand, the governor entirely loses contact with humanity, taking it for a mere construct of the intellect, while the governed are in turn indifferent to laws that barely relate to them. Wearying at last of maintaining a bond whose burden is so little eased by the state, positive society relapses into a moral state of nature – which has long been the fate of most European states; the public power becomes just *one party among many*, hated and circumvented by those for whom it exists, and recognized only by those who can do without it.

Faced with this dual force that presses upon it, both from within and from without, could humanity choose a path other than that which it actually took? Since the spirit of speculation

in the world of ideas sought immemorial possessions, it had to become a stranger to the world of the senses, and through its concern with form lose sight of matter. Since practical spirit was locked into a monotonous world of objects, and there further restricted by formulation, the free whole receded from view, becoming likewise impoverished. Speculative spirit sought to model the real on the conceivable, exalting the subjective conditions of its powers of imagination into laws constitutive of the existence of things. By contrast, the practical spirit went to the opposite extreme, judging all experience whatsoever according to one particular fragment of that experience, seeking to impose without discrimination the rules governing *this* fragment upon each and every occupation. The first fell victim to empty subtlety, the second to a pedantic obtuseness; the former being too high-flown for the individual, the latter too unambitious to grasp the whole. The disadvantage of this last tendency was not merely limited to knowledge and production; it had no less an impact upon sensibility and action. We know that the degree of sensibility of the mind depends upon vivacity of imagination, its range upon imaginative powers. However, the preponderance of analytical power must necessarily rob the capacity for invention of both power and inspiration, a more restricted domain of objects reduce its wealth. Consequently, the abstract thinker very often has a *cold* heart, since he dissects the impressions that can touch his soul only in their entirety; the man of affairs very often has a *cramped* heart, because his power of imagination is confined to the uniform limits of his occupation, and is not capable of envisaging alien ways of thought.

I was minded to reveal the disadvantageous aspect of contemporary character and its sources, not to demonstrate the advantages with which nature endows it. I freely admit to you that, however little good this fragmentation of their being can do individuals, there is no other way in which the human species could have progressed. There is no doubt that the emergence of Greek humanity represented a maximum at which there could be neither pause nor further upward movement. There could be no pause, because intellect must have been

inevitably compelled by knowledge already accumulated to separate itself from sensation and intuition in its striving for clarity of knowledge. There could be no further upward movement, because only a certain degree of clarity can coexist with a particular abundance and warmth. The Greeks had achieved this, and if they had wished to develop their culture further they would have had to surrender the totality of their being in the same way that we have had to, to pursue truth along separate lines.

There was no way of developing the various capacities of man other than to set them one against the another. The antagonism of powers is the great instrument of culture, but, all the same, only an instrument; for so long as this antagonism persists one is still on the path towards culture.[6] It is only because the individual powers of man separate themselves in this way, seeking exclusive authority, that they come into conflict with the truth of things and compel an idle common sense, that would not otherwise rise above external appearance, to penetrate to the heart of things. Since pure intellect usurps authority in the world of sense, while the empirical intellect seeks to subordinate pure intellect to the conditions of experience, both capacities develop to the greatest possible maturity, exhausting the full extent of their respective domains. Since the power of imagination also here dares dissolve the ordered world through its unconstrained freedom, it compels reason to become the supreme source of knowledge, calling upon the law of necessity for assistance in dealing with this capriciousness.

The unilateral exercise of powers does inevitably lead the individual into error, but it leads the species as a whole to truth. Solely by focussing the entire energy of our mind, and pulling our entire being together into one single power, we lend wings to this individual power, and through artifice lead it far beyond the limits that nature seems to have set it. Just as it is quite certain that all human individuals together, with the eyesight with which nature has endowed them, would never have discovered even one of the satellites of Jupiter revealed to the astronomer with the telescope, so it can also be agreed that human powers of thought would never have proposed an

analysis of the infinite, nor a critique of pure reason, if the individuals so assembled had not isolated reason from everything material, readied their eyes and directed their attention to the absolute with the most intense abstraction. But will such a mind, dissolved into pure intellect and pure intuition, be suited to exchange the strict fetters of logic for the free course of poetic power, grasping hold of the individuality of things with true and chaste sense? Nature here sets even the universal genius a limit that he cannot cross, and truth will continue to make martyrs so long as philosophy has to make its prime concern the creation of safeguards against error.

