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Faculty of Humanities

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

BOTOND CSUKA

THE TELEOLOGY OF THE AESTHETIC IN THE
BRITISH ENLIGHTENMENT

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[Unterzeichnung]

a doktori értekezés szerzőjének aláírása
Final Causes lye more bare and open to our Observation, as there are often a great Variety that belong to the same Effect; and these, tho’ they are not altogether so satisfactory, are generally more useful than the other, as they give us greater Occasion of admiring the Goodness and Wisdom of the first Contriver.

– JOSEPH ADDISON, *The Spectator, No. 413* (1712)

There is no part of Philosophy of more importance, than a just Knowledge of Human Nature, and its various Powers and Dispositions.

– FRANCIS HUTCHESON, Preface to *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725)

A purpose, an intention, a design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it. *That nature does nothing in vain*, is a maxim established in all the schools, merely from the contemplation of the works of nature, without any religious purpose; and, from a firm conviction of its truth, an anatomist, who had observed a new organ or canal, would never be satisfied, till he had also discovered its use and intention.

– DAVID HUME, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779)

That man is finely adjusted internally as well as externally to his situation on this earth, is made evident from a thousand instances.

– HENRY HOME, LORD KAMES, “Personal Identity”, in *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751)

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When I began studying aesthetics I never would have thought that I would eventually write my dissertation on the final cause arguments in eighteenth-century British aesthetic theories. I simply never could have imagined that eighteenth-century aesthetics could be so beautifully perplexing, intriguing, and relevant until a seminar on Burke’s aesthetics and a course on the eighteenth-century philosophies of taste, both held at the Department of Aesthetics at ELTE by Sándor Radnóti. I am immensely thankful for professor Radnóti for enticing me to study this period and supervising this project from my earliest, half-baked ideas to the last moments. The final form of the dissertation also owes a tremendous debt to the supervision of Endre Szécsényi who first drew my attention to the teleological explanatory structures in eighteenth-century British aesthetics during an inspiring graduate seminar.

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Introduction:

Perspectives, Aims, and Methods

For a student of aesthetics at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it might seem that the field of aesthetics has never been so vast, erratic, and open, anarchized by so many competing aesthetic programmes drawing on the full spectrum of theoretical approaches. Among these programmes, there is a diverse group suggesting a novel approach to aesthetics. These aesthetic programmes emerged during the last decades of the twentieth century, and have, standing on very different traditions and proposing very different visions of a new aesthetics,1 been challenging the prevailing “fetishes” and “myths” of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophical aesthetics. The prevailing myths had, they argue, led to the reduction of aesthetics to the philosophy of art as an autonomous domain, the separation of “the aesthetic” from other values and practices, and the equation of “the aesthetic” with the artistic.2 As a result, aesthetics, as a discipline, became segregated, and “the aesthetic”, as a domain of value, became uprooted from the rich fabric of everyday life. Many now argue that instead of dissecting this rich fabric, aesthetics should rather explore it in its complexity, and point out the interconnectedness of the aesthetic with other values, together with its significance in our embodied practices. As a result, aesthetics has been transformed


during the last decades into an encompassing interdisciplinary project of investigating and even improving our interactions with the surrounding human and non-human world as, to adapt John Dewey’s phrase, “live creatures” endowed with sensibility, embodied feelings, imagination, and creativity.\(^3\) Partly because of the recent reorientation of aesthetics, and partly because of the developments in the twentieth-century practice and theory of art, the philosophy of art has also freed itself from the guardianship of aesthetics and is now discovering the potentials inherent in non-aesthetic theories of art.\(^4\)

These novel aesthetic approaches, while urging us to rethink the aesthetic and the subject-matter and method of the discipline itself, draw on both non-Western and Western “aesthetic traditions”. They often refer, for example, to the eighteenth-century beginnings of modern Western philosophical aesthetics, pointing out that in its early days aesthetics had a broader, even pragmatic, scope, one they would like to restore.\(^5\) One could mention Baumgarten’s famous definition of aesthetics as “the science of sensitive cognition” as well as eighteenth-century British and French theories of taste and criticism, which were originally not written as part of the new discipline of aesthetics but were, as we will see, soon incorporated into it nevertheless. Needless to say, authors like Francis Hutcheson or Edmund Burke stood on different theoretical groundworks, utilised different vocabularies, and often pursued very different goals than the present-day protagonists of everyday aesthetics. However, they did share the idea that art makes up only one segment of our aesthetic life, and, even more importantly, that our aesthetic experiences, aesthetic judgments, and cultivated aesthetic sensibilities play a significant role in “world-making” (though they would have probably used the term “improvement”), and that “aesthetic literacy” can help us shape

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\(^4\) For a subtle account of these transformations in the philosophy of art, see Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all. Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London – New York: Verso, 2013). It seems promising that recent introductory works have started to draw a clear distinction between aesthetics and the philosophy of art. See, for instance, Robert Stecker, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

\(^5\) Richard Shusterman proposed a slightly different argument, when he claimed that the “demarcational police” of twentieth-century Anglo-American *philosophy of art* forgot “the limit-defying” tendency of eighteenth-century *aesthetics*. At the beginning, the argument goes, aesthetics was a bold, experimental venture that dared to explore the sensuous beyond the conceptual, the sublime and picturesque beyond the beautiful, until Hegel confined it to the field of art. Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and the Limits of Aesthetics,” in *Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 129–38.
a better world. But even though many aspects of eighteenth-century “criticism of taste” might be relevant in our age when aesthetic autonomy seems to have lost its appeal, my goal here is not to appropriate it for present-day purposes, but to understand it, as far as it is possible, ‘in its own terms’. My aim is to understand how the roots of “the aesthetic” pervaded, penetrating into its deepest layers, the lavish soil of the British Enlightenment.

As the title of my study already indicates, I will not only speak of the historical context as “the British Enlightenment” (or, when specifically addressing regional contexts, “the Scottish Enlightenment”) but I also consider this frame of reference to be of high importance. Recast, discarded, and rehabilitated many times, “the Enlightenment” has, however, become an extremely contested term by the end of the twentieth century, which makes it necessary to explain in what sense and for what reasons I apply it here. Since the last third of the twentieth century, a growing number of intellectual historians challenged Peter Gay’s assumption that “There were many philosophes in the eighteenth century, but there was only one Enlightenment.” Although most of them were reluctant to discard the term altogether, the versatility of the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment has been firmly established in historiography, together with the claim that Enlightenment scholarship has no other option than to focus on the particular “species of Enlightenment”, to use J.G.A. Pocock’s term, who has been one of the chief proponents of “pluralising Enlightenment into a number of movements in both harmony and conflict with each other”. As a result, historians started to differentiate between the Enlightenment’s earlier and later phases, the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement of European elites and as a culture, its distinct (but interrelated) national

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7 Throughout this study, “the Enlightenment” is used to refer to a complex historical phenomenon in European history, and not as a philosophical punching bag. For this reason, I will not discuss the onslaughts on “the ruined altar of critical rationalism” (László Kisbali) in the wake of philosophers like Adorno, Horkheimer, Foucault, or MacIntyre. For a brief historical survey and critical reassessment of “the philosophers’ enlightenments” and “the historians’ enlightenments” from the point of view of a social historian, see Vincenzo Ferrone, The Enlightenment. History of an Idea, trans. Elisabetta Tarantino (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).
(and regional) contexts,\textsuperscript{10} radical and moderate wings,\textsuperscript{11} secular\textsuperscript{12} and religious orientations,\textsuperscript{13} the movements that supported and those that countered it,\textsuperscript{14} etc. John Robertson, who gave an excellent and balanced survey of these shifts in Enlightenment research at the beginning of his \textit{The Case of the Enlightenment}, aptly summed up these developments when he wrote: “The Enlightenment is dead; but many Enlightenments may yet flourish.”\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{15}}

Exploring the various contexts of the Enlightenment has proved to be of pivotal importance. Together with drafting anew its chronology and geography, entrenched views that understood the Enlightenment as “the age of reason”, the apotheosis of insipid rationality, an essentially revolutionary force, or a unified, militant march against religion started by French radicals have been challenged. Terms that had seemed absurd (or at least strange) earlier such as “clerical Enlightenment” or “conservative Enlightenment” have been introduced, and the ideas of a “British Enlightenment”, an “English Enlightenment” or a “Scottish Enlightenment” have become firmly established and widely discussed in the literature.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{10} For a landmark collection of essays dedicated to the various national (and regional) variants of the Enlightenment from America to Russia, see \textit{The Enlightenment in National Context}, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).


\textsuperscript{12} For a recent account that discusses the Enlightenment as a secular movement, see Margaret C. Jacob, \textit{The Secular Enlightenment} (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019).


But what remains of “the Enlightenment” if, in the absence of an overarching intellectual or cultural framework, we must make do with a broad definition, which can accommodate the contradictory ideas (and various religious beliefs) that emerged and clashed from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, while we can study only its particular manifestations? Opposing both a borderless Enlightenment and dissolving the Enlightenment into various enlightenments altogether, authors like Jonathan Israel or John Robertson have recently tried to restore the unity of the Enlightenment. Their unity is, however, a unity amidst variety. Israel famously differentiated between a Radical and a Moderate Enlightenment, while arguing that “Indeed, with its two main contending streams – moderate and radical – the Enlightenment can only be understood as a single narrative.” Modifying Israel’s account about the intellectual resources and chronology of the Enlightenment as well as his argument for the centrality of secularisation, Robertson defended the variety of national units but maintained that “the intellectual coherence of the Enlightenment may still be found”. He convincingly argued that this unity consists of modernisation or improvement, the enlightenments’ “commitment to understanding, and hence to advancing, the causes and conditions of human betterment in this world.” There seems to be a wide-ranging consensus regarding the primacy of modernisation. While assessing Robertson’s approach, Israel states that “Any workable definition of Enlightenment must focus on betterment in this world”, and even Roy Porter, who vehemently dismantled the idea of a “homogeneous Enlightenment” grounded in the

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17 One might add here, if I understand Pocock’s pluralistic approach correctly, that these narratives are not necessarily incompatible with a pluralistic approach. What is incompatible with pluralising the Enlightenment is the idea that one can get to the definitive account of the Enlightenment. Talking about Isaiah Berlin’s narrative, Pocock wrote that “If we see a number of processes, to which the word Enlightenment may be in one way or another applicable […], it must follow that to narrate one, or some, of these processes does not invalidate the narration of others for the moment left un-narrated. […] I deny only that his [Berlin’s] narrative constitutes a history of The Enlightenment or that mine does either. […] Enlightenment was a forest, in which there were many tangled paths to be found” Pocock, “The Redescription of Enlightenment”, 107–08, 114. (my italics)
18 Israel, Democratic Enlightenment, 6. (my italics)
19 Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment, 28.
20 Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment, 28.
21 Israel, Democratic Enlightenment, 5. Revising Robertson’s definition in many respects, Israel proposes his definition of the Enlightenment in the second volume of his Enlightenment series: “Enlightenment is, hence, best characterized as the quest for human amelioration occurring between 1680 and 1800, driven principally by ‘philosophy’, that is, what we would term philosophy, science, and political and social science including the new science of economics lumped together, leading to revolutions in ideas and attitudes first, and actual practical revolutions second, or else the other way around, both sets of revolutions seeking universal recipes for all mankind and, ultimately, in its radical manifestation, laying the foundations for modern basic human rights and freedoms and representative democracy. Certainly, there was a deep internal split between radical and moderate enlighteners. But both radical and moderate enlighteners sought general amelioration”. Ibid., 7.
“hallucination” that its “quintessence” can be found in mid-century France,\textsuperscript{22} seemed to have suggested that the Enlightenment “should be seen as a cluster of overlapping and interacting élites who shared a mission to modernize.”\textsuperscript{23}

One might interject, however, that modernisation cannot really assure the coherence of the Enlightenment since it had many faces in the eighteenth century, so even if it interlocks, for instance, the radical and moderate endeavours to improve the state of humanity, it remains a very loose bond. Even if it is so, I am afraid, we have to make do with it. So when it comes to modernisation or improvement in the Enlightenment, one must keep in mind that in the “moderate mainstream”, as Israel labels it, modernization rarely entailed denying faith, revelation, or religion: “a focus on betterment in this world carried no necessary implication about the existence of the next.”\textsuperscript{24} It is especially true in the case of the moderate British Enlightenment, where “improvement”, as we will see, mostly remained within a religious or pious framework.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, I will use “the Enlightenment” to refer to \textit{a coherent European intellectual movement of modernisation}, understood in the inclusive sense, encompassing radical and moderate, secular and religious ventures in various national or regional contexts. The instruments of modernisation, Robertson argues, were systematic inquiries into \textit{the laws of human nature, political economy, and the civilising process} – gathered under the umbrella of \textit{“the science of man”}. It is crucial to understand that these Enlightenment enquiries were meant to be applied, in a Baconian manner, to promote the benefits of mankind: “the science of man” was utilized “to establish the material and moral conditions and mechanisms of \textit{sociability}, the better to clear the path for human betterment, and to assess the prospects of its realisation.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{23} Porter, \textit{The Creation of the Modern World}, xxii (my italics).
\textsuperscript{24} Robertson, \textit{The Case for the Enlightenment}, 31.
\textsuperscript{26} See Robertson, \textit{The Case for the Enlightenment}, 28–30, quote from 30 (my italics).
But is “the Enlightenment” worth all the fuss? Why not throw it out altogether? My answer is that if we get rid of “the (British) Enlightenment” we might also forget its strong connotations of improvement. This “shared mission” of enlightened authors is, however, crucial for the understanding of “the aesthetics” of the British Enlightenment. As a brief survey of the literature in the first chapter will show, it is firmly established in Enlightenment scholarship that the various theories of taste and criticism of eighteenth-century Britain were also incorporated into the shared venture of improving sociability. Most of the literati of the British Enlightenment were united by their strong belief that a “refined” taste, a “polished” imagination, or a “delicate” sensibility are vehicles of individual and social improvement, and that these ‘aesthetic’ instruments can and should shape the emerging “public sphere”, in which they can serve as “models of sociability”.

The present study will also read the “aesthetic theories” of the British Enlightenment as instruments of improvement. However, instead of political philosophy, it will take anthropology to be their proper historical context, and argue that promoting a polished society was only one of the many interrelated functions that were attributed to the cultivation of human sensibility. Eighteenth-century “aesthetic theories” will be discussed here as integral parts of “the science of man”, which was, as I have just mentioned, the multidisciplinary venture that served as the vehicle of modernisation. What we often call the “aesthetics” of the early British Enlightenment is made up of seemingly very different works: the theories in question were originally written as contributions to different disciplines (from criticism of taste to moral psychology), and their immediate subjects differed from one another as well (from the fine arts to the reformation of manners). However, what lends unity to their variety is their shared aim to understand and promote the value of the aesthetic in individual and social flourishing. It is, in other words, the workings and functions of the emerging modern aesthetic experience or sensibility – or, as they called it, the pleasures of the imagination, taste, the sense of beauty, or, more generally, sensibility – that they sought to grasp. For describing these functions, the aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment utilized a theological language, the language of final causes.

constructing *teleological accounts of the aesthetic* in order to answer the anthropocentric concern with the value of aesthetic experience in somatic well-being, moral culture and social cohesion. Thus, I will not challenge the well-established idea that the “core” of modern Western philosophical aesthetics is “a concern with a certain kind of experience”\(^{28}\) and that it emerged in the eighteenth-century before Baumgarten’s initiation of the discipline. What I will challenge is the idea that the aesthetic was understood as an autonomous domain, cut off from other spheres of human life.

The first chapter will clarify the key concepts and contexts of the study. It is crucial to clarify in what sense I use the term “aesthetics” or “aesthetic theory” in the context of the British Enlightenment. No eighteenth-century British author used this term or thought that he (in this case, sadly, it is almost always a he) was contributing to a distinct philosophical discipline called “aesthetics”. There are, however, good reasons to attach these theories to the history of modern philosophical aesthetics, some of which will be considered in the first chapter. The chapter positions the early aesthetic theories in the contexts of “the science of man” and what Charles Taylor calls “Providential Deism” in order to lay down the main theses of the study as reference points for the following chapters.

The second, third, and fourth chapters will serve as case studies offering interpretations of the aesthetic theories of Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, and Henry Home, Lord Kames. This quite conventional list might be surprising given that defining the aesthetics of the British Enlightenment as the anatomy of sensibility could broaden excessively the limits of the aesthetic discourse. However, this is not what I wish to pursue here. Rather, I want to revisit some central philosophical works of “the aesthetic tradition” and see what happens if they are read as anatomies of sensibility. Revisiting these theories as parts of the science of human nature can not only help us understand their *main objectives* and discover the multifarious *disciplinary background* they drew on and were embedded into but it can also provide an explanation of the presence of the *final cause arguments* throughout the discourse. My interpretations will be structured by the ways these authors adopted and transformed the final cause arguments worked out by Addison: I will follow the reconfigurations of the recurring versions of these teleological accounts, what I will call *the well-being argument, the apprehension argument, and the social cohesion argument*. The interpretations organized around the

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teleological accounts of the aesthetic aim to explore what roles were assigned to the aesthetic in individual and social flourishing including the promotion of health, happiness, cognition, moral self-cultivation, spiritual experiences, and social cohesion.

I am fully aware that the list of my central figures is accidental, and that there are good reasons to include others. One might argue, for instance, for the inclusion of the third Earl of Shaftesbury who undoubtedly had a decisive influence over the entire eighteenth century. The names of David Hume or Thomas Reid, the giants of the Scottish Enlightenment, could be also mentioned among the rightful candidates. One might also suggest that the historical significance of Francis Hutcheson’s systematic aesthetic treatise should have earned him an entire chapter. Objections like these are certainly valid, and I can respond to them only by revealing the considerations behind my decision to focus on Addison, Burke, and Kames.