However much the entire world might benefit from this separated development of human powers, it cannot be denied that the individuals involved are cursed by this universal purpose. While gymnastic exercise might create athletic bodies, beauty is created only by the free and regular play of the limbs. In the same way, harnessing together individual intellectual powers can certainly create extraordinary human beings, but only an equal intellectual temperament can make them happy and complete. And in what kind of relationship with former and future eras would we stand if the development of human nature made such a sacrifice necessary? We would have been the serfs of mankind, we would for a few thousand years have slaved for it, and our mutilated nature would be marked with the shameful traces of our servitude – so that a later generation might in blissful indolence maintain its moral health, and allow free rein to the development of its humanity!

But can man really be intended to neglect himself for the sake of any purpose? Should the purposes of nature rob us of a completeness which the purposes of reason prescribe for us? It must therefore be wrong that the development of individual powers requires the sacrifice of their totality; or if the rule of nature strives so for this end, then it is up to us to restore, through higher artifice, the totality in our nature that artifice has destroyed.

SEVENTH LETTER

Should we perhaps expect this to be done by the state? That is not possible, for the state in its present form has itself brought about the evil, and the state as conceived by reason would, instead of being able to establish this better humanity, have to be established upon this better humanity. This would have brought my studies right back to the point from which I had started, and from which my studies had for a time removed me. The present era is far from placing before us that form of humanity recognized to be the necessary condition for a moral reform of the state, and instead shows us something which is more like the direct opposite. If the principles I have advanced are correct, and if experience confirms my assessment of the present, then one has to declare that any attempt to bring about this kind of transformation in the state is untimely, and also declare any hope that might be founded upon this as chimerical, until such time as the inner separation of man is ended, and his nature is sufficiently developed to itself be the artist, and lend reality to the political creation of reason.

Nature shows us in its physical design the path we must take to moral existence. Not until the struggle of elemental forces in lower organisms has abated does nature begin with the noble formation of physical man. In the same way the elemental conflict within ethical man, the conflict of blind impulse, has to be stilled, and crude antagonism within him cease, before one might dare to favour diversity. On the other hand, the autonomy of his character has to be secured, and subordination to alien despotic forms give place to a respectable liberty, before the diversity in him might subordinate itself to the unity of the

ideal. Where natural man misuses so arbitrarily his voluntarism, here one might scarcely show him his liberty; where the man of artifice still needs his liberty so little, one cannot here take his voluntarism from him. The gift of liberal principles is betrayal for the whole if it associates itself with a still fermenting force, reinforcing a nature already overmighty; the rule of conformity becomes tyranny against the individual if it associates itself with an already prevalent weakness and physical limitation, extinguishing in this way the final flickers of autonomy and individuality.

The character of the age must therefore first lift itself from its deep degradation, free itself of the blind force of nature to which it was there subject and return to its simplicity, truth and substance; a task that will take longer than a century. I freely admit that some isolated efforts might succeed, but this will not improve the whole, and the contradiction of conduct will constantly trump the unity of maxims. In other parts of the world the humanity in the negro will be honoured,[1] while in Europe it is disparaged in the thinker. The old principles will remain, but clothed with the garb of the century, and philosophy will lend its name to a repression formerly authorized by the Church. Fearful of liberty, whose early efforts are always inimical, one will either submit to an easy servitude or, brought to despair by pedantic tutelage, escape to a state of nature lacking all constraint. Usurpation will invoke the weakness of human nature, insurrection its dignity, until finally the great ruler of all human affairs, blind might, intervenes, and decides what purports to be a conflict of principles in the same way that it would a common brawl.

EIGHTH LETTER

Should therefore philosophy retire, discouraged and without hope, from this domain? While the rule of forms extends itself in every other direction should this, the most important of all possessions, be delivered up to faceless chance? Should the conflict of blind forces last an eternity in the political world, and the sociable law never vanquish hostile self-interest?

Not at all! Reason itself will not engage directly with a harsh power resistant to its weapons; no more than the son of Saturn in the *Iliad* will it stoop to take action in that grim arena.[1] Instead, reason chooses from among the ranks of warriors the most worthy, equips him like Zeus did his grandson with divine arms, and through his victorious power brings about the great decision.[2]

Reason has done what it can by discovering the law and establishing it; its execution is the task of resolute will and living feeling. If truth is to prevail in battle it must itself first become a *force*, establishing an *impelling force* as its champion in the realm of appearances; for impulses are the only motive forces in the sensible world. If reason has as yet showed little of its victorious power, this is not the fault of an intellect powerless to unveil it, but rather of the heart closed against it, and of the impulse that did not act in its favour.