(a) I wanted to examine self-admitted representatives of the new empirical science and to understand the role of the final cause arguments in this hostile theoretical environment. After all, Francis Bacon banished final causes from scientific inquiries, even if he left a loophole when he wrote that the reference to final causes “actually distorts the sciences except in the case of human actions.”\(^{29}\) The Newtonians seem to have exploited this loophole while expanding the experimental method of analysis and synthesis to “enlarge”, as Newton himself famously put it, “the Bounds of Moral Philosophy”.\(^{30}\) The presence of finality in Shaftesbury’s neo-platonic “rhapsodies” hardly comes as a surprise, since his aesthetic considerations are grounded in the “the Order, Union, and Coherence of the Whole” and “the mutual Dependency of Things” and lead to the “healing Cause by which the Interest of the Whole is securely establish’d, the Beauty of Things, and the universal Order happily sustain’d.”\(^{31}\) To find them, however, recurring again and again in the works of devotees of the experimental method requires some explanation.

(b) Not independently from the first consideration, I chose authors who were, in one way or another, directly linked to Locke and what Israel called the “moderate


\(^{30}\) Sir Isaac Newton, Opticks, or a Treatise of the Reflexions, Refractions, Inflections & Colours of Light (London: William and John Innys, 1721), Query 31, 381.

mainstream Enlightenment”.

Locke did not work out an aesthetic theory, but it was his “new way of ideas” that gave shape to eighteenth-century British aesthetics, even though the century of taste did not produce a proper “Lockean aesthetics”. When elaborating theories of taste and criticism, authors of the century rather utilized, modified, criticised, and sometimes rejected the Lockean theoretical framework and assumptions, as we will see in the cases of Addison, Burke, and Kames. Needless to say, one might describe Shaftesbury’s influence in a similar manner, even if he rather functioned as an inspiration or provocation. No account of eighteenth-century aesthetics can leave him out of the picture. Furthermore, the Lockean and Shaftesburian origins of eighteenth-century British aesthetics were in no way independent from each other and were often conceived, as Hutcheson’s theory shows, as compatible approaches. As Peter Kivy writes: “if Locke's universe was a bloodless dance of particles, Shaftesbury's, on the contrary, was a veritable orgy of virtues, beauties, and designs. It was a marriage of the new way of ideas and the most venerable of ancient philosophies, Platonism, that had issue in the new British aesthetics.”

Lastly, I wanted to examine full-fledged aesthetic theories (Burke, Kames) that were adapted as aesthetic theories in the Continent, but I also wanted to revisit the more fluid essay philosophy of Addison, an early source that had a tremendous influence in the British Enlightenment. It is telling, for instance, that even though Hutcheson’s Inquiry (1725) contains arguably the first systematic aesthetic theory of the British Enlightenment (and, some argue, of Western modernity in general), some years later Hutcheson is ready to adapt the terminology of “the Ingenious Mr. Addison”. I devoted the last chapter to Kames, because his Elements of Criticism of 1762 is an all-encompassing synthesis of the aesthetic thinking of the first half of the century, while it also opens up new avenues which were later explored by his fellow Scots in the Common Sense School. The third Newtonian, Burke comes in the middle with his 1757 Philosophical Enquiry not only because the theories of the sublime have, as we will see, the potential to rearrange, and challenge some of the assumptions of eighteenth-century

32 Israel, Democratic Enlightenment, passim.
33 For the seminal account that emphasizes Locke’s pervasive significance and traces even the aesthetics of Romanticism back to Locke’s epistemology, see Ernest Lee Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace. Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960).
theories of taste but also because of his strict physiological approach to aesthetic phenomena represents an extreme (and often neglected) position, and is worthy of revisiting.

Methodologically, my historical investigations are going to proceed as follows. Each chapter dedicated to particular aesthetic theories has three main loci. (1) They start with positioning the author’s aesthetic theory within his own philosophy and the disciplinary network (or, in Addison’s case, the socio-cultural network) it was addressed to. Since neither Addison, Burke, nor Kames regarded their theories to be part of a distinct discipline called aesthetics, this contextualization is, in a sense, unavoidable. My goal here is, however, to take their original intentions seriously, and to understand these theories in the light of the broader disciplinary contexts they were meant to be integrated into. The disciplinary context will show that these aesthetic theories were, first and foremost, worked out as contributions to the new philosophical anthropology of the Enlightenment. (2) Each chapter then proceeds by meticulously reconstructing certain arguments that concern the anatomy of sensibility, or, as I will refer to it, the aesthetic apparatus. These arguments characteristically conclude in the consideration of the final causes of the constitution of human nature, i.e. they try to explain why human nature is “designed” in such a way that we are able to aesthetically engage with the world due to certain principles of sensibility. The teleological accounts reveal, as I have already claimed, that the ultimate goal of these aesthetic theories goes beyond the explanation of the principles of human sensibility: they are also normative theories that argue for the salutary benefits of the proper workings of the aesthetic apparatus for health, happiness, morality and society. To sum up, I will start with reconstructing particular arguments and proceed with reconstructing the historically relevant contexts these arguments open up and the final goals they point towards.

If I must find a label to be stamped onto the methodology of the study, it is designed to be a “contextualist” one. I feel reluctant, however, to accept the usual characterisation of the ongoing debate between “appropriationist” and “contextualist” histories, which conceives these positions as rigid and mutually exclusive.\(^{36}\) I also find

\(^{36}\) For such a characterisation, see Mogens Lærke, Justin E.H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser, Introduction to Philosophy and Its History. Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy, ed. Mogens Lærke, Justin E.H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–6. For a more subtle characterization of the positions, see Koen Vermeir, “Philosophy and Genealogy. Ways of Writing History of Philosophy”, in Philosophy and Its History, 50–53. For a more recent description of the
problematic the overtly confident claim of some contextualist historians that the historian is to reach a “disinterested” or “neutral” stance, which would assure establishing the objective historical meaning of a philosophical text, an illusion shattered in both the Continental\textsuperscript{37} and the Anglo-American world.\textsuperscript{38} Nevertheless, it is a contextualist study if to be a contextualist means rejecting “the use of criteria of description and classification not available to the agent himself”, understanding the meaning of a text in relation to the historical context it was addressed to, and sharing the idea that learning from the past “is to learn the key to self-awareness itself.”\textsuperscript{39} Criticising Skinner’s aim of reconstructing the intention of the author but keeping his “notion that a past philosophical text is a concrete intervention or contribution to a determined past philosophical controversy”, Mogens Lærke has recently argued that to understand “some philosophy ’on its own terms’ simply means taking departure from an \textit{internal perspective}”: “the parameters and guiding principles of the reconstruction” must be “formulated from a \textit{perspective situated within the historical context} of these past philosophies.”\textsuperscript{40} That is, from a perspective within the particular historical controversy the given text was addressed to as a contribution.

But does that mean that only those concepts and perspectives can be legitimately used that were used in the given historical controversy as well and that every other concept and perspective is to be discarded as anachronistic? If this is the case, using the concept of “the aesthetic” to refer to a new theoretical model, or the term “aesthetics” to

\textsuperscript{37} Gadamer famously concluded that “[t]he only ‘objectivity’ here is the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out. [...] a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither ‘neutrality’ with respect to content nor the extinction of one’s self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London – New York: Continuum, 2004), 271.

\textsuperscript{38} See, for instance, the remarks of Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner from 1984: “Pseudo-problems arise, however, when one tries to make a distinction between knowing about the relation of the past to the present and knowing about the past in itself. [...] The idea of ‘the truth about the past, uncontaminated by present perspectives or concerns’ is like the idea of ‘real essence, uncontaminated by the preconceptions and concerns built into any human language’. It is a romantic ideal of purity which has no relation to any actual inquiry which human beings have undertaken or could undertake.” Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, Quentin Skinner, \textit{Introduction to Philosophy in History. Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy}, ed. Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 8.


\textsuperscript{40} Mogens Lærke, “The Anthropological Analogy and the Constitution of Historical Perspectivism,” in \textit{Philosophy and Its History}, 21. Even though I will more or less try to follow the interpretive technique Lærke proposes, I am sceptical about his argument that such a technique leads to “the true historical meaning of a text,” for reasons given above. Ibid., 29.
refer to an emerging discourse, is certainly an unwarrantable anachronism which distorts the internal perspective necessary for understanding “the true historical meaning” of these theories. I will discuss the use of these terms in the first chapter, so it will suffice now to indicate that many contextualist historians have argued for the inevitability, usefulness, and legitimacy of anachronistic concepts and perspectives in historiography, especially in genealogical histories.\(^{41}\) In their introduction to a 1984 collection of essays, Rorty, Skinner, and Schneewind even wrote that “we might do well to forget the bugbears of ‘anachronism’ and ‘antiquarianism’”.\(^{42}\) What is needed, nevertheless, is extreme caution and self-reflection when such anachronistic terms are applied, especially when it comes to such an infamously volatile concept as “the aesthetic”. Though his inspiring *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is hardly a contextualist study, Terry Eagleton is absolutely right when he writes that “For a notion which is supposed to signify a kind of functionlessness, few ideas can have served so many disparate functions.”\(^{43}\)

To sum up these preliminary remarks about the methodology of the study: my purpose was to understand the early aesthetic theories of Addison, Burke, and Kames “on their own terms” by reconstructing the inner perspectives of the particular theories and the disciplinary configurations they were addressed to originally. However, my interest in rethinking the scope of the aesthetic and the place of aesthetics is hardly independent of present-day circumstances. In a sense, one can draw a parallel between the eighteenth- and twenty-first-century plights of aesthetics: “Indeed – Arnold Berleant points out –, the concerns of aesthetics may be more controversial at present than at any time since the eighteenth century when Kant gave modern aesthetics its classic formulation.”\(^{44}\) To Berleant’s remark, I would add that it was Kant’s “classic formulation” that eventually led to the diminishing of the scope of the concept, exactly because it proved to be so foundational. The present-day debate about aesthetics is essentially different from the one in the eighteenth century, because while today most proponents of everyday (and environmental, social, soma, etc.) aesthetics must argue

\(^{41}\) For a brief discussion of the question, see Vermeir, “Philosophy and Genealogy”, 51–53. Vermeir later adds that “The difference between the use of history in philosophy and the history of philosophy is thus not a question of anachronism or presentism; rather, they have a different object that is of interest, and their practice is adapted to this interest. The practices of the former are philosophical, while the practices of the latter are historical.” [i.e. genealogical] Ibid., 56.

\(^{42}\) Rorty, Schneewind, Skinner, Introduction, 10.


against the prevailing “myths” of the predominant models, these models were still in the making in the first half of the eighteenth century. This not only gives pre-Kantian aesthetics a certain elasticity and rich versatility but sets a challenge for the historian of philosophy. Early modern philosophy is an “interface between the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophy”, a terrain both alien and familiar. The “Culture of Enlightenment”, as probably one of its most famous critics, Alasdair MacIntyre put it, was “One so close to our own that it is not always easy for us to understand its distinctiveness, its difference from our own, and so not easy either to understand its unity and coherence.”

However, it is exactly these transitional periods or interfaces, the periods when the “classic formulations” are still in the making, which are the most significant for us to understand. Philosophy, Charles Taylor writes, produces “creative redescriptions” of certain concepts and problems, which not only merit but require the redescriptions of the “foundational formulations” of predominant theoretical models. Revisiting the formative years of a model is crucial, since after one formulation becomes entrenched, and sinks “to the level of an unquestionable assumption”, we often forget that once it was only one alternative among others: “So to understand ourselves today, we are pushed into the past for paradigm statements of our formative articulations.” In the case of philosophical aesthetics, the predominant modern theoretical models of “the aesthetic” appeared and competed in eighteenth-century theories of taste and criticism. These early aesthetic programmes sought to describe and understand the aesthetic as a new, modern sensibility and experience, and to grasp its significance in our lives as sensitive and social beings. The aesthetic was then, as it is now, an open question.

1. Aesthetics, the Science of Man, and the Providential Order

The following inquiry concerns the emergence and unfolding of what we now call “aesthetics” in Britain during the first half of the eighteenth century, exploring the ways the modern aesthetic experience grew out of and was embedded into the rich historical fabric of the British Enlightenment. The present chapter has three loci: first, it will propose arguments to justify the anachronistic disciplinary extension of “aesthetics” and the use of the infamously volatile concept of “the aesthetic” to the British Enlightenment, as the literati of eighteenth-century London, Edinburgh or Aberdeen never used them. Second, the main theses of the dissertation, which will serve as signposts for the interpretations expounded in the later chapters, will be introduced. It might be useful to summarize these theses at the outset: I will argue that what we would now call “the aesthetics” of the British Enlightenment was a multi-disciplinary endeavour channelled into the new philosophical anthropology of the Enlightenment, what Hume and his contemporaries called “the science of man”. These theories were designed to explore the anatomy of sensibility. They sought not only to explain the laws of the human sensitive and affective faculties (what I will call our aesthetic apparatus) but also reveal that its cultivation is necessary to improve life in modern commercial society. The aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment wanted to reveal and promote the values and functions of the aesthetic in individual and social flourishing. These theories were, after all, explanatory and normative at the same time. Behind this pursuit lies the assumption that aesthetic experiences have transformative power. This anthropocentric concern with the values and functions of the aesthetic was, however, almost always addressed in terms of final causes. This can explain the pervasive presence of what I will call the teleological accounts of the aesthetic in the British philosophy of taste.

But allow me one more preliminary remark here. The central place the study attributes to teleology might seem surprising: were not, after all, explanations in terms of finality, already banished from science by Francis Bacon? And even if final causes were still lingering on in the works of eighteenth-century British Newtonians, were
these not the remnants of the past, which were, their days being numbered, doomed to be swept away by the unstoppable tide of secularization in the West? Is it not the case, as it is often heard, that the aesthetic is the product of secular modernity? Reconstructing the relevant historical contexts in this chapter might illuminate the persistence of final cause arguments. Not only are these early aesthetic theories permeated by final causes, but crucial arguments also run towards and converge into the teleological accounts: *teleology seems to be at the heart of the aesthetics of the British Enlightenment*. It is not to say, however, that aesthetics, driven by a theological interest, can be subsumed under natural theology. Neither can this theological language be regarded as mere linguistic attire, a meaningless jargon that covers the new, secular flesh of modern Europe.

Through dissecting the final cause arguments, it will become visible that the first half of the eighteenth century was a period of transition in the understanding of the Providential Order: on the one hand, providentialism was still a relevant and meaningful framework, while, on the other hand, there were certain shifts in the understanding of the Providential Order, eventually resulting in crucial changes in the European history of ideas. The emergence of the aesthetic, I believe, is bound up with these shifts in eighteenth-century providentialism. The final cause arguments constitute the cornerstones of the early aesthetic theories because they reveal their true agenda, which is, paradoxically, an anthropocentric one: to *explain and promote certain this-worldly functions and values* of the bodily and mental faculties of sensibility – the “intention”, “use” or “design” of the human *aesthetic apparatus*. Throughout the teleological accounts of the aesthetic, the language activated is theological, a legacy of the past. The aim is, however, anthropocentric and radically modern: determining the role and significance of sensibility in the emerging modern world.

### 1.1. The Emergence of Modern Aesthetics

In the 1883 edition of *Modern Painters II*, the doyen of Victorian criticism, John Ruskin (1819–1900) wrote in a characteristically snappy remark that even though the term “aesthetics” is “now commonly employed”, “It was, of course, never so used by good or
scholarly English writers, nor ever could be.”48 “Aesthetics”, indeed, did not have an easy time of it for a long period in the British Isles. No one used it in the eighteenth century and, as Ruskin’s words attest, it remained problematic, as a spawn of German philosophy, even in the next one. The British had their own “criticism of taste” well before the Germans initiated their “aesthetics”, which was often conceived as nothing more than a new denomination for the same thing.49 Why bother then with the obscure terminology of the Germans? And, more importantly, why should we, today, try to force the eighteenth-century criticism of taste into the history of aesthetics? What could possibly justify such an anachronistic encroachment?

1.1.1. Aesthetic Programmes

As it is well known, the term “aesthetics” was introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) in his 1735 Meditationes originally to remedy the failure of logic to “guide the faculty of sensate cognition”. Furthermore, logic proved to be a poor guide in “philosophical poetics” as well, which Baumgarten defined as “the science guiding sensate discourse to perfection” (a “perfect sensuous discourse” being a poem). For this reason, Baumgarten writes, we need a philosophical discipline besides that of logic: “a science which might direct the lower cognitive faculty in knowing things sensately” – an asset that can be also utilized for improving the fine arts. He famously labelled this novel science “the science of perception, or aesthetic”. 50 Baumgarten’s early work was followed by his popular lectures in Halle and Frankfurt an der Oder (which gave rise to Meier’s influential Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften),51 his Metaphysica52 and finally his influential two-volume fragment entitled Aesthetica.

49 See, for instance, Sir William Hamilton’s remarks in his Lectures on Metaphysics (1859): “since Baumgarten […] first applied the term Aesthetic to the doctrine which we vaguely and periphrastically denominate the Philosophy of Taste, the theory of the Fine Arts, the Science of the Beautiful and Sublime, &c. – and this term is now in general acception, not only in Germany, but throughout the other countries of Europe.” Sir William Hamilton, Lectures on Metaphysics I (1859), Works of Sir William Hamilton, ed. H. L. Mansel and John Veitch (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1828–1960), vol. 3, 124, quoted in Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 3.
52 Here, under the rubric of “Empirical Psychology”, Baumgarten gives a succinct definition of the new science: ‘The science of knowing and presenting <proponendi> with regard to the senses is AESTHETICS (the logic of the inferior cognitive faculty, the philosophy of graces and muses, inferior
(1750/1758). The term spread like wildfire and aesthetics, as a distinct discipline of philosophy dedicated to “sensitive cognition”, was installed, quickly followed by the rise of an academic institutional framework throughout Germany as well as Central Europe.