So where does this still-prevailing rule of prejudice and smothering of minds come from, given the light shed by philosophy and experience? The era is enlightened, which means that knowledge has been discovered and made public sufficient to correct at least our practical principles. The spirit of free investigation has scattered those mistaken conceptions which

have long barred the approach to truth, and has undermined the ground upon which fanaticism and deception had set their throne. Reason has cleansed itself from the deceptions of the senses and delusions of sophistry, and philosophy itself, which first made us disloyal to nature, now loudly and insistently calls us back into its arms – why, then, are we still barbarians?

Rather than in the things themselves, it must be something in men's psyche that obstructs the acceptance of truth, even when it burns so brightly, and the adoption of truth, even when it is so vividly convincing. A wise old man has sensed this, and it lies hidden in the pregnant statement: *sapere aude*.[3]

Have the courage to use your own understanding! The energy of courage needed to overcome the obstacles to learning thrown up by both the indolence of nature and the cowardice of the heart. Not for nothing does the ancient myth have the goddess of wisdom emerging fully armed from Jupiter's head;[4] for her very first action is that of a warrior. Even at her birth she must enter a bitter struggle with senses that do not wish to be torn from sweet repose. The more numerous part of mankind is too tired and exhausted from its struggle with need to gird itself up for a new and more intense struggle against error. Happy to avoid the troublesome effort of thinking, they gladly leave the control of their concepts to others; and if it so happens that they rouse themselves to higher needs, they seize with greedy credulity upon the formulations that state and priesthood have prepared for them in anticipation. If these unhappy souls deserve our sympathy, we are justified in despising those whom fortune has freed from the yoke of need, but who nonetheless choose to bend themselves to it. Such people prefer the twilight of obscure belief, in which one can feel more alive and shape the imagination in whatever way one likes, to the rays of truth that chase away the comforting delusions of their dreams. These illusions, which the malevolent light of knowledge threatens to scatter, are the basis of all their happiness; how can they be expected to pay so much for a truth that begins by robbing them of all they hold so dear? To love wisdom, they would already have to be wise, which itself is a truth already felt by those who gave philosophy its name.[5]

It is not therefore sufficient that all enlightenment of the intellect deserves recognition only insofar as it affects character; in part it derives from character, since the path to the head must be opened up through the heart. Culture of the capacity for feeling is the more urgent need at this time, not merely because it will enable better insight into life, but because it prompts the improvement of such insight itself.

NINTH LETTER

But have we not simply gone round in a circle? Theoretical culture should engender practical culture, while practical culture is still the condition of theoretical culture? All improvement in the domain of politics should derive from the refinement of character – but how can character be refined under the influence of a barbaric state order? One would need to find a tool suited to this task that the state does not possess, and with it open up sources that, for all political corruption, would remain pure and honest.

I have arrived at the point towards which all my previous observations have been moving: this tool is fine art; these sources open themselves up in its immortal examples.

Art, like science, is absolved from all that is positive and that human convention has introduced; both enjoy an absolute *immunity* from human capriciousness. The political legislator can bar the way to its domain, but he cannot rule within it. He can despise the friend of truth, but truth prevails; he can humiliate artists, but he cannot falsify art. Of course, nothing is more common than for both art and science to pay homage to the spirit of the age, or for creative taste to be ruled by prevailing taste. Where character becomes rigid and hardens itself, we can see that science strictly observes its boundaries, and art is encumbered by the heavy shackles of rules; where character becomes slack and decays, science will seek to please and art to entertain. For entire centuries both philosophers and artists have showed themselves prepared to sink truth and beauty into the depths of a depraved mankind: there philosophers and artists perish, while truth and beauty victoriously wrestle themselves upward with indestructible vitality.