Given the origins of the discipline in the Wolffian school, it might seem at first that aesthetics, until the second half of the nineteenth century at least, was “a predominantly Germanic affair”. But according to those historians who “focus on the thing rather than the name”, as J. Colin Mcquillan neatly put it, i.e. who are concerned with the subject of the inquiries instead of their disciplinary status, the clear evidence of the Baumgartian origins of the term and the discipline is nothing more than antiquarian nitpicking that conveniently evades answering the problem of the beginnings of modern aesthetics. Tracing the central ideas, subjects, core problems, etc. of the new discipline back to earlier discourses, many historians argued that the history of aesthetics does not correspond with the history of the discipline called aesthetics.

If one surveys the recent historiography of aesthetics, it is not hard to come across statements like this one: “The discipline covers a broad spectrum of issues, problems, and approaches, but students and practitioners generally agree that its origins can be traced unequivocally to eighteenth-century British philosophers working predominantly, though not exclusively, in England and Scotland.” A bit later in this book, the author – seemingly showing a total disregard for the Baumgartian coinage of the very term – does not hesitate to give us the real origins of aesthetics as well: “if Shaftesbury’s Characteristicks heralds the birth of philosophical aesthetics, and Hutcheson’s Inquiry is its inaugural systematic treatise, then Addison’s essays stand as


53 For his famous definition and description of the “younger sister” of logic in the Aesthetica, see Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Ästhetika, Lateinisch – deutch, trans. and ed. Dagmar Mirbach (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2007), vol. 1, §1–13; for its goal in beauty, “the perfect sensitive cognition”, see §14.


55 Kai Hammermeister, The German Aesthetic Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), x. For another recent historical account that discusses the emergence of aesthetics exclusively in the German context, see Stefanie Buchenau’s The Founding of Aesthetics in the German Enlightenment. The Art of Invention and the Invention of Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

the sustained treatment of ideas and concepts that in one way or another dominate the new discipline up to and beyond the publication of Burke’s *Enquiry* in mid-century”.  

Timothy M. Costelloe in no way represents a radical view when showcasing these authors – neither of whom even thought about contributing to “aesthetics” – as the forefathers of “the aesthetic tradition”. It seems to be the case, that there really is a general agreement in Anglo-American scholarship that it is not the initiation of the discipline that marks the beginning of modern philosophical aesthetics. In an influential article in the 1960s, Jerome Stolnitz arrogantly declared that “it is simply frivolous to allow [the use of the terms ‘aesthetic’ or ‘aesthetics’] to decide who ‘created’ aesthetic theory”.  

Half a century later, Paul Guyer complacently asserted that Baumgarten’s founding gesture was “an adult baptism” – rather than genuinely initiating something new, Baumgarten merely organised a novel, dynamically evolving *(proto-/pre-/quasi-)*aesthetic discourse into the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. The underlying idea here is that there is a continuity between the pre-aesthetic discourse of the seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century and the theories written as contributions to aesthetics proper. That although the label is different, the “thing” is the same.

Instead of Baumgarten, Guyer identifies the *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1711) from Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713), the *Spectator* essays (1712) from Joseph Addison (1672–1719), the *Traité du Beau* (1715) from Jean-Pierre de Crousaz’s (1663–1750), the *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting, and Music* (1719) from the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos (1670–1742), and the *Rational Thoughts on God, the World, and the Soul of Man* (1720) from Christian Wolff (1679–1754) as the works in which modern philosophical aesthetics originates. But why stop here? – one might ask. A well-known narrative traces back Baumgarten’s aesthetics not only to Wolffian but also to Leibnizian philosophy, which is often linked to the influential seventeenth-century French discourse of *délicatesse* that brought forth concepts like *esprit, sentiment* or the *je ne sais quoi*, revealing the individual and ineffable character of certain qualities and their experiences. Endre Szécsényi proposed an even bolder

57 Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, 1, 38. (my italics)
61 This seminal narrative was explicated in Alfred Baeumler’s 1923 work, which – following Karl Heinrich von Stein’s 1886 *Die Entstehung der neueren Ästhetik* – linked the German and French discourses, locating their fountainhead in Leibniz. See Alfred Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche
origin story, when he traced back the new kind of sensibility and the modern “aesthetic” notion of taste articulated in Dominique Bouhours’s *Entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugene* (1671) and Baltasar Gracián’s *Oraculo manual* (1647) to theological origins in the spirit of exercise of fellow Jesuits like St Ignatius of Loyola, which, Szécsényi claims, by sensualizing spirituality, served as antecedents of modern aesthetic experience with long-lasting theological influence that should not be overlooked.62

The list of nominees for the “Creator of Modern Aesthetics” could be continued. But even such a short survey forces us to abandon Guyer’s catchy metaphor of an “adult baptism” because it suggests a homogeneous discourse as well as a homogeneous discipline.63 The works mentioned above, however, discuss a wide range of subjects, utilize different methodological approaches, as well as vocabularies and languages, while relying on a wide array of theoretical and cultural background. We have not one but many persons – erudite adults as well as mischievous adolescents – who, minding their own business, have no idea that they are going to be baptised.

And to make things even more complicated, one should not forget that the discipline of aesthetics was far from monolithic in the second half of the eighteenth century: Baumgarten’s programme had to face other competing aesthetic programmes very early on. These programmes proposed different visions of the new science: its proper subject, its exact disciplinary status between science and criticism, its language and methodology were widely debated throughout Europe, and the Baumgartian programme was soon challenged and overshadowed by others – well before its transcendental transformation in the hands of Kant. A quick glance into the booming field of “university aesthetics” in Germany and Central Europe during the last third of


63 This view is still widely held. Writing about the relation of “philosophical aesthetics” to criticism, rhetoric and other discourses, Costelloe, for instance, asserts that “Whatever shared moments or points of intersection it enjoys with these intellectual traditions, however, philosophical aesthetics remains singular and, as the suggestions of various commentators have shown, a little prodding quickly reveals some distinguishing marks of its birth.” Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, 4.
the century is enlightening: an eclectic, creative mish-mash of various aesthetic programmes, utilizing whatever sources that were thought to be fit for the new “science of sensitive cognition”, “doctrine of taste”, “theory of the beautiful sciences and the fine arts”, etc.

However, these emerging European aesthetic programmes in the second half of the eighteenth century did appropriate – seemingly without any difficulties – many of the theories of the pre-aesthetic discourse(s) as aesthetic programmes themselves, incorporating theories into the new science that were originally written as contributions to criticism, rhetoric, pneumatology (epistemology or psychology), moral philosophy, (natural) theology and sometimes even to natural philosophy (physiology, medicine). An example taken from the “university aesthetics” of the period is symptomatic. In his 1778 *Aesthetica*, Georgio Aloysio Szerdahely (1740–1808), the first Hungarian professor of aesthetics, thought it to be an urgent task to clarify what he means by “aesthetics”. Szerdahely defined aesthetics as “the doctrine of taste” as well as the “theory of the fine arts”, while he emphasized the *modernity* of the “name, cultivation, extension, method, and facility” of aesthetics. He contrasts aesthetics as a *science* to “a kind of aesthetics in practice” represented by the works of earlier critics and rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Cicero or Longinus from antiquity and Petrarch or Boileau from early modernity. Szerdahely’s argument becomes interesting when he reflects on the modern roots of the new discipline. Among the modern representatives of aesthetics: besides Baumgarten, Szerdahely mentions not only Meier and Sulzer but also Shaftesbury, Burke, Kames, Batteux, and Du Bos. Interestingly, these authors, who probably never would have thought they would eventually end up in such a company, are almost the same ones as those listed earlier.

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65 Georgio Aloysio Szerdahely, *Aesthetica sive Doctrina Boni Gustus ex Philosophia Pulcri deducta in Scientias, et Artes Amaeniores* (Buda, 1778), vol. 1–2. For the online critical edition of the original corpus in Latin, see *Opera Aesthetica Szerdahelyana* <http://deba.unideb.hu/deba/szerdahely/aesthetica.php> [20.03.2018]. (All citations from this work are by reference to section.) 1.1.4.1, 1.1.5.2. For Szerdahely’s aesthetic programme, see Piroska Balogh, *Teória és medialitás. A latinitás a magyarországi tudásáramlásban 1800 körül* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2015), 23–33.
But if Szerdahely’s eclectic university aesthetics is not authoritative enough, here is a longer quote from Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744–1803) 1767 fragment entitled “A Monument to Baumgarten”:

Let his [Baumgarten’s] work be whatever it may be; it is not what its name declares it to be: *aesthetics*, the science of feeling. The original source on which it drew was not indeed Greek feeling, sensation, the inner sentiment of the beautiful, but rather speculation. And where speculation ought to draw near the sea of the human soul (though Baumgarten did not get this far in his plan), where it ought to flow into psychology, well, instead it floats above the sensation of the beautiful, as slick as oil. […] With my induction I do not wish to transform a Baumgartian philosophy derived from strict principles into the sophistical reasoning of a St. Mard based on mere sentiments, for I desire not a French but a Greek aesthetics. And such an aesthetics – how it would fetch everything from the depths of our feeling, how it would draw on sensation and from it extract the glorious spirit. It would philosophize within the human soul like a swimmer half submerged beneath the sea. Home’s *Principles of Criticism* (which is more deserving of the name of aesthetics than all of Baumgarten’s oeuvre)— these principles, augmented by the psychology of the Germans and then returned to *that* nation which has remained, in its doctrines of the beautiful, whether in art or in letters, most true to the feeling for Nature, then *hellenized* in line with this people’s feeling for Nature – now that would be aesthetics!66

Herder’s words clearly attest to the quick aesthetic appropriation of the criticism and rhetoric of the Britons (Kames) and, similarly, of the French (“French aesthetics”!). It also gives us a sense of the enthusiasm with which Herder and his contemporaries ventured upon constructing a new science (one that reaches well beyond the walls of academia into the renewal of manners as well). A sense of the enthusiasm with which they travelled through the “normally mist-shrouded lands” of “the domain of lower faculties” of human sensibility. “And in this realm – Herder writes – must reside powers that originally produced poetry and powers that are now in turn exercised by it. We must therefore journey into these dark regions to bring back from them, as from an

enchanted grotto, word of where this goddess dwells.” Baumgarten was the first traveller who dared to do this – the rest is up to them.

Both Herder’s and Szerdahely’s accounts indicate perfectly how the new discipline had already annexed the (quasi/pre)aesthetic discourse by the end of the 1760s, and that in his first Critique Immanuel Kant, who himself used Lord Kames’s “science of criticism” to attack Baumgarten’s aesthetics, did not exaggerate too much when he lamented that “[t]he Germans are the only ones who now employ the word ‘aesthetics’ to designate that which others call the critique of taste.” Even after Kant’s influential disciplinary proposal, the theories of the British Enlightenment that had originally been written as critical, rhetorical, epistemological or moral theories were read as genuine aesthetic programmes. In a 1793 letter to his friend, Christian Gottfried Körner, Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) lists without any explanatory remark Burke’s “sensuously subjective” approach to the beautiful alongside Baumgarten’s or Mendelssohn’s “rationally objective”, Kant’s “subjectively rational” and his own “sensually objective” aesthetics. The idea that the British came up with aesthetic theories of their own seemed in no way anachronistic, absurd or in any other way surprising to the German founding fathers of the discipline.

The early disciplinary appropriation of the critical, rhetorical, moral, and psychological theories of the British (pre-)aesthetic discourse is one of the main reasons why I will refer to them, anachronistically, as aesthetic theories. To back up my decision, I will briefly survey the German reception of Burke and Kames at the beginnings of the particular chapters devoted to them, showing that they were read in Germany as genuine aesthetic programmes. Burke offered a radical physiological aesthetic programme, while Kames became something like an emblem of the psychological path aesthetics could take, a representative of the British tradition. Furthermore, his 1762 Elements of Criticism also served as a crucial ingredient in the process of fermentation that transformed aesthetics into the general theory of art by the 1770s. Since I do not have the space to trace the Continental recalibration of the theories of Burke and Kames thoroughly, I will concentrate mainly on their

reverberations in one work that I consider to be central and symptomatic of the period in German aesthetics between Baumgarten and Kant: Herder’s Critical Forests. It is not to say, however, that the German recognition is the benchmark of aesthetics. To my knowledge, Hutcheson’s first Treatise – which is widely recognized today to be “the first formal treatise on aesthetics in English”\(^{70}\) – was not received as an aesthetic programme in Europe.

1.1.2. The Aesthetic

But if the appropriation of the aesthetic discourse went so easily – one might ask – is it not the case that the discarded metaphor of an “adult baptism” is correct nevertheless? I still believe that the metaphor is overly simplistic but there is, indeed, something that connects the pre-aesthetic discourse to aesthetics proper and that explains why most eighteenth-century aestheticians were aware, quite self-consciously, of the modernity of their enterprise. But what exactly was modern about the eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse? It is widely acknowledged that our understanding of the concepts of beauty, art, taste, and genius – together with that of human subjectivity, pleasure, and experience – underwent essential changes during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, eventually resulting in the vocabulary and theoretical premises that were taken for granted by later aesthetic theories. The concept that came to embody these changes in European consciousness is “the aesthetic”.

Many historical accounts share the idea that the emergence of the aesthetic is a symptom of a wider rearrangement of the European intellectual landscape at the threshold of Western Modernity. Some see the aesthetic as the appearance of individuality (and even irrationality) to European consciousness,\(^ {71}\) while others regard it to be the embodiment of a new conception of subjectivity.\(^ {72}\) In a more critical spirit, there are those who understand it as the encapsulation of a new ideology, eventually “refashioning the human subject from the inside, informing its subtlest affections and bodily responses with this law which is not a law.”\(^ {73}\) Authors like László Kisbali suggested that understanding the aesthetic as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense might

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\(^{71}\) See Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem*.


help us explain these developments: the aesthetic emerged as a rise of a new vocabulary, a bundle of theoretical premises and also of “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”\(^{74}\). The modern aesthetic subjectivity and aesthetic relation to the surrounding world, that is, are “in some sense produced by the existence of the aesthetic discourse; those who cannot understand this discourse cannot engage into an aesthetic relation.”\(^{75}\)

Another well known historical narrative bound the emergence of aesthetics to the rise of the modern system of the fine arts, i.e. to the modern (autonomous) concept of art.\(^{76}\) This account, though it explains how artworks became aesthetic objects, does not explain what it means to be an aesthetic object, an object of aesthetic experience. But there is another problem. Reconstructing the emergence of the aesthetic through the emergence of art can be misleading. The equation of the realm of the aesthetic with that of art is a later development in the history of aesthetics. Theorists of the Enlightenment, while working out their aesthetic versions of concepts like taste, the beautiful or the sublime, either took experiences of nature to be the paradigm cases of aesthetic experience (until Kames) or drew on the interpersonal relations of courtly conversation and self-presentation.\(^{77}\)

Even more importantly, the eighteenth-century discussion about art, as Peter de Bolla and Andrew Ashfield pointed out, “is bound up with what [the period] thought and said about the nature of human experience generally.”\(^{78}\) The aesthetic was bound up with anthropological questions from the very beginning. It was born as a result of a subjective turn: a turn to the body, the nerves, the imagination, the inner senses, taste, memory, etc. It was a turn to the human aesthetic apparatus, the faculties that allow us to engage in a pleasurable, sensitive-affective relation with the world around us. As for


\(^{75}\) László Kisbali, “Ízlés és képzelet: az esztétikai beszédmód kialakulása a XVIII. században,” in *Sapere aude! Esztétikai és művelődésérténeti írások*, ed. Endre Szécsényi (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2009), 64.


criticism, it meant that the classical “construction paradigm” gave way to the “perceptual paradigm”: even though the critical practice remained mimetic and pragmatic in general, artistic value came to be defined in terms of the response raised in the subject (perceptions, affections, pleasure). Artworks became, at least partly, aestheticized. As for the theory of beauty, it meant that the concept of beauty – partly due to epistemological and partly due to theological shifts – lost its earlier metaphysical status and became an aesthetic property: it came to be defined in terms of the perceptions, feelings or sentiments raised in the human mind. Beauty, as Hutcheson put it, became “relative to the Sense of some Mind perceiving it”. Thus, it is not art or beauty that is at the heart of the new aesthetic discourse but what came to be called the aesthetic experience.

Note, however, that defining aesthetic properties in terms of perceptions and sentiments did not entail that eighteenth-century authors gave in to a borderless aesthetic relativism. There were several reasons for the rejection of scepticism or relativism (some of which will be discussed later when I revisit how Hume and Burke rebutted the sceptic’s challenge concerning a standard of taste). But one should keep in mind that the objectivism-subjectivism dichotomy, in its extreme form, as W.J. Hipple noted, is nowhere to be found in the British Enlightenment. Even though the monochrome picture painted by Hipple’s remark is problematic, it is noteworthy that instead of following Locke in determining beauty as a mixed mode, the vast majority of the British aesthetic theories used the model of secondary qualities. Thus, Kames’s

80 Peter J. McCormick gives a neat reconstruction of what he calls “the analytic reading of early modern aesthetics”, which interpretive tradition focuses on similar issues as the key moments in early modern aesthetics (the expanding array of aesthetic properties and the central role of aesthetic experience as a result of the subjectivist turn). See his Modernity, Aesthetics, and the Bounds of Art (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 41–60.
81 Hutcheson, “Treatise I”, I.IV.I, 42.
82 As a recent example of reconstructing the possible models of aesthetic experience, one might mention Paul Guyer’s monumental history of modern aesthetics, according to which the history of modern Western aesthetics “can be captured by following the intertwining trails of the three [eighteenth-century] ideas that aesthetic experience is an experience of key truths, of the most fundamental emotions of human experience, and of the free play of the imagination.” As a result of the tension and interplay between these three principles, it is also a history of “a struggle between those who think aesthetic experience engages all our faculties and those who think it engages a distinctive one”. See Guyer, A History of Modern Aesthetics, vol. 1, 27–28.
“double signification”, the idea that aesthetic properties denote a quality in the object as well as an affect experienced by the subject, is in accord with the belief of most of his contemporaries, bringing the eighteenth-century British discussion about the whereabouts of the aesthetic to a reassuring halt.

But just as the aesthetic theory of the British Enlightenment was not (yet) a theory of art, it was not a theory of beauty either: “the theory of beauty is no longer a theory of beauty at all – Peter J. McCormick writes –, but has become a distinct theory of the aesthetic.” Why is that? On the one hand, beauty lost its central place: as early as 1712, Addison recast beauty as one of the “pleasures of the imagination” alongside the great (the sublime) and the new (the uncommon). The aesthetic, that is, being a more encompassing notion, came to accommodate other modes of experiences, some of which, as the Burkean version of the sublime, was even conceived to be antagonistic to the beautiful.

On the other hand, eighteenth-century aesthetic theories, as we will see in the following chapters, did not aim at constructing full-fledged theories of beauty or sublimity. Instead, they used these experiences as experiments through which the workings of the bodily and inner senses, taste, imagination, association and other faculties of the aesthetic apparatus could be revealed. In other words, through investigating the “facts” or “evidences” of aesthetic experience, the aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment aimed at revealing the laws of human sensibility. Thus, aesthetics emerged in the British Enlightenment, to paraphrase Hume’s famous formulation, as the anatomy of sensibility.

1.2. The Anatomy of Sensibility: Aesthetics as the Science of Man

The first thesis to which I arrived at in the previous part was that the ultimate goal of the aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment was to reveal the anatomy of sensibility. Instead of constructing a general theory of the fine arts or a full-blown philosophy of beauty or sublimity, they sought to determine the universal “laws” or “principles” that govern the operation of the bodily and mental faculties of the human aesthetic apparatus.

85 McCormick, Modernity, Aesthetics, and the Bounds of Art, 42.
the faculties that enable us to engage with the world in a sensitive, affective, “aesthetic” way. What I would like to focus next, the (meta)disciplinary framework of the anatomy of sensibility and the way its results were used in it. The established laws of sensibility could be used not only as warrants of criticism but as crucial contributions to the new anthropology of the Enlightenment, “the science of man”. The explanatory aspects of the anatomy of sensibility were intertwined with normative ones: the anthropological fused with the therapeutic to bring about improvement and, eventually, a new understanding of what it means to live and flourish in this world as human beings – a new model, that is, of human nature.

Positioning eighteenth-century British aesthetic theories within the anthropological framework of the science of man, on the one hand, is a trivial statement, since almost every discipline – from “pneumatology” to “rhetoric and belles lettres” – was subsumed, directly or indirectly, under the project of the science of human nature. On the other hand, however, the implications of this disciplinary configuration are very rarely drawn, when it comes to the aesthetics of the British Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century British aesthetic theories did not, as it is sometimes claimed, congeal into an “independent” or “sovereign” “aesthetic tradition”.86 “‘The science of man’ – Peter Jones argues – involved a systematic investigation into everything man did, and into the ways those actions related to each other; under such a comprehensive umbrella there is no place for a radical distinction for the arts and sciences”.87 Modern aesthetics was born in the British Enlightenment as a multidisciplinary discourse produced by essayists, clergymen, “natural” and “moral” philosophers, literary critics and rhetoricians that sought to figure out, first and foremost, to adopt Hutcheson’s phrase, “what sort of creatures we are”.88

86 See Costelloe’s claim: “The aesthetic tradition stands proudly and independently apart, sovereign over its own domain rather than an afterthought to metaphysics and epistemology or in service to religious dogmatism, artistic instruction, or literary style.” Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 5.
1.2.1. The Science of Man, Experimental Science, and Naturalisation

The science of man was the all-encompassing anthropological venture of the British Enlightenment.\(^89\) British Newtonians like Addison, Hume, Burke and Kames firmly believed that by applying the experimental method of analysis and synthesis (induction and deduction), they can “enlarge”, as Newton himself famously put it, “the bounds of moral philosophy”.\(^90\) The goal was to determine the universal “laws”, “rules” or “principles” behind certain “facts” (the human body, mind, and society) based on experiments. In “moral philosophy” (in its wide sense embracing everything what we now call humanities or social sciences), the word ‘experiment’ meant the (usually introspective) observation of mental operations as well as the study of historical records.\(^91\)

Given that these methodological criteria were met, the “moral” or “human” sciences could be brought under “natural history”, which term, still widespread in the Enlightenment, drew on the meaning of ‘historia’ as knowledge based on empirical observation: nature was “historicized”, understood, that is, “as an assemblage of ‘things’, including events as they exist or have happened, to be studied as they are”.\(^92\) Human phenomena – medical, psychological-epistemological, moral, historical, and socio-political – were deprived of the special status they used to enjoy and recast as parts of this historicized natural world, which meant that they ought to be studied with the same experimental method as other natural things and events.

Stephen Gaukroger recently argued that it was the extension and application of the experimental method from the historicized natural sciences to the realm of man that contributed to “the naturalization of the human”: “Naturalization is the translation of questions that had previously been taken as exclusively conceptual or a priori matters, and had been treated accordingly, into a form in which empirical evidence becomes

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\(^90\) Isaac Newton, Optics, Query 31. For the method, instrument and ultimate goal of “the sober and well-grounded philosophy of Scotland”, see James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy. From Hutcheson to Hamilton (London: Macmillian and Co., 1875), 2–11. For the shifts and variations in the “Scottish Newtonianism”, see Tamás Demeter, David Hume and the Culture of Scottish Newtonianism (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016).


appropriate to answering these questions.”

Besides transforming how we investigate the human world, applying the experimental method also promised to set into motion the human sciences, which seemed to have come to a halt in the hands of “metaphysicians”. The goal was to bring about new results, which are as exact and accurate as those of natural science. As Hume wrote: “‘tis at least worth while to try if the science of man will not admit of the same accuracy which several parts of natural philosophy are found susceptible of. There seems to be all the reason in the world to imagine that it may be carried to the greatest degree of exactness.”

Even though there was a consensus concerning the scientific model that was to be applied to human affairs, there were different coexisting and interlocking conceptions about what kind of inquiry will reveal human nature. One manifestation of the science of man came to be called “conjectural” or “stadial history”. This approach sought to get to human nature by tracing the historical stages of progress – from the “original state” of humanity to modern commercial society. These historical investigations encompassed the experimental investigation of the newly “discovered” peoples of the world, while they also used historical records as experiments. Based on such experiments, the conjectural histories proposed theories concerning social and economic principles together with views about race, gender, education, and the arts.

Another approach, which often cooperated with the former, was “anatomizing” the human mind. After the advances in physiology and anatomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was time, many thought, to reveal and dissect the powers of the mind as well. “Let us, therefore – Hume wrote –, apply this method of enquiry, which is found so just and useful in reasonings concerning the body, to our present anatomy of the mind, and see what discoveries we can make by it.”

There was no question about the scientific character of anatomizing the mind: “every Enquiry about the constitution of the human Mind – writes George Turnbull (1698–1748) at the beginning of his 1740 Treatise on Ancient Painting (!) –, is as much a question of Fact or natural history, as

Enquiries about objects of Sense are". When Herder, as we shall see, praises Burke for making “real discoveries”, it is not a figure of speech: the new naturalised philosophical anthropology of the Enlightenment – within which aesthetic theories were read in the period – was expected to make discoveries just like the natural sciences.

Since the Enlightenment and its treatment of human nature, permeated with ideologies, provoked a great deal of criticism, allow me here to stop and reflect on the political implications of the science of man. László Kontler recently examined these implications. He argued that “the temporalisation of human difference” (stadial histories), by explaining diversity in terms of dynamic historical developments and recognising the role of cultural (mores) and environmental (climate) factors in the improvement of human faculties, and “the naturalisation of man” (anatomy of mind), by ascertaining laws of nature based on experiments (observation), eventually led to the emergence of the modern notion of “humanity” or “mankind”. These interrelated strands of the science of man, Kontler argues, could unite as well as divide “mankind” depending on the classification criteria they chose, which was, needless to say, fuelled by ideologies (benign as well as malicious) in the centuries of geographical exploration (and colonial exploitation). Through these strategies of inclusion and exclusion, the science of man could serve as a force promoting equality and dignity as well as dehumanisation and depravity: “both stadial history and natural history were capable of inclusionist as well as exclusionist uses.”

The Enlightenment, again, leaves us a cumbersome legacy, a volatile notion of “humanity”, far from being black or white. For this reason, Roy Porter suggests, we should probably “consider the ambiguities of the science of man as forged in the eighteenth century, and not the complexities of its legacy.” But back to our main business now.

The connection between the science of man and the natural sciences is far more complex than an appropriated experimental methodology. The science of man also gained a fundamental role among the sciences as well as the arts. In the Treatise, Hume famously praised Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler for laying

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100 Kontler, “Inventing ‘Humanity’”, 37.
102 See, for instance, the studies published in vol. 22, no. 2–3 (2017) of *Early Science and Medicine* (ed. Tamás Demeter) on the interconnectedness of physiology and normative ethics in the science of man.
down the new experimental foundations of the science of man as “the only solid foundation for the other sciences”. Every science (and art), Hume argues, profits immensely from our widening knowledge about the powers of the mind, which makes the new anthropological venture a key to improvement.\(^{103}\) But what does ‘criticism of taste’ have to do with all of this, one might ask. Some sciences, Hume writes, have a “close and intimate” connection to human nature, according to Hume. Besides logic, morals, and politics, Hume mentions here “Criticism”, a science that concerns “our tastes and sentiments”. With this brief remark, Hume throws criticism in the middle of an anthropological framework: its central place in the “compleat system of the sciences” is ensured by its unique capacity to explain the principles of the sensuous part of human nature.\(^{104}\)

Even though it was Kames who first described his general theory of the fine arts grounded on the anatomy of sensibility with the term “criticism”, earlier aesthetic theories were also designed to contribute to the science of human nature. Shaftesbury, in order to understand our moral and/or aesthetic perceptions, embarked upon anatomizing, like a “surgeon of another sort”, our “inward Anatomy”, the “Parts and Proportions of the Mind, their mutual Relation and Dependency”.\(^{105}\) His disciple, Hutcheson also made it clear at the beginning of his Inquiry (1725) on the “reflex senses” responsible for our aesthetic and moral sentiments that “There is no part of Philosophy of more importance, than a just Knowledge of Human Nature, and its various Powers and Dispositions.”\(^{106}\)

Anatomizing human sensibility meant (1) identifying the particular human powers (the human aesthetic apparatus) that were thought to be responsible for our aesthetic perceptions (e.g. the beautiful), (2) revealing the universal laws of their natural (and optimal) operation, and (3) examining their interrelations with other faculties of body and mind. (4) Finally, as we will see, their functioning within the order of things – encompassing their interrelated medico-physiological, epistemic, moral, spiritual, and socio-political functions – also had to be revealed. The universal principles that govern the workings of the aesthetic apparatus were to be established “from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its

\(^{103}\) See Hume, *Treatise*, vol. 1, 4.  
\(^{105}\) Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit”, in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Liberty Fund, 2001), vol. 2, 48, 49.  
different circumstances and situations." Applying the experimental method, the aesthetic apparatus was observed in (re)action when it engages with the beautiful or the sublime. This means, on the one hand, that aesthetic experiences, occasioned by art or nature, function primarily as experiments in the aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment. On the other hand, it also shows that the aesthetic emerges in the eighteenth-century process of the naturalisation of the human realm. For this reason, I thought it necessary to examine in the chapters to come how the Addisonian, Burkean and Kamesian application of the (Newtonian) experimental method naturalised aesthetic phenomena.

In the next step, I would like to argue that the emergence of the aesthetic, intertwined with the emergence of naturalised philosophical anthropology, was part of the rise of a new model of human nature and a new sense of self. Furthermore, the aesthetic also emerged as a new culture: far from being a term confined to the criticism of art, the aesthetic, by transforming how one relates to the world and to oneself, embodied a technology of the self, a new way of life. These two aspects of the aesthetics of the British Enlightenment – what I will call its anthropological and therapeutic aspects – were interconnected in many ways. But in order to set things straight at the beginning: the concept of the aesthetic will be used hereinafter to refer to new objects, qualities, and modes of experience accessible through the sensuous-affective faculties of the human body and mind. Aesthetics, in turn, will be used here to refer to the anatomy of sensibility, an anthropological enterprise that wanted to understand the sensuous-affective faculties making up our aesthetic apparatus through observing their operation when engaged with such objects, qualities, and experiences.

1.2.2. Human Flourishing

At the beginning of his Inquiry, Hutcheson writes that contrary to “Our late Inquirys [that] have been very much employ’d about our Understanding, and the several Methods of obtaining Truth” without paying due attention to “the greatest and most lasting pleasures”, his theory of aesthetic and moral sentiments wants to reveal “the

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108 Besides introspective observations, there was another way. Artworks – Shakespeare’s plays in particular – were seen as collections of experiments, as Veronika Ruttkay pointed out, which experimental anthropological approach – rooted in the science of man – was still popular in art criticism at the end of the century. Veronika Ruttkay, “Experimental Stages. British Romantic Drama and the Scottish "Science of Man”", lecture at Applied Anthropological Aesthetics Around 1800. Part 2 (Workshop of the Institute for Literary Studies, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences), 7th June, 2019.
various Pleasures which Human nature is capable of receiving”. By anatomizing human sensibility, aesthetic theories shifted the attention to the sensitive and affective kinds of human pleasure and, thus, to a new conception of human flourishing. Aesthetic theory as the anatomy of sensibility meant to help us understand the causes and processes of our pleasures and pains, affections and aversions, the laws behind the felt phenomena. Aesthetics, that is, concerns how we feel ourselves in the world, surrounded by objects that pamper and torment our senses, calm and agitate our passions. Aesthetics offers a view of human beings as embodied, sensitive creatures, whose happiness is inextricably rooted in how they feel themselves in this world. The emergence of modern aesthetics, Brian Norton argued, is bound up with the emergence of the modern phenomenal concept of happiness, which, in turn, is often described with perceptual (aesthetic) terms. Thus, aesthetics attests the “great reorientation of the human gaze – from the joys of heaven to the happiness of earth”.

The world around us was discovered as something beautiful, a rich source of “innocent Pleasures”, a “perpetual feast to the mind”. But given that beauty had become a relational quality, it meant that the objects of the world and the human aesthetic apparatus were harmonized in a benevolent providential design. This meant nothing less, according to Addison and his contemporaries, that human beings were designed to be happy in this world and that their sensitive-affective make-up, its pleasures and pains, if used correctly, is a useful part of this human-centred design: “the End for which [God] designed his reasonable Offspring is the Contemplation of his Works, the Enjoyment of himself, and in both to be happy”.

The emergence of the aesthetic, in this respect, was part of the larger process of what Charles Taylor labelled “the affirmation of the ordinary”, which meant that contrary to earlier understandings of human flourishing, early modern philosophy, drawing partly on the spiritual value of the ordinary in Reformation theology, “displaces the locus of the good life from some special range of higher activities and places it within life itself”, within those ordinary aspects of human life, that is, which are

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concerned with production and reproduction”, with “what we need to do to continue and renew life” (with special attention to labour, marriage, and the family). Addison’s Mr. Spectator, an early promoter of the new aesthetic culture of politeness, is not a scholar who devotes his life to contemplation. Instead, he remains amidst the noisy huddle of the crowded coffeehouses and busy streets of London, though “without ever medling with any Practical Part in Life”, as a “Spectator of Mankind” so that he can get a better view.

The sources of the aesthetic were identified in the ordinary scenery of human life. It is true that having an aesthetic experience were thought to presuppose that the object, embedded into the background murmur of the everyday, comes to the foreground by surprising us in some way and forcing our attention to itself: “Some degree of novelty – Burke writes – must be one of the materials in every instrument which works upon the mind”. But this is not to say that the aesthetic transcends the ordinary – it rather complements and enhances it: the “aesthetic does not transcend the everyday – Norton noted – so much as it reveals its immanent value.” One must keep in mind that the eighteenth-century – to use Kisbali’s phrase – was still a “homogeneous universe”, where the aesthetic was as moral or theological, as morality or theology

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113 Charles Taylor, The Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001 [1989]), 213, 211. This shift in the understanding of human flourishing was bound up with a new ethical ideal: a life spent in disciplined, industrious labour and the moderate, sober enjoyment of the fruits of that labour, embedded into a stable social order. Just like Weber his bourgeois ethic, Taylor traces his affirmation of the ordinary back to the Reformation and Anglo-Saxon Puritanism in particular, which revolutionary movements, by getting rid of the sacred and mediation, elevated the status of everyday activities and “affirmed the spiritual value of lay life”. (217) There is no need for a special place (e.g. the mass) or special activity (e.g. monastic vocation) to be near God. The sacred “interpenetrates” the everyday, and it depends only on one’s “spirit” whether it is experienced or not. The affirmation of the ordinary also meant the rebuttal of asceticism: God, after all, gave all these wonderful things to us to use and enjoy. It is not to say, however, that one should sink into the pleasures offered by this world. Taylor reiterates Weber’s diagnosis of the “innerworldly asceticism” of Puritans: “we should love the things of this world, but our love should as it were pass through them to their creator.” (222) In short, the Puritan affirmation of the ordinary was based on the idea that “Humans are meant to enjoy the things which God has put there for them – only the enjoyment must partake of a certain spirit.” (222, italics) “The highest life – Taylor sums up – can no longer be defined by an exalted kind of activity; it all turns on the spirit in which one lives whatever one lives, even the most mundane existence.” (224)


116 Norton, “The Spectator”, 93–94. Also see Kisbali’s argument that the Romantic idea of a hermetic-autarchical aesthetic experience cannot be applied to the eighteenth-century: “The romantic theory of the autonomy of the artwork and of the intrinsic nature of aesthetic experience is, I believe, the point in the ‘development’ of the aesthetic discourse, where it takes its presently valid and which – retroactively – makes the theory blind towards its own history due to its peculiar questions.” Kisbali, “Izlés és képzelet”, 64–65.

were aestheticised. The very “bipolar space of the aesthetic”, Sándor Radnóti argues, constituted by autonomy and heteronomy, was still in the making during the British Enlightenment. What marks the emergence of the aesthetic, therefore, is not the emergence of an autonomous domain but this interpenetration, the aestheticisation of the different domains of human life.