The artist is certainly the child of his age, but all the worse for him if he is at the same time its pupil, even worse its minion. May a benevolent divinity tear the infant from his mother's breast and nourish him with the milk of a better age, and allow him to grow into maturity under a distant Greek sky. When he has become a man, let him return as an alien form to his own century; not to please it by his reappearance, but instead terrifying, like Agamemnon's son, to cleanse it.[1] He will take his material from the present time, but the form will come from a more refined time; indeed, beyond all time, borrowed from the absolute and immutable unity of his being. Here, from the pure ether of his daimonic nature, the spring of beauty wells, uninfected by the corruption of the generations and eras tumbling in dark eddies far below. Whim can dishonour his material just as he had ennobled it, but chaste form is beyond such flux. While in statuary the Roman of the early centuries stood erect, he had long before bent his knee to his emperor; temples were still looked upon as holy long after the gods were derided; and the misdeeds of a *Nero* and a *Commodus* were shamed by the refined style of the building which lent them cover.[2] Mankind had lost its honour, but it was rescued by art and preserved in worthy stone; truth survives in the shape of deception, and from the copy the original will be restored. Just as refined art *survived* refined nature, so the inspiration of art now goes before her, arousing and teaching her. Before truth casts its victorious light into the depths of the heart, poetic power catches its rays, and the peaks of mankind will shine out while in the valleys it is still dank night.

How does the artist shield himself from the corruptions of his age that surround him on all sides? By disdaining its judgement. He should look upwards to his dignity and the law, never downwards to fortune and need. Free both of a vain activity that would gladly leave its mark in the passing moment, and of the impatient spirit of enthusiasm that applies the measure of all things to the petty creations of the time, he may leave the sphere of the actual to the intellect, where it belongs; for he may strive instead to create the ideal by connecting the possible with the necessary. Let him express this ideal in

illusion and truth, express it in the play of his power of invention and in the gravity of his deeds, express it in all sensuous and spiritual forms, and wordlessly project it into infinite time.

But not all in whose soul this ideal glows were granted the creative rest and great sense of patience to imprint this ideal upon the unnamed stone, or to pour it out in sober words, trusting to the loyal hands of the era. Far too impetuous to pass through this tranquil means, the divine creative impulse often throws itself into the present and into active life, seeking to reshape the formless material of the moral world. The misfortunes of the human race speak urgently to the sensitive man, even more urgently its degradation; enthusiasm is roused, and ardent yearning in vigorous souls strives impatiently for effect. But did man not ask himself whether this disorder in the moral world offends his reason, or perhaps instead pains his self-love? And if he does not yet know, then he will see it in the zeal with which it insists upon particular and prompt effects. The pure moral impulse is directed to the absolute; for this impulse there is no time, and the future becomes the present once it has with necessity to develop from this present. For a reason without limits the way is at once the destination, and this path is completed from the moment it is commenced.

To the young friend of truth and beauty who seeks from me knowledge of the way in which he should, despite all the century's opposition, satisfy the noble impulse in his breast, I say: *guide* the world upon which you act towards the good, and the calm rhythm of time will bring about its fulfilment. You have given the world such guidance if your teaching raises its thoughts to the necessary and the eternal; if, by action or example, you transform the necessary and eternal into an object of its impulses. The edifice of delusion and capriciousness will fall, it has to fall, it has already fallen as soon as you are certain that it is tending towards this; but this tendency must be within man's inner self, and not merely in his external appearance. Raise up victorious truth in the modest calm of your soul, project it in beauty so that not only thought pays homage to it, but sense might lovingly grasp its appearance. And so that you might not find yourself receiving from reality

the model that you should be lending it, do not consort with its dubious company until you are assured that your heart is at one with the ideal. Live with your century, but do not be its creature; serve your contemporaries, but give them what they need, not what they praise. Without having shared their guilt, share with them with noble resignation their punishments, and bend freely under the yoke that they can hardly carry, but can hardly do without. Through the steadfast courage with which you spurn their fortune you will prove to them that it is not through cowardice that you take on their suffering. Think them how they should be when called upon to influence them; but think what they are when you are tempted to act for them. Seek their applause from their honour, but calculate their happiness according to their unworthiness; your own nobility will awake their own, and here their unworthiness will not ruin your purpose. The gravity of your principles will scare them off, but they will be able to bear them in play; their taste is purer than their heart, and here you have to grasp the timid fugitive. Their principles you will attack in vain, their acts condemn to no effect; but you can try your creative hand on their leisure. Chase from their pleasures all caprice, frivolity and coarseness; so will you imperceptibly banish them from their actions, and finally from their convictions. Wherever you find them, surround them with refined, great, inspirational forms, encircle them with symbols of excellence, until appearance conquers reality, and art nature.