The aesthetic, thus, emerged alongside the idea that human beings must not necessarily leave neither the environment of ordinary life, nor the natural set of sensitive-affective tools the human frame provides to get a share in the good life. Aesthetic pleasure was praised because it was regarded to be “more obvious, and more easie to be acquired” than the privileged pleasures of the understanding. “It is but opening the Eye, and the Scene enters” – as Addison wrote. But it is not to say, however, that the aesthetic value of the ordinary manifests itself to everyone equally: those with “polite imagination”, “delicate sensibility”, “refined taste”, or “chearful habit of mind” have better access to them: “A Man of a Polite Imagination – Addison famously wrote – is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving.” A person with a cultivated sensibility “looks upon the World, as it were in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind.”

If our happiness is rooted in a great part in the richness and quality of our sensitive-affective experiences, then cultivating these experiences can improve human life immensely.

1.2.3. Creatures of Sensibility

So far I have argued that the aesthetics of the British Enlightenment as the anatomy of sensibility was part of the affirmation of ordinary life (Taylor), which also included the emergence of the new sensitive-affective notion of happiness (Norton). Recognising these closely linked contexts leads us to a third relevant historical context of the emergence of the aesthetic. I have argued that working out the anthropological and the therapeutic accounts of the aesthetic, the aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment eventually helped to redefine man. Amidst the naturalised anthropological ventures of

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118 See, for instance, Ashfield and de Bolla’s succinct statement: “far from relinquishing the interconnections between the aesthetic and its neighbouring discourses, the British tradition insists that the affective is based in human experience and human nature, and that by necessity the aesthetic cannot, therefore, be understood as a separate realm.” Ashfield and de Bolla, Introduction, 4.
119 See Radnóti, Jöjj és lass!, ch. 1.
120 Addison, The Spectator, no. 411.
121 Addison, The Spectator, no. 411.
the science of man, a new model of human nature was being forged that conceived man as a sensible creature. The emergence of modern aesthetic theory as the anatomy of sensibility was part of a wider intellectual rearrangement in Europe that took place roughly in the first half of the eighteenth century: the collapse of the mechanistic worldview and the “rise of sensibility”. My paraphrase of the Humean anatomy of the mind as the anatomy of sensibility is meant to emphasize the role of aesthetics in this development.

The rise of sensibility was the joined and notoriously complex enterprise of the novel medico-physiological models that moved away from seventeenth-century mechanism towards vitalism and the medical treatises on neurological maladies, the sensationalist analyses of the production of consciousness, theories of moral sentimentalism, rhetoric and criticism, and, needless to say, novels of sensibility cultivating and articulating inner experience. As a result, “consciousness was presented – as Roy Porter eloquently wrote – as infinite potentiality, a sum of shifting sensations, reliant on an indeterminate and trembling network of nerves and fibres”, and as “an embodied self, wafted by the breezes of experience, vibrating with impressions, emotions and sympathy conducted via the nervous system.” This “nervous” model, born from the cooperation of natural and moral sciences, also offered a guide to self-fashioning, a code embodied in bodily movements, postures, gestures, various expressions of affection – signs of a delicate nervous constitution. Again, the anthropological and the therapeutic are inextricably bound up with each other.

123 George S. Rousseau famously argued in his classical essay that the origins of sensibility lie in the scientific model of Locke’s theory of sensation, which can be traced back to the neurophysiology of Locke’s Oxford teacher, Thomas Willis. Willis argued for the existence of an “animal” or “corporeal soul” (anima) – distinct from and subordinated to the immaterial and immortal rational soul of humans –, which functions as a vivifying principle, responsible for motor and sensory functions, movement and sensibility. See George S. Rousseau, “Nerves, Spirits and Fibres: Toward the Origins of Sensibility” [1975], in Nervous Acts. Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 157–84. For an excellent introduction and the framework of “the science of sensibility”, see Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard, “Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay”, in The Science of Sensibility, 3–56.

124 For the cooperation of the moral philosophies, psychologies, physiologies and literature of sensibility, see Ildiko Csengei, Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
126 For an illuminating account of the process during which the nerves replaced the “vapours” and “spleens” and its connection to the “nervous self-fashioning” and “cults of sensibility” of urbane
The moral and the natural sciences converged in the concept of sensibility, resulting in the characteristic fusion of physiology, medicine, morality, politics, theology, criticism and art in the second half of the century.\textsuperscript{127} As a result, by the mid-eighteenth century, sensibility became “a unified phenomenon having physiological, moral, and aesthetic dimensions” that “lies at the basis of our relation to the physical world”.\textsuperscript{128} It ceased to be seen, Stephen Gaukroger writes, as “an added extra” and became “what underlies our cognitive life”.\textsuperscript{129} The theories of the British Enlightenment that soon came to be regarded as aesthetic theories were integral parts of this process.

Finally, the ease with which the prolific aesthetic discourse of the British Isles was appropriated by the new science of aesthetics in German-speaking countries can be explained by the fact that the latter also had an anthropological aspiration and that it also redefined man in terms of sensibility. In his seminal work on the Enlightenment, Ernst Cassirer already pointed out in connection with Herder and Baumgarten that “the problem of the beautiful thus leads not only to the foundation of systematic aesthetics but to the foundation of a new ‘philosophical anthropology’”.\textsuperscript{130} More recently, Ernst Stöckmann published an excellent account on the “anthropological aesthetics” of eighteenth-century Germany (while tracing it back to France and also acknowledging the significant role of British critics such as Kames). Stöckmann lays down his thesis concerning the distinctive reciprocal relation between aesthetic and anthropological questions as follows:

Ästhetische Fragestellungen gewinnen anthropologische Relevanz, wenn der Phänomenbereich des Ästhetischen im Ganzen als das Wirkungsfeld der sinnlichen

\textsuperscript{127} This fusion is probably best attested by the representative venture of the French Enlightenment, the Encyclopédie: there are two entries on “sensibilité”: the term is defined, on the one hand, as a “delicate and tender disposition of the soul that makes it easily moved and affected”. Sensibility, as a result, is praised as “the mother of humanity and of noble-mindedness [generosité]”, the foundation of morality. On the other hand, sensibility is defined in biomedical terms as “the faculty of sensing, the sensitive principle”, “the basis and conserving agent of life, animality par excellence, the most beautiful and most singular phenomenon of nature”. It “is in the living body, [and is] a property by which certain parts perceive the impressions of external objects, and in consequence of this produce motions in proportion to the degree of intensity of this perception”. Quoted in Gaukroger, The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility, 390. For a seminal account of the French “sentimental empiricists”, see Jessica Riskin, Science in the Age of Sensibility, The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

\textsuperscript{128} Gaukroger, The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility, 390. (my italics)

\textsuperscript{129} Gaukroger, The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility, 393.

Vermögensnatur des Menschen begriffen und für die Bildung respektive Kultivierung dieser Vermögen konzeptualisiert wird. Anthropologische Fragestellungen erlangen umgekehrt ästhetische Relevanz, wenn der menschlichen Sinnennatur attestiert wird, für die Grundlegung wie die Entwicklung des ästhetischen Wissens, d.h. für den Bereich des ästhetischen Wahrnehmens, Erfassens bzw. Erlebens, unverzichtbar zu sein. Anthropologische Kenntnis, nicht schönheitsmetaphysische Spekulation erscheint dann als der maßgebliche Ausgangspunkt für das Verständnis des Ästhetischen, ästhetische Theoriebildung fungiert umgekehrt zugleich als differenzierendes Interpretament der anthropologisch allgemeinen Wahrnehmungs-, Erfassungs- und Erlebnisdispositionen. Ein reziproker Begründungs- und Ergänzungszusammenhang verbindet beide Bereiche.\textsuperscript{131}

Besides Cassirer and Stöckmann, Odo Marquard also pointed out that aesthetics set forth to redefine man as “\textit{homo sensibilis et genialis}”. Marquard argues that it was exactly this new anthropological relevance that made aesthetics, an academic discipline at first, a powerful cultural force, infiltrating and subverting other cultural practices and scientific disciplines as well.\textsuperscript{132} This common anthropological aspiration of the pre-aesthetic discourse and the discipline of aesthetics is the third reason why I think the anachronistic extension of the term is not only justified but also heuristic.

In conclusion, the aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment sought to reveal the laws that govern the workings of the bodily and inner senses, the imagination, taste, or the nerves – the human \textit{aesthetic apparatus}, that is – by examining how the body and mind respond to certain stimuli from nature or art. Through these experiments offered by the beautiful or the sublime, aesthetic theories from Shaftesbury and Addison onwards had a central place in the science of man: they embarked upon the exploration, to adapt Herder’s words, of an “obscure” or “mist-shrouded” frontier, with the promise of giving a better picture of human nature – the only proper subject, as Pope famously dictated to the British Enlightenment, of the scholarly enterprise of mankind. Embedded into the affirmation of the ordinary and the rise of sensibility – the processes that shaped Western modernity as we know it – aesthetics began as \textit{the anatomy of sensibility},

\textsuperscript{131} See Ernst Stöckmann, \textit{Anthropologische Ästhetik. Philosophie, Psychologie und ästhetische Theorie der Emotionen im Diskurs der Aufklärung} (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009), 1–2.
aimed at revealing, dissecting, and showcasing all that was thought to reside at the core of human existence.

1.3. The Aesthetic in the Providential Order

In the last part of this chapter, I would like to focus on what I call the teleological accounts of the aesthetic. These are final cause arguments, which were designed to embed aesthetic experiences into the order of things. Examining these accounts might illuminate that the emergence of the aesthetic was not only part of the affirmation of ordinary life and the rise of sensibility but also of the eighteenth-century transformation in the understanding of the framework of this life. I will argue that the agenda of the teleological accounts, in accord with the anthropocentric shifts in eighteenth-century providentialism, is human-centred: by attributing various functions to the (optimal) operation of our aesthetic apparatus, they unite the anthropological and the therapeutic aspects of the anatomy of sensibility and establish how the aesthetic benefits the preservation and maintenance of life.

1.3.1. Moral Culture and Erasmian Anthropology

But let’s start with a programmatic introduction to a work in moral philosophy, which might be quite instructive to our present purposes as well. Francis Hutcheson begins his Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy (1747) by defining the goal of the discipline in a way that openly incorporates it into the science of man. The “proper end” of moral philosophy, Hutcheson writes, is “to lead us into that course of life which is most according to the intention of nature, and most happy, to which end whatever we can obtain by other arts should be subservient.”\(^{133}\) Note, on the one hand, that Hutcheson connects happiness to a virtuous life, which is defined as a life lived in accordance with “the intention of nature”. In establishing these connections, he clearly draws on the Stoic tradition and Cicero’s philosophy, which he merges into his Presbyterianism, paving the way for the “Christian Stoicism” of the “Moderate literati” of the Scottish

\(^{133}\) Francis Hutcheson, Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria with A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy, ed. Luigi Turco (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 1.1, 23.
Enlightenment. Hutcheson operates with a teleological conception of human nature within a providential framework. However, as the Preface to his Inquiry already suggested the sphere of “the various Pleasures which Human nature is capable of receiving” also encompasses pleasures other than virtue such as the beautiful, which is closely intertwined but not identical with it. Hutcheson defines virtue in aesthetic terms – just like beauty, virtue is a pleasurable perception raised in the mind by certain natural faculties (the moral sense), which is to say that it is immediately felt without the intervention of reason or any kind of consideration concerning our personal benefits.

On the other hand, note that Hutcheson defines moral philosophy as “the art of regulating the whole of life”, which reflects the practical dimensions of his ethics. Moral philosophy was less an academic discipline than a “culture” for the group of Scottish Presbyterians called the “Moderates”. Drawing on the conception of philosophy as a technology of the self in classical antiquity, the Scottish idea of “moral culture”, Thomas Ahnert writes in his monograph on the subject, refers to “a process of cultivation, an incremental improvement of human nature by which individuals were turned into properly virtuous agents.” Ahnert also argues that the idea of a moral improvement through the cultivation of human sensibility can be traced back to the theological shifts in the “religious Enlightenment” of Scotland. To be more precise, as authors from Ernst Cassirer to Charles Taylor have argued, the validity of religious piousness was gradually come to be found in moral conduct and social virtues and not in doctrine or belief, which meant that pious transformation was not at the mercy of God’s grace anymore but came to be seen as the conscious effort on part of the individual (with the help of some sort of divine support). Religion, in short, was more and more reduced to moralism: “The church – James Downey wrote – seemed to

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137 Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis*, 1.1, 23.
become almost a society for the reformation of manners, a place where kindred spirits met to have their moral sensibilities tuned to a finer pitch.\textsuperscript{140}

This moral-pious culture, needless to say, presupposed that there is a fertile soil to begin with.\textsuperscript{141} The moral culture, that is, presupposed a different vision of human nature than that of fundamentalist and determinist orthodox Calvinism. Again, we end up at anthropology. In his 1967 study, Hugh Trevor-Roper famously argued that the Enlightenment has its roots in rebutting the dark Calvinist anthropology based on the idea that the salvation of man as a sinful creature is solely at the mercy of God. Instead, the Enlightenment drew on the Arminian and Sozinian anthropology, a tradition traced back by Trevor-Roper to Desiderius Erasmus’s (c. 1467–1536) debate with Luther. Man, Erasmians held, by virtue of its own natural make-up, is capable of moral-pious improvement.\textsuperscript{142} Scottish Erasmians such as Hutcheson, Hume or Kames, drawing on the “intellectual tradition of scepticism, mysticism, critical scholarship, lay reason, free will, which was united in Erasmus”,\textsuperscript{143} attempted to establish “the foundation of morality” within human nature: they anatomized human nature and argued that the exercise of certain faculties could bring about moral-pious improvement.

The Erasmian anthropology also had a strong affinity with the organic as opposed to the artificial and with the living as opposed to the mechanical.\textsuperscript{144} The new vision of man was interlocked with the rise of sensibility. Contrary to instrumental reason considering punishments and rewards, it was the sensitive-affective faculties (the aesthetic apparatus), operating instinctively, which were recognised by the influential deism of Shaftesbury and his followers as the site of morality. Moral culture, then, meant improving the self through cultivating its natural sensitive-affective faculties: moral-pious improvement, through cultivating the sprouts of one’s innermost feelings and sentiments, was essentially aesthetic. For this reason, Simon Grote recently argued


\textsuperscript{144} See Taylor, \textit{The Sources of the Self}, 249–50.
that “aesthetic theories were first developed largely as a means of bolstering the Erasmian position” and “proposed that contemplating beauty in works of art and in the natural world, independent of any revealed knowledge of God or of divine law, could lead the contemplator to virtue. […] Theories of art and beauty, in other words, functioned as arenas for implicit or explicit debate about the foundation of morality”.

1.3.2. Aesthetic Culture and the Providential Design of Sensibility

Needless to say, if moral philosophy is expected to function as a technology of the self, it must be founded on a true conception of “the intention of nature” – something on which, as we saw in Hutcheson’s claim above, human flourishing depends. Therefore, moral philosophy (as moral culture), by necessity, must “search accurately into the constitution of our nature, to see what sort of creatures we are; for what purposes nature has formed us; what character God our Creator requires us to maintain.”

Against the backdrop of Hutcheson’s eighteenth-century version of Christian-Stoic providentialism, this means, on the one hand, that understanding the processes and the efficient causes of the cognitive and affective phenomena is not enough: forming a true conception of their final causes – of the “purposes nature has formed us” – is also part of the job. Examining the human powers in terms of finality – the proper “character God our Creator requires us to maintain” – adds a normative dimension to the science of man.

The purposes designed into the human frame, Hutcheson assures us, can be brought to light:

> All such as believe that this universe, and human nature, in particular, was formed by the wisdom and counsel of a Deity, must expect to find in our structure and frame some clear evidences, shewing the proper business of mankind, for what course of life, what offices we are furnished by the providence and wisdom of our Creator, and what <therefore> are the proper means of happiness.

The primary goal of the exploration of final causes, that is, is not to find traces of Providence – it is rather a by-product of the analysis than its aim. The true goal of examining the final causes is very practical: to arrive at “the proper business of

147 Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis*, I.1, 24. (my italics)
mankind” and “the proper means of happiness”. Indeed, the theological language masks an anthropocentric interest – to reveal how one should live and for what one should strive for – questions that became really urgent for the men and women of eighteenth-century Britain who tried to make their way in a changing, modernizing world.

The best way to answer these questions concerning human improvement, Hutcheson argues, is “by examining what these things are which our natural senses {or perceptive powers} recommend to us, and what the most excellent among them? and next, what are the aims of our several natural desires, and which of them are of greatest importance to our happiness?”148 The “intentions of nature”, that is, can be discovered by focusing on our faculties of perception and affection – on what I have called the human aesthetic apparatus. God operates through the laws of sensibility – it is the anatomy of sensibility that can lead us to Providential Design as well as to “the proper business of mankind”. In accord with the Erasmian anthropology and the moral culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, this also implies that our aesthetic apparatus can, by design, promote human flourishing if it functions in an optimal, i.e. cultivated way. Cultivating human sensibility, then, is linked to our genuine interests.

As I have mentioned, the teleological accounts explored by the anatomies of sensibility could promote, justify as well as direct the culture they implied. The idea rooted in theological as well as medical literature that we encounter throughout the British Enlightenment is that cultivating our aesthetic sensibility is a kind of sensitive-affective exercise that could bring about individual and even social improvement. Aesthetics, just like the various fellow-enterprises within the science of man, was designed, in a Baconian manner, “to ease and improve the human condition”.149 What I would like to suggest here is that there is a subtle difference between “moral culture” and what I would call, appropriating Schiller’s term recklessly, “aesthetic culture”. The difference seems to be that while the moral-pious culture was a conscious effort on part of the individual to achieve moral or pious transformation, the moral/spiritual reform through the engagement with the arts and nature was not necessarily a directly intended goal on part of the individual. Aesthetic culture, the exercise of our aesthetic apparatus, was recognized as a moral/spiritual technology of the self, but the improvement was conceived rather as an additional benefit of aesthetic pleasure.

148 Hutcheson, Philosophiae Moralis, 1.1, 24.
It is well-known that aesthetic perceptions were thought to be independent of personal gains or benefits, which made them, in this ordinary sense, “disinterested”. The systematic benefits attributed to the aesthetic, however, are often ignored. However, there were crucial functions attributed to the aesthetic in human life in the teleological accounts. In this sense, the aesthetic was seen as a *useful*, *beneficial*, and even *salutary* experience. In other words, it was generally held in the British Enlightenment that, far from being “disinterested”, aesthetic responses and a cultivated sensibility have tremendous *instrumental significance*: the aesthetic was intertwined with the highest goods of human existence. These additional benefits of aesthetic culture, as we have seen, were not seen as accidental but as *designed* by a benevolent providence in order to promote individual and social improvement. This brings us to the eighteenth-century understanding of the Providential Order.

1.3.3. Rethinking the Providential Order

The aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment are permeated with teleological explanatory structures, which aim to establish the final causes of the beautiful, the sublime and other aesthetic properties. Given that these properties were defined in terms of the pleasurable perceptions raised in the mind, discovering the final causes of the beautiful, the sublime, or the uncommon meant nothing else than *discovering the purposes of God in the workings of the sensitive-affective faculties of our own make-up.* In the *laws* governing the workings of these faculties, to be exact. For the majority of eighteenth-century authors, the wise hand of Providence no longer acts through miracles, interrupting the regular order of the world. Instead, Providence operates, as an

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150 Defining aesthetic experience as opposed to the ordinary in terms of “disinterested contemplation” and tracing its emergence back to Shaftesbury—became something of a commonplace. The bright career of “aesthetic disinterestedness” started with Jerome some years later: Stolnitz, “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness’; ‘‘Beauty’’: Some Stages in the History of an Idea,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1961), 185–20; “On the Significance of Lord Shaftesbury in Modern Aesthetic Theory,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 43 (1961), 97–113. As a result of recent contextualist historiography, however, it has become clear that when it comes to the British Enlightenment, one must dismiss the notion of “disinterested contemplation” as an anachronistic term borrowed, on the one hand, from twentieth-century analytic aesthetics. Miles Rind points out that Stolnitz’s attempt to find the antecedent of his “aesthetic attitude” in the British Enlightenment is misguided since aesthetic disinterestedness as “a mode of attention and concern in which the perceiver’s interest is in perception alone and terminates upon the object” cannot be found in the eighteenth-century British theories of taste. It is not so say, of course, that the idea of disinterestedness was missing from the works of Shaftesbury, Addison or Hutcheson; it only means that it appears in its ordinary meaning: a judgment/pleasure is disinterested inasmuch it is not motivated by personal interest, prospects of advantage or desire for possession, and not if it is “interested solely in perception”. See Miles Rind, “The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2002), 67–87, quotations from 85–86.
“invisible hand”, through the universal laws of nature. Thus, the question, recurring in almost every aesthetic theory of the British Enlightenment, could be schematized as follows: why did the author of human nature designed human sensibility to work in the particular way it does? What is the purpose of the laws of the human aesthetic apparatus in the order of things? Or, to put it in an even more profane way, what is the use of aesthetic pleasure in the law-governed world? By bringing these purposes to light, the anatomy of sensibility, fused with the promotion of a new sensibility, can also show the readers why it is in their genuine interest to improve our aesthetic sensibility. The framework of the intertwining anthropological and therapeutic aspects of the anatomy of sensibility is the Providential Order.

As we saw in Hutcheson’s programmatic introduction earlier, the authors of the British aesthetic theories from Shaftesbury and Addison onwards all shared the deists’ conviction that the created world is teleological and transparent. According to the eighteenth-century deists or physico-theologists, God’s purposes can be rationally comprehended, “the Book of Nature” can be deciphered by reason through the laws that govern the universe. Through the careful observation of nature, Shaftesbury claimed, it is possible “to read Providence”. As we have seen, the human had been incorporated into nature, which meant that it was also understood to be teleological and transparent: for eighteenth-century deism, the providential design “is also visible in our own make-up – for instance, in the inclinations and tendencies of our own nature.” Providence became a scrutable force operating within, through the universal laws governing the natural faculties of human sensibility. Furthermore, given that this way the experimental method could be applied to discover God’s purposes themselves, Providence came to be naturalised as well.

The persistent final cause arguments in eighteenth-century British aesthetics are often read as residues of previous ages, anachronistic remnants in a post-providential, secular intellectual climate, out of tune with The Enlightenment itself. However, this is nothing more, than a sad result of concentrating for too long on the Radical Enlightenment. The mainstream of eighteenth-century thought did not give up the Providential framework. The presence of teleological explanatory structures, Jonathan Israel points out, was not the exception but the norm in the Moderate Enlightenment:

152 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, “The Moralists. A Philosophical Rhapsody”, in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, 155.
153 See Taylor, The Sources of the Self, 282, also see 245.ff.
“Moderate thought […] of necessity postulated a strong providential dimension either explicitly, as a fundamental principle, as in Voltaire, Kames, Smith, Ferguson, Turgot, Wolff, and Mendelssohn, or else as an indispensable by-product and practical consequence, especially with regard to morality and legislation, as in Hume and Kant.”154 But how are we to read these teleological accounts then? Should we take them seriously? After all, many eighteenth-century clerics, like Joseph Butler, saw their age as a time of “general decay of religion”,155 which was often attributed to the “freethinkers” or “deists” – many of whom, from Shaftesbury to Kames, were among the founding fathers of modern Western aesthetics. However, “freethinking” or “deism”, contrary to the beliefs of its clerical critics like Berkeley, was not atheism in disguise.156 It was, nevertheless, a symptom of transition in religious belief in the Western World, a move towards secularization at the threshold of modernity.

First in his The Sources of the Self (1988), then in A Secular Age (2007), Charles Taylor argued that one should take seriously the transitional character of eighteenth-century providentialism. The appreciation of the vast design of the universe and the particular make-up of the creatures inhabiting it was ancient, also shared by the Stoics, who became so important for deists like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. The eighteenth century, however, transformed this providential framework into an anthropocentric one. The anthropocentric shift, on the one hand, consisted of the new conception of God’s providential plan. What makes the eighteenth-century “ Providential Deism” a transitional phase pregnant with secular modernity is that this providential plan was described exclusively from the point of view of human beings. In the deists’ order of things, the laws of nature – including those of human nature – are only designed to promote human flourishing, which means that living according to “the intention of nature” consists simply in preserving and improving our own good. “What is striking about Deist views – Taylor sums up – is that the human good in terms of which God’s benevolence is defined is so self-contained. It is not that the reference to God is wholly absent, but it seems to be subordinate to a conception of happiness which is defined purely in creaturely terms.”157

The Providential Order, as the deist Matthew Tindall

155 Joseph Butler, A Charge Delivered to the Clergy (1751), quoted in Taylor, A Secular Age, 225.
157 Taylor, The Sources of the Self, 267. See also Taylor, A Secular Age, 221–34.
(1657–1733) wrote in 1730, promotes the “common Interest, and mutual Happiness of his rational Creatures.”¹⁵⁸

Besides reason, human sensibility plays an extremely significant role in the providential order as well. Indeed, Taylor argues that in the new deist vision of providence, the “human good, the happiness which God has designed for us, is purely a matter of the fulfilment of our natural desires and sentiments.”¹⁵⁹ If, on the one hand, the “divine author” of human nature assures our happiness through the design of our pleasures and pains, desires and aversions, feelings and sentiments and, on the other hand, he operates through universal laws, then the anatomy of sensibility offers us the anatomy of providence.

God designed man to be able to engage in aesthetic relation with certain elements in the world and to cultivate a delicate sensibility for a reason. The laws of the human aesthetic apparatus, therefore, must serve God’s purposes. Or, conversely, Providence operates through the design of our aesthetic apparatus without us being conscious of it, as “an invisible hand”: through the design of our nature, we are “programmed” for pleasures and pains, “actions and attitudes […] which have systematically beneficent results for the general happiness, even though these are not part of what is intended in the action or affirmed in the attitude.”¹⁶⁰ As we will see, the teleological accounts identified several different ways the laws of sensibility contribute to human flourishing: aesthetic experience, as a sensitive-affective exercise, was given crucial role in maintaining or regaining bodily and mental well-being, promoting a happy or cheerful disposition, connecting the self to its natural and social environment, guiding the apprehension of the world, and driving the moral or pious transformation of the self.

So far I have emphasised individual improvement inherent in aesthetic culture (medical, cognitive, moral-pious etc.). However, the teleological accounts of the aesthetic have much to say about the tremendous role of the aesthetic in socio-political improvement as well. Our innermost aesthetic pleasures, it seems, by design, can transform and benefit society at large. Taylor’s account of the anthropocentric shift in eighteenth-century providentialism also offers us an explanation concerning this relationship between the personal and the social. A novel element in the eighteenth-

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¹⁶⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 177. (my italics)
century understanding of the Providential Order, Taylor writes, “is an appreciation of the way in which human life is designed so as to produce mutual benefit.” The new Providential Order, Taylor claims, is not an order of “command and hierarchy” but of a well-ordered economy, where the “exchange of advantages” is assured by the universal laws of nature, operating silently and invisibly through the human body and mind. The modern economic (and political) order, Taylor argues, which emerged as an order of advantageous exchange, served as a model: with the increasing prominence of the new economic order, the Providential Order was transformed into an “order of mutual benefit” as well. The law-governed world created by God became a “great interlocking universe, in which the parts are so designed as to conduce to their mutual preservation and flourishing.”

As we will see, Addison, Burke and Kames all attributed functions to the aesthetics that go well beyond the life of an individual: functions were assigned to the aesthetic in the preservation of the species as well as the promotion of social cohesion, economic prosperity, and political stability. In this respect, there is an interesting analogy between economy and the aesthetic. As opposed to the coercive power absolutism, the economy was more and more seen as the force that leads to social flourishing, peace and order, a force operating invisibly, as it were, from the inside, to create uniformity out of the cooperation of various particles. Similarly, the aesthetic exercises also improved the individual and its social relations from within, by cultivating its natural sentiments, senses or even the very fibres of the body.

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161 Taylor, A Secular Age, 177.
162 Taylor, A Secular Age, 177.
163 Taylor, The Sources of the Self, 264.
164 See Michael Brown’s recent suggestion that contract law and money bestowed a certain beauty – in the Hutchesonian sense – to commercial activity: “Commerce then was a system in which diversity was given order by law: various modes of production could trade through the use of a ‘universal’ system of value, money, and with the backing of a legal order [...]. Political economy turned the desires of a society into the orderly pursuit of satisfaction. [...] The system of political economy was a thing of beauty.” Michael Brown, “The Aesthetics of Political Economy. The Case of Francis Hutcheson”, Journal of Scottish Thought, vol. 7 (2016), ed. Endre Szécsényi, 147.
165 Of course, from another, let’s say Foucauldian point of view, this aesthetic culture is the inscription of social norms on bodily habits, sentiments and responses, that is, by transforming and regulating the lived experience: power became, in this sense, “aestheticized”, as authors like Elias, Foucault or later Terry Eagleton argued: “The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus of absolutism, will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections. And this is equivalent to saying that power in such an order has become aestheticized.” See Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic, 20. This, of course, rather augments than contradicts my earlier account of aesthetic culture. Technologies of the self, as Foucault himself noted, “hardly ever function separately” from technologies of power. See Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, 18–19.
The aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment presupposed a well-ordered, law-governed universe of mutual interdependence designed by a benevolent God. Aesthetic experiences, due to the benevolent design of our aesthetic apparatus, produce various beneficent results for the individual and for the general society as well. The improvement of the health, happiness, apprehension, pious and moral transformation of the individual and the stability, prosperity and coherence of society were all thought to be anchored in human sensibility – without us even being aware of it. Our freedom, as we will see in the providentialism of the authors discussed in the following chapters, is subordinated and even sacrificed (as in Kames’s deism) for the sake of improvement. What seems to be clear, however, is that given that the new providential deism is human-centred, the “systematically beneficent results” of the aesthetic remain within the economic framework of ordinary life: the aesthetic serves the preservation and continuation of human flourishing. This means that the final cause arguments do not refer out of the framework of ordinary life. On the contrary, the teleological accounts made it possible for the anatomy of sensibility to explore the role and significance, the functions and values, of sensibility in the emerging modern world.
2. Imagination:

*The Teleology of the Aesthetic in Addison’s essays*

In the summer of 1712 Joseph Addison (1672–1719), the Augustan poet, playwright, critic, and Whig politician, published a series of essays in his and Richard Steele’s *The Spectator* (1711–1712), the organon of the new “polite” culture that was taking shape in the early British Enlightenment. The series entitled “Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination” (nos. 411–421), as we have seen in the previous chapter, is considered by many as one of the sources of modern Western aesthetics. Addison himself presented it as something radically new: even though it is connected to the age-old question of “what it is that gives a Beauty to many Passages of the finest Writers both in Prose and Verse”,

Addison argues that his treatment of this question differs from how earlier works in criticism, poetics or rhetoric had dealt with it. He warns his readers that he sets out to “consider that Subject at large”,

which means, as it turns out, to examine the problem in terms of human sensibility.

Addison’s essay rephrased the questioned of the theory of art and the theory of beauty in terms of the aesthetic, and it in great measure comes down to his treatment of the imagination (or its synonym, “fancy”). Addison defined beauty as a particular kind of the pleasures the human mind is capable of feeling – as a pleasure of the imagination.

The imagination is defined in the essay in *pictographic terms* as the “Power of retaining, altering and compounding those Images, which we have once received” through the sense of sight.

Addison, as we will see later, draws on the new physiological definition of the imagination, conceiving it as “a real essence, as material

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in substance as any other part of the body”, which not only allows him to argue that aesthetic pleasures resemble to *direct sensory experience* and involve *salutary bodily processes* but it also bestows upon them *an intermediary status* between the bodily senses and the understanding: even though they are not “founded on some new Knowledge or Improvement in the Mind of Man” as the latter, they are “more obvious, and more easie to be acquired”, and “as great and as transporting” as the former.

Thus, beauty is transformed into a certain *intermediary pleasure* between the “gross” pleasures of the bodily senses and the “refined” pleasures of the understanding – it becomes an aesthetic property, a *felt pleasure*, raised *immediately* in the mind, *without any interference of reason*, by a visual perception of certain qualities of an object: “The Colours paint themselves on the Fancy, with very little Attention of Thought or Application of Mind in the Beholder. We are struck, we know not how, with the Symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately assent to the Beauty of an Object, without enquiring into the particular Causes and Occasions of it.” By separating the mechanisms evoking aesthetic pleasure from those involved in making rational judgments, Addison influenced such authors such as Francis Hutcheson or Edmund Burke, who drew many implications from this distinction, as we shall see regarding, for example, the debate about the beauty of utility.

Addison’s essay tackled the problems that excited many of his contemporaries concerning the peculiar sensitive-affective responses human beings are capable of by virtue of their natural and/or cultivated constitution. This shared concern can explain that even though various authors identified the efficient causes of these perceptions in the workings of different mental or bodily powers, sometimes it did not seem to matter. In his 1728 *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, Hutcheson conveniently writes that the peculiar pleasures can be called, “after Mr. Addison, the Pleasures of the *Imagination*”, while, at the same time, assigns these perception to his “Internal Sense”, a “reflex” or “subsequent” sense perceiving uniformity amidst variety. This clearly suggests that Hutcheson believes that he is concerned with the same phenomenon as Addison before him, even though his proposed psychological

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explanation is different.\textsuperscript{172} Even more boldly, Hutcheson, the scholarly university professor, closes this line of argument by casually remarking that “Whoever dislikes this Name may substitute another.”\textsuperscript{173} The aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment, as anatomies of sensibility, revealed the various parts of the human aesthetic apparatus, which means that even if they focused on different powers or faculties they could see their theories as part of a joint enterprise to understand the make-up of man as a creature of sensibility.

Addison also introduced an important distinction based on the sources of the pleasures of the imagination. If the pleasure is raised by an object present, it is defined as primary. Addison transforms earlier discussion on art, beauty, and taste by expanding the scope of the properties that can trigger a pleasurable aesthetic response: due to his enormous influence, it was Addison who set eighteenth-century aesthetic theory on a new and adventurous path by introducing other kinds of pleasure alongside the beautiful under the same rubric: “the Pleasures of the Imagination [...] all proceed from the Sight of what is Great, Uncommon, or Beautiful.”\textsuperscript{174} This triad of categories, as many emphasised, will be eventually transformed into the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful. Besides these sources of aesthetic pleasure (which will be discussed in some detail in this chapter), Addison also talks about secondary pleasures of the imagination. A pleasure is secondary if it is raised by an object “called up into our Memories, or formed into agreeable Visions of Things that are either Absent or Fictitious”\textsuperscript{175} by mimetic art or other kinds of representation (e.g. historical accounts). In this case, Addison claims, there is “a new Principle of Pleasure”\textsuperscript{176}. In an influential argument, which will be adopted and modified by subsequent philosophers in order to prove various points,\textsuperscript{177} Addison writes that the “Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination

\textsuperscript{172} For this interesting fluidity of the rubrics of faculty psychology in aesthetic theories, see Jerome Stolnitz, “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness’,” \textit{The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism} vol. 20, no. 2 (1961), 140. Stolnitz also quotes Hutcheson’s adaptation of the Addisonian terminology but uses it to prove his point that the underlying idea was “disinterestedness” all along.


\textsuperscript{174} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 412. For the sources of Addison’s categories, see Endre Szécsényi, “The regard of the first man: on Joseph Addison’s aesthetic categories”, \textit{History of European Ideas}, 2016.

\textsuperscript{175} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 411.

\textsuperscript{176} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 418.

\textsuperscript{177} One might argue that Hutcheson’s distinction between “absolute” or “original” and “relative” or “comparative” beauty can be traced back to Addison’s differentiation between primary and secondary pleasures. “Absolute beauty”, for Hutcheson, is the idea raised by the perception of a proper ratio of
proceeds from that Action of the Mind, which compares the Ideas arising from the Original Objects, with the Ideas we receive from the Statue, Picture, Description, or Sound that represents them”. 178

The Addisonian rephrasing of old questions and introduction of new ones did not only result in a theoretical amendment to criticism of taste but eventually led to the transformation of the disciplines within which these problems had been traditionally discussed. The later authors of the British Enlightenment seem to have shared Addison’s claim that “an Undertaking of this Nature is entirely new”. 179 Hugh Blair (1718–1800), for example, wrote plain and simple some seventy-five years after the publication of the Imagination-series that concerning “the pleasures of taste” “Mr. Addison was the first who attempted a regular inquiry, in his Essay on the Pleasures of the Imagination”. 180 Blair, however, also made a critical remark that still runs in the family of the histories of aesthetics: even though Addison’s “speculations on this subject” are “very beautiful and entertaining”, they, Blair claims, are “not exceedingly profound”. According to this well-known proviso, the true historical significance of the Imagination-series consists of its astonishingly wide reception, in the fact that it “opened a track, which was before unbeaten.” 181 Even today, many historians (especially historians of philosophy) seem to feel the need to justify taking Addison’s essays seriously given that they lack “systematic rigour” or “psychological profundity”. 182

One way of justifying this attention is to argue that Addison set later authors on a new trajectory: indeed, none of the subsequent anatomies of sensibility could ignore, as we will see in the later chapters, the compendious insights and intriguing paradoxes of Addison’s essay, which also established the main points of interest. Subsequent authors were expected to (1) describe the experiential features, (2) explain the physiological and psychological mechanisms, (3) identify the material sources, and (4)

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178 Addison, The Spectator, no. 416.
179 Addison, The Spectator, no. 409.
reveal the various (medico-physiological, cognitive, moral, spiritual, socio-political etc.) functions of the aesthetic. Needless to say, Addison’s essay does not offer its readers a systematic treatment of any of these loci of modern philosophical aesthetics (except the last one, as we shall see). His treatment of experiential features is lacking the subtle distinctions of a Kames, the identification of efficient bodily or mental causes is nowhere near the meticulous proceeding of a Hutcheson or a Burke, while Addison’s list of the material sources of beauty and other pleasures are also unrefined compared to these authors. Addison’s Imagination-series, that is, is not, to use my terminology, an anatomy of sensibility, strictly speaking. Addison did not cut deep under the skin but he cut deep enough to inspire others to continue the work.

2.1. Improvement, Ideology, and Aesthetic Culture

Addison’s anatomy of sensibility might seem to be too shallow for the theatrum anatomicum of universities but it was never intended for academic use. Addison’s and Steele’s “Morning Lectures” delivered in The Spectator were addressed not to university students or academics but to “Disciples in London and Westminster, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless Herd of their ignorant and unattentive Brethren.” Just like Socrates, Addison wanted to bring “Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables, and in Coffee-houses” – the “Instruction”, accordingly, must have been designed to be “agreeable” and the “Diversion useful”. Thus, it was the Coffee-house where Addison’s writings were at home, the place that came to be seen as a “polishing venue” in post-1688 England, a boisterous laboratory of sociability, promoting improvement. Or at least this is how Addison and Steele presented the image of the coffee-house, as Lawrence E. Klein noted, in their pursuit to refashion the manners, morals, and sensibilities of urban society.

The prominent place given to the Imagination-series in the histories of aesthetics can be also explained by the fact that The Spectator is usually regarded as a

183 Addison, The Spectator, no. 10.
184 Addison, The Spectator, no. 10.
symptomatic enterprise, but more importantly as a promoter of the new ideal of polite society. What was engineered in these essays is the modern public sphere, a new arena of sociability, where, to quote Shaftesbury, the other main inspiration of “the paradigm of politeness” beside Addison and Steele, “We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amicable Collision.” Klein also noted how the coffeehouse – as opposed to the authoritative institutions of the court, the church, and the universities – “was associated with the disruption of the restorative goals of the 1660s and 1670s” and went against the “authoritarian measures of the Restoration regime”. Politeness, Klein argues, “as a norm and goal of discourse promised order and direction in a way that authoritative cultural institutions might have sought to do.”

Since Habermas’s famous account, it has become a commonplace to point out that the emergence of this new polite public sphere, just like the coffeehouse itself, was intertwined with the socioeconomic rearrangements during the period – the rise of commercial capitalism and the bourgeoisie. From a critical perspective, these essays (and aesthetics itself) embody the emergence of a “hegemonic social order” (the middle class or bourgeoisie) in cultural politics. The “most formidable strengths” of this new social order, as Erin Mackie pointed out, “lie not in outright censorship but in widespread consensus garnered through the free assent of each individual.”

“Bourgeois cultural politics”, according to this reading, meant an aesthetic technology of power, the inscription of certain norms into the very sentiments and fibres of the

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187 “The paradigm of politeness offered an alternative to the reliance on traditional authoritative institutions because it sought to formulate processes that would produce order and direction within the babble, diversity, and liberty of the new discursive world of the Town.” Klein, “Coffeehouse Civility”, 47.


189 Klein, “Coffeehouse Civility”, 42, 50.

subject. But even if the aesthetic operated as a technology of power, did it really embody “the operations of power characteristic of the bourgeois public sphere”?\textsuperscript{191}

It seems that this Marxist reading of Addison’s essays has to face the recent challenges posed to the long-held general view of the socio-economic developments in eighteenth-century Britain. Social historians and authoritative historians of ideas argued that eighteenth-century Britain was still an “ancient regime”, in which the cultural, political, and economic power, despite the growing significance of “the middling orders”, was still in the hands of a relatively small number of Whig aristocratic oligarchy, the gentry and the peerage. A self-contained and self-aware middle class, driven by possessive individualism, exploiting the workforce, and subverting the power hierarchies, was nowhere to be found.\textsuperscript{192} The true debate and tension, Pocock famously argued, was not between a vigorous bourgeoisie and an effeminate aristocracy but between the “monied interest” and the “landed interest”.\textsuperscript{193} Drawing on the work of Pocock, Cannon, Clark as well as on the textual evidence of Addison’s texts, William Walker has recently argued against the view that Addison was a bourgeois ideologist. There is no textual evidence, Walker convincingly showed, that the ethics of possessive individualism or the specific class difference relevant to capitalism play a decisive role in Addison’s aesthetic views. On the contrary, Addison’s aesthetic point of view could even override or criticise appropriating, exploiting, and damaging the world, filled with various beauties.\textsuperscript{194} Walker accepts Pocock’s and Klein’s assessment that if Addison’s project of promoting politeness can be aligned to any ideology, it is Whiggism, in the

\textsuperscript{191} Mackie, Market à la Mode, 18.

\textsuperscript{192} See, for example, John Cannon’s concise summary on the complex make-up of the parties involved: “The ‘middling orders’ of Hanoverian England were in no position to offer a sustained, coherent or united challenge to aristocratic rule, even if they had wished to. Any sensible definition of the middling orders must include a vast number of farmers and gentry, who were more likely to identify with the landed interest, including the nobility, than with commercial and professional men in the towns. For that matter, many brewers, bankers, coal-owners and merchants, having made their pile, were only too anxious to purchase a country estate and turn gentlemen. Successful professional men were too dependent upon aristocratic patronage to discern a separate or rival interest, however much they may have been enraged by patrician nonchalance in paying bills. Since many peers, as we have seen, participated in commercial and industrial undertakings, there was no very obvious reason why they should have seemed obstacles to a capitalist development or an industrial revolution.” John Cannon, Aristocratic Century. The Peerage in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 178. For positioning politeness within the socioeconomic landscape of the ancient regime, see J.C.D. Clark, English Society, 1660–1832. Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1985]), 200–31.


service of both the monied and the landed interests. Accordingly, Addison’s and Steele’s essays did not really challenge social order – the public sphere engineered by them was not “an open forum for competitive debate between ideologies and interests” but rather “a carefully policed forum for urbane but not risqué conversation”.

But even though Addison’s and Steele’s writings were not in the service of “the emerging” middle class, they were deeply involved in the Whig cultural politics of the period. The politics of *The Spectator* was admittedly presented by them as consisting in the aesthetic transformation of the self, seeking “to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality [...] till I have recovered them out of that desperate State of Vice and Folly, into which the Age is fallen.” The agenda of *The Spectator*, as we will see, was to is the promotion of a moral-pious and aesthetic culture, and engaging the essays on a regular basis was seen by Addison as part of this *self-cultivation*: “The Mind that lies fallow but a single Day, sprouts up in Follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous Culture.”

Many interpreters pointed out that the Addisonian refashioning of manners consisted of the external regulation, disciplining and often even shaming of improper bodily behaviour or excessive affective responses (associated with Restoration decadence). Some even suggested drawing a parallel between the external persecution of Tory authoritarianism and the internalized (aesthetic) policing of the Whig ideology of politeness. It is true that one of the main aims of Addison and Steele was “to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour.” And it is also beyond dispute that this reformation involved refashioning the body and the affective economy of man: the “eligible persona for the new, post-1688 public [...] rested upon a healthy and disciplined body”, which, “in turn, would

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195 See Walker, “Ideology and Addison’s Essays”, 78.ff. Walker refers his readers to Pocock for a list of the various adversaries of Addison, a “polite Whig”: “Addisonian politeness [...] could be used against the uncouth virtue of the Spartans and Romans [...] being exalted by the neo-Harringtonian critics of the regime, and against the radical deists [...] being employed against Puritan, Tory, and republican alike and of making them look curiously similar.” Pocock, “The Varieties of Whiggism”, 236.

196 Brian Cowan, “Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2004), 351.


199 See, for instance, Cowan, “Mr. Spectator”, 351.


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sustain a healthy mind”. These techniques of refashioning the self, however, all involve the reflective act of monitoring the felt experience or policing our aesthetic responses (movements, feelings, affections) in order to adjust them to the expectations established by Addison and Steele through their brilliantly cruel wit, a uniquely friendly authoritarian voice. I will not focus on these policing aesthetics here. Instead, I will examine in the third part of this chapter how Addison presents the embodied therapy of aesthetic culture, consisting of the gradual, pleasurable exercises of engaging with the various beauties of the world and forming an open, sensitive disposition he calls cheerfulness.

The interesting fact that Addison’s account of the various functions of the aesthetic is relatively elaborated compared to the other three loci of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory is probably not independent from his agenda in *The Spectator*: to recommend an aesthetic culture that can improve human life and society through the cultivation of sensibility. For Addison, Brian Michael Norton argued, aesthetics is rather “a kind of therapeutic”, one that can “intensify the feeling of living”. This enhanced sensitivity, as we will see, is bound up with many other benefits – spiritual, cognitive, affective, and medical – that can improve human flourishing. It should be not surprising, then, that rather than meticulously identifying the efficient causes of our aesthetic pleasures in human sensibility as subsequent authors such as Hutcheson, Burke, and Kames will attempt to do, Addison puts the *final causes* of these pleasures in the foreground. Given that Addison defines aesthetic properties in terms of the pleasure they raise in the human mind due to the power of the imagination, the final causes of the beautiful, the uncommon and the great will be the final causes of the particular make-up of human sensibility. As a consequence, the efficient causes give way to the *final causes*, the explanatory to *the normative*, and the anthropological to *the therapeutic* in Addison’s aesthetic theory. As a result, Addison focused on the final causes of the aesthetic, establishing patterns of arguments, which were then adopted, refined or discarded by the anatomies of sensibility of the British Enlightenment. These teleological accounts constitute an often neglected undercurrent of eighteenth-century

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British aesthetics, which, nevertheless, is of crucial importance, it was these accounts that channelled the aesthetic into the Enlightened project of improvement.

2.2. Final Causes

Addison’s teleological accounts of the aesthetic map out the final causes he attributes to the particular make-up of human sensibility constituted in such a way that it naturally reacts with pleasure to the perceptions of great, uncommon, and beautiful objects, which can – and should – be enhanced through cultivation. Some of Addison’s teleological accounts proved to be extremely instructive for the British Enlightenment, while some were not adopted by the majority of subsequent aesthetic theories. The reason might well be that Addison’s final cause arguments are sometimes still quite theocentric (though with certain important modifications), while later authors such as Hutcheson, Burke, and Kames focused much more on the benefits of the aesthetic in this world. The reference to “the author of our nature” remains, but what matters is the function of the aesthetic within the self-contained economy of benefits of human life – individual as well as social.

Interestingly, Addison’s decision to focus on final instead of efficient causes seems to be based on a methodological obstacle: “it is impossible for us – Addison claims – to assign the necessary Cause of this Pleasure, because we know neither the Nature of an Idea, nor the Substance of a Human Soul”. We are stuck with mere speculation when it comes to “the Operations of the Soul”, “without being able to trace out the several necessary and efficient Causes from whence the Pleasure or Displeasure arises.”

In contradistinction,

Final Causes lye more bare and open to our Observation, as there are often a great Variety that belong to the same Effect; and these, tho’ they are not altogether so satisfactory, are generally more useful than the other, as they give us greater Occasion of admiring the Goodness and Wisdom of the first Contriver.

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204 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413.
205 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413.
In accordance with the criteria of the newly naturalised anthropology, Addison confines his inquiry to the observable, and God’s purposes, hidden in the laws governing human sensibility, Addison claims, are accessible to the observing mind. In this respect, Addison is in full accord with the “natural theology” of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

Equipped with the new experimental method, the natural philosopher, by observing the workings of nature, could eventually discover the astonishing macro- and micro-designs and the purposes the natural laws serve. For the great majority of natural philosophers observing and experimenting with nature in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Britain, this also meant discovering the designer and his purposes behind this law-governed world. This meant, on the one hand, that the experimental data of the new science (natural philosophy or natural history) also produced teleological arguments for the existence of God and Providence: the amazingly rich tradition with a distinguished pedigree of natural theology was transformed into “physico-theology”.

The discoveries of natural philosophy, on the other hand, were also seen as uniquely powerful enticements to piety and faith: the new science also promised to prompt man (the scientist as well as his reader) to admire God. As John Ray (1627–1705) wrote in his The Wisdom of God (1691): “Let us then consider the Works of God, and observe the Operations of his Hands: Let us take notice of, and admire his infinite Wisdom and Goodness in the Formation of them”.

It is often pointed out in the scholarship that Addison learnt a great deal from seventeenth-century physico-theology and shared many of its convictions. Through observing the laws of the natural world, Addison writes, natural philosophy “considers the several Ends of Providence which are served by them.” Applying this to aesthetic phenomena roughly means that the anatomy of sensibility, ultimately, reveals the anatomy of Providence as well. Besides these features of early modern physico-theology, there was a particular thread of argument that apparently had a decisive influence on Addison. In an oft-cited study, Lisa Zeitz claimed that “Addison’s psychology of aesthetic perception grows out of a shared aesthetic argument in

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208 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 393.
physico-theological thought” and was “inspired by a similarly ‘affective’ and ‘aesthetic’ component in some of the period’s popular ‘design arguments’ for the existence of God.” The “affective” or “aesthetic” design arguments Zeitz is referring here were arguments for God’s existence from the presence of beauty in the world as well as from the human capacity to appreciate these beauties. Through these arguments, Zeitz argues, “the human response of pleasure to the contemplation of God’s art of Nature was integrated into the design argument.” I will return to Zeitz’s claim throughout this chapter and argue that it requires some important qualifications.

Through the various final cause arguments and his essays on cheerfulness, I will argue that for Addison the main point was neither to come up with arguments from design nor to enhance religious belief through reflecting on the amazing designs revealed by observation. Instead, Addison writes, the great benefit of experimental science is that “Natural Philosophy quickens this Taste of the Creation”: the experimental study of nature not only “raises such a rational Admiration in the Soul as is little inferior to Devotion” but also “heightens the Pleasures of the Eye”. The natural philosopher is not only led to God, indirectly, by considering the designs of nature revealed to him by science. Rather, the observer of nature can “taste” the order of things, connecting to it directly, without any intermediaries. In other words, the natural philosopher, and perhaps the ones familiar with his discoveries, can develop a heightened sensibility, one that connects us, on a sensual-affective (aesthetic) level, to God’s purposes. I will argue that similarly to the experimental study of nature, the regular aesthetic engagements with the great, beautiful, and uncommon works of nature can also “quicken the Taste of the Creation”. Instead of design arguments, Addison is concerned with aesthetic experiences – experiences lacking rational reflections of any kind, which have sensitive-affective, spiritual, cognitive, and medical dimensions, and eventually form an open, sensitive disposition he calls “cheerfulness”.

2.2.1. The Great

First, the Imagination-series considers the final causes of “the Great”. Addison gives us examples of great objects found in nature: the “Prospects of an open Champain Country”, a “vast uncultivated Desart”, a “huge Heaps of Mountains, high Rocks and

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211 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 393.
Precipices”, and a “wide Expanse of Waters”. When encountering with such “stupendous” natural objects, we are “struck” with a “rude kind of Magnificence”, and “flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views”, while feeling “a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul”.212 Such vast, immense, unbounded, spacious works of nature soon came to be associated with the sublime, and Addison’s Imagination-series played a tremendous role in that process, even if he himself did not refer to these properties as sublime, which term, for him was still strictly rhetorical, following Longinus’s *Peri Hypsous* and its seventeenth-century translator and commentator, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), who also refashioned it for the early aesthetic discourse.213

Addison’s essay seems to be at a threshold in the history of the sublime as a modern aesthetic category. Samuel H. Monk famously traced the discourse back to Boileau’s 1674 translation of Pseudo-Longinus’s *Peri Hypsous*, thus to rhetoric and literary criticism.214 At around the same time, however, a new sensibility emerged, mainly among British travel writers, critics, and philosophers that found a kind of contradictory pleasure not only in vast and immense prospects but also in environments and sceneries that had been condemned “deformed” by neo-classical taste such as tempestuous waters, towering mountains or terrifying precipices. The environment that drew the most attention was probably that of the Alps: it was alien, striking, and most British travellers (Grand Tourists), such as Addison himself, had the opportunity to face these “irregular mis-shapen Scenes” and experience the “agreeable kind of Horror” they evoked.215 This development of sensibility, Marjorie Hope Nicolson argued, was not independent of the lived experiences of mountain environments on the one hand, and the emancipation of geology from the theologically-based histories of the Earth, on the other.216 The assumption that the mountains were “form’d by universal Destruction, when the Arch with a mighty flaw dissolv’d and fell into the vast Abyss” and that “they are not only vast but horrid, hideous, ghastly ruins,” were seemed to be less and less
important: many agreed, sometimes on the fringe of enthusiasm, that “these Ruins of the old World [are] the greatest wonders of the New.”

Addison represents a threshold in the formation of modern sublimity not only because he separated the great and the beautiful but because he connected the new sensibility towards the vast and undetermined in nature to the psychology of the rhetorical sublime. The psychological assumption behind Addison’s account of Greatness is based on the Longinian understanding of the sublime as an experience of overwhelming power as well as “elevation” and “pride exaltation” that satisfies our natural urges for the great and divine.

Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its Capacity. [...] The Mind of Man naturally hates every thing that looks like a Restraint upon it, and is apt to fancy it self under a sort of Confinement, when the Sight is pent up in a narrow Compass, and shortened on every side by the Neighbourhood of Walls or Mountains. On the contrary, a spacious Horizon is an Image of Liberty, where the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the Immensity of its Views, and to lose it self amidst the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observation.

Addison, however, slightly augments the Longinian psychology when offering a description of the phenomenal features of experiencing Greatness. As the above quotation shows, a great part of our pleasure comes from being filled or elevated by a perception but the unhindered activity of the faculties also contribute to it: our sight “ranges abroad” and “loses itself” in its object. Besides the Longinian models of expansion and elevation, Addison proposes a model of aesthetic pleasure, Paul Guyer

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217 The quotations are from John Dennis, who gave us the earliest accounts of Alpine sublimity in a letter dated 25th October, 1688. The letter, written in Turin, described his ascend to Mount Augebelette on 21st October, followed by his reflections on the experience. John Dennis, Miscellanies in Verse and Prose (London, 1693), 139. Interestingly, the Alpine sublime provoked excitement and was exploited by both men of letters and tourism to such an extent that it soon lost its radical aesthetic potential, and became a pre-structured experience, rather picturesque than sublime. See Bálint Gárdos, “The Avoidance of the Sublime in the English Romantic Essay,” in CrosSections. Vol. 2: Selected papers in literature and culture from the 9th conference, eds. Andrew C. Rouse, Gertrud Szamosi and Gabriella Vöő (Pécs: Institute of English Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pécs, 2010), 33–45.

218 For Addison’s position in the eighteenth-century history of the category, see Monk, The Sublime, 56–59.


220 Addison, The Spectator, no. 412.
suggested, based on “the free play with the ideas of sight and imagination.” For the
time being, I will leave the eighteenth-century explorations of the precipices of the
sublime but will return to them in the next chapter. Instead, I will turn now to the final
cause arguments concerning these experiences.

Addison’s teleological account of Greatness is what I consider to be a relatively
theocentric argument, which has strong ties to the physico-theological literature, and, as
we will see, was not adopted in this form by subsequent authors. Addison writes that

The Supreme Author of our Being has so formed the Soul of Man, that nothing but
himself can be its last, adequate, and proper Happiness. Because, therefore, a great Part
of our Happiness must arise from the Contemplation of his Being, that he might give
our Souls a just Relish of such a Contemplation, he has made them naturally delight in
the Apprehension of what is Great or Unlimited.

I called this account theocentric because it suggests that the function of our (natural)
susceptibility for the great (the sublime), programmed into human sensibility by
Providence, is to assure that a heightened pleasure accompanies the contemplation of
God. Furthermore, this account even seems to contradict the relocation of human
flourishing because it is, after all, the contemplation of “the Supreme Author of our
Being” that is designed to be the “last, adequate, and proper Happiness” of man.
Everything else appears to be a preparation for these contemplative pleasures. Addison
returns to the final causes of the “very pleasing Astonishment” occasioned by the
natural sublime in a later fictitious letter, in which he seems to suggest one more
function of the great:

I must confess, it is impossible for me to survey this World of fluid Matter, without
thinking on the Hand that first poured it out, and made a proper Channel for its
Reception. Such an Object naturally raises in my Thoughts the Idea of an Almighty
Being, and convinces me of his Existence as much as a metaphysical Demonstration.
The Imagination prompts the Understanding, and by the Greatness of the sensible
Object, produces in it the Idea of a Being who is neither circumscribed by Time nor
Space.

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222 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413.
223 Addison, The Spectator, no. 489.
The experience of the sublime, it is suggested here, functions like “a metaphysical Demonstration”, some sort of an aesthetic aid for the understanding to form a notion of the infinite power of God.

This reading places Addison into the physico-theological tradition. Lisa Zeitz, who proposes such a reading, quotes William Derham’s (1657–1734) in order to support her claim that Addison’s aesthetics is “a psychological reinterpretation of the design argument.”\(^{224}\) In his 1711–1712 Boyle Lectures, Derham did proposed that hills and valleys “contain somewhat august and stately in the beholding of them, that inspireth the Mind with great Thoughts and Passions, that we naturally on such Occasions think of God and his Greatness.”\(^{225}\) Derham then continues to argue that Mountains are “noble, useful, yea, a necessary Part of our Globe”, but he passes over their power to evoke pleasure quite quickly as the “least valuable Consideration” and turns to the “Uses and Conveniences” of mountains in preserving health, offering sites for habitation, accommodating various plants and animals, regulating climatic and ecological processes, and producing various resources.\(^{226}\) Derham is more interested in the functions Providence assigned to mountains in the macro-design of the Earth. But there is another, more important difference.

Endre Szécsényi recently pointed out that even though the strong influence of Derham and other physico-theologists is undisputable, the above reading overlooks the fact that in Addison’s essay the main point is not a rational reflection on divine benevolence, wisdom, and power following the observation of empirical data. What matters is what happens *in and with us during* our immediate aesthetic engagements. As we will see in the Cheerfulness-essays, Addison believes that one can not only think of the greatness of God but also *experience* it directly. The “agreeable Horrour” raised by the sublime is not an occasion for subsequent reflection on God’s power but a *sensitive-affective share in* it. Contrary to the “rational Admiration” of physico-theology, the aesthetic engagement with nature makes it possible for us to “contact the providential God (and not the wise designer-Creator)”. During these experiences, “his Will becomes

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\(^{226}\) See Derham, *Demonstration*, 71–75.
felt, not his intellect or wisdom understood and adored with delight.”

What emerges during the early British Enlightenment, Szécsényi argues elsewhere, is “a new type of interconnection between the sensual/sensuous and the transcendental, in which the former is not merely a disposable ‘means’ toward the latter, but an indispensable and constitutive ‘frame’ for it.”

2.2.2. The Uncommon

Addison’s next final cause argument concerns the purposes of our susceptibility for the uncommon. “Every thing that is new or uncommon – Addison writes – raises a Pleasure in the Imagination, because it fills the Soul with an agreeable Surprize, gratifies its Curiosity, and gives it an Idea of which it was not before possesst.” Reading Addison’s introductory account on the Uncommon, it becomes instantly clear that his notion of the uncommon or novelty is very general: it encompasses not only the new, the particular but also variety in general. We easily get used to the objects surrounding us, Addison argues, and lose interest in them. Therefore, we welcome everything that can “vary human Life”, “divert our Minds for a while” and serve as “a kind of Refreshment”, rescuing us “from that Satiety we are apt to complain of”. It is novelty, Addison argues, that “bestows Charms on a Monster, and makes even the Imperfections of Nature please us”.

Jean-Baptist Du Bos (1670–1742), some years later, will expound an extremely influential escapist aesthetics through generalizing this claim, as we will see in the next chapter. But let’s turn now to the final causes of our pleasure in and attraction to the new or unusual.

The divine engineer of human nature, Addison argues,

annexed a secret Pleasure to the Idea of any thing that is new or uncommon, that he might encourage us in the Pursuit after Knowledge, and engage us to search into the Wonders of his Creation; for every new Idea brings such a Pleasure along with it, as rewards any Pains we have taken in its Acquisition, and consequently serves as a Motive to put us upon fresh Discoveries.

229 Addison, The Spectator, no. 412.
230 For this critical remark, see Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 19.
231 Addison, The Spectator, no. 412.
232 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413.
Besides being simply “a kind of Refreshment”, the aesthetic, again, seems to get a subordinate place in the order of things, now in service of the “Pursuit after Knowledge”. This argument, Zeitz noted, also showcases the strong ties between Addison’s aesthetics and “the design argument’s harmonious union of science and religion” in physico-theology. But, again, it is crucial to see the peculiarity and further implications of Addison’s teleological account of the Uncommon.

First, it is noteworthy that the source of the pleasure, similarly to the pleasure in Greatness, is the very exercise of our respective sensitive faculties. As Guyer writes: “what we enjoy in the case of novelty is not the acquisition of new information or knowledge, but simply new mental activity, regardless of its content.” It is this pleasurable aesthetic exercise that prompts us to discover the world. Knowledge is an added extra. Furthermore, it seems that if one reads this account in the wider context of Addison’s essays, motivating us to explore and learn to appreciate the works of nature turns out to be only one of the beneficial functions assigned to the Uncommon.

In his essay on Addison’s concept of novelty, Scott Black argues that Addison here argues for the importance of the aesthetic in alluring the solitary, melancholic scholar in distress out of his study and into the wonderful novelties and surprises of nature. Black suggests that Addison follows Francis Bacon in this respect, whose “Of Regiment of Health” is evoked in Addison’s previous essay (no. 411). In his essay on health, Bacon suggests various entertainments, “wonder and admiration (and therefore novelties), studies that fill the mind with splendid and illustrious objects (as histories, fables, and contemplations of nature)” to counterbalance “envy, anxious fears, anger fretting inwards, subtle and knotty inquisitions, joys and exhilarations in excess, sadness not communicated”. These maladies were traditionally thought to accompany solitary and strenuous study, while the right kind of study could function as therapeutic. Following in the footsteps of Bacon, Robert Burton (1577–1640) also proposed that study can be one of the most effective cures since it consists of the “employment” of the faculties, an exercise that, similarly to physical exercise, can “expel Idleness and

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233 Zeitz, “Addison’s ‘Imagination’ Papers”, 496.
Melancholy.” As we will see, this movement therapy found its way into the aesthetic theories of Addison, Burke, and Kames alike.

Drawing on this tradition, Black argued that “Addison uses Bacon to suggest that the imagination resocializes the solitary (dispersing melancholy) and returns the scholar to wonder (clearing and brightening the mind).” It is not only the acquisition of new information, then, what is promoted by the aesthetic power of the Uncommon. By designing human sensibility in this particular manner, Providence also assured socialisation and psychosomatic well-being. I will return to the medical dimensions of Addison’s essay soon enough.

Furthermore, this argument also entails that the experimental philosophy is supported by the providential laws governing our aesthetic apparatus, which “encourage” us to engage with “the Wonders of Creation”. This, however, also means that the experimental method is in accordance with the purposes of Providence, which designed the aesthetic apparatus in a way that it finds pleasure in everything that breaks the dullness of the everyday and allures us into the world. Finally, it seems that the new science is also a rich source of the pleasures of the imagination – the Great, the Uncommon, and the Beautiful alike.

In a sublime vision of the aesthetics of science, Addison describes how scientific inquiries can “gratifie and enlarge the Imagination” by exploring the fascinating make-up of the universe. The “Immensity and Magnificence of Nature” fills us with “a pleasing Astonishment”, forcing the Imagination to wrestle with being “filled with so immense a Prospect” and to put “it self upon the Stretch to comprehend it.” In a visionary account, reminiscent of the imaginative travels of Pascal’s disproportionate man, Addison also shows how experimental science offers an imaginative exercise by making us compare the human frame to the greatest as well as the minutest parts of the universe. “Nay, we might yet carry it farther – Addison closes his comparisons –, and discover in the smallest Particle of this little World a new and inexhausted Fund of Matter, capable of being spun out into another Universe.” But to the utmost fringes of

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the universe, Addison writes, the imagination cannot take us: facing with “extraordinary Degrees of Grandeur or Minuteness”, we are left with the understanding alone.

The Understanding, indeed, opens an infinite Space on every side of us, but the Imagination, after a few faint Efforts, is immediately at a stand, and finds her self swallowed up in the Immensity of the Void that surrounds it: Our Reason can pursue a Particle of Matter through an infinite Variety of Divisions, but the Fancy soon loses sight of it, and feels in it self a kind of Chasm, that wants to be filled with Matter of a more sensible Bulk. 241

Addison entertains the idea that this “defect” of the faculty of imagination can be explained by its intermediary status between the mind and the body, and that its limits are the limits of the bodily faculties involved in its operation (the brain and the animal spirits). Be that as it may, it was left to Kant to elaborate an intricate aesthetic theory, his analytic of the mathematical sublime based on these hints.

2.2.3. The Beautiful

Addison’s third and fourth final cause arguments consider the functions of the beautiful in the order of things. Similarly to his concept of the Uncommon, Addison’s Beauty is a very broad notion. After mentioning the fact that “every different Species of sensible Creatures has its different Notions of Beauty”, Addison defines beauty as a property consisting “either in the Gaiety or Variety of Colours, in the Symmetry and Proportion of Parts, in the Arrangement and Disposition of Bodies, or in a just Mixture and Concurrence of all together.” 242 Even though Addison’s imagination is a kind of “mental seeing”, 243 and even though his enumeration contains visual properties (emphasising the aesthetic value of colours), he points out that the imagination is “capable of receiving a new Satisfaction by the Assistance of another Sense.” 244

Addison allows that non-visual sensible qualities can also play a restricted rule in raising aesthetic perceptions: a proper sound “awakens every moment the Mind of the Beholder, and makes him more attentive to the several Beauties of the Place that lye before him”, while a smell can “heighten the Pleasures of the Imagination, and make

241 Addison, The Spectator, no. 420.
242 Addison, The Spectator, no. 412.
243 Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 41.
244 Addison, The Spectator, no. 412.
even the Colours and Verdure of the Landskip appear more agreeable; for the Ideas of both Senses recommend each other”. Note that the function of non-visual perceptions in aesthetic experience is confined to enhancing the pleasures raised by objects of sight. This “general agreement of the senses” will prove to be crucial in Burke’s physiological aesthetics, which will radically expand the scope of the aesthetically relevant senses, acknowledging all the senses as sources of our aesthetic perceptions.

What connects these various components of beauty is their common effect raised within creatures of sensibility. Beauty is unique, Addison writes, because “there is nothing that makes its Way more directly to the Soul than Beauty”. The beautiful “immediately diffuses a secret Satisfaction and Complacency through the Imagination”, the “very first Discovery of it strikes the Mind with an inward Joy”. This “Chearfulness” and “Delight” spreading “through all its Faculties” are the characteristic sentiments evoked by the beautiful – a claim that will be accepted and refined by many subsequent authors. Kames will emphasise the gaiety accompanying the perception of beauty, while Burke will work out his teleology of the beautiful based on Addison’s remark that beauty “raise in us a secret Delight, and a kind of Fondness for the Places or Objects in which we discover it.”

Addison proposes a relational concept of the beautiful, suggesting that “There is not perhaps any real Beauty or Deformity more in one Piece of Matter than another, because we might have been so made, that whatsoever now appears loathsome to us, might have shewn it self agreeable”. Referring his readers to Locke’s “great Modern Discovery” of primary and secondary qualities, Addison introduces a parallel between beauty and sensible qualities like colours or tastes, which is not, and cannot be, an equation, since sensible qualities are defined as components or sources of the perception of the beautiful. This parallel, however, does not imply relativism or scepticism concerning our aesthetic perceptions.

The origins of the primary and secondary quality distinction can be found in Robert Boyle’s (1627–1691) The Origin of Forms and Qualities of 1666, where Boyle famously argues that the sensible qualities are the products of the psychophysical interaction between the particular shape, size, motion and texture of an object and the

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particular constitution of a perceiving body and mind. A particular object can give rise to such qualities in the mind “by virtue of a certain congruity or incongruity” between them, just like the proper key can open a lock if there is “a congruity betwixt the wards of the lock and those of the key” – “the lock and the key, Boyle writes, did each of them now obtain a new capacity”.250 This “congruity” between the physical world and the particular make-up of human sensibility will be crucial for Addison’s teleological account of the beautiful.

Addison’s teleology of beauty is actually composed of two arguments. The distinction between the two final causes fits Addison’s distinction between the two kinds of beauty – again, a distinction that will be adopted by Burke some fifty years later. First, Addison argues that God

has made every thing that is beautiful in our own Species pleasant, that all Creatures might be tempted to multiply their Kind, and fill the World with Inhabitants; [...] unless all Animals were allured by the Beauty of their own Species, Generation would be at an End, and the Earth unpeopled.251

One of the final causes of beauty is the assurance and promotion of generation: the aesthetic not only assures our engagement with the natural world, encouraging us to discover it (which, as we have seen, implies re-socialising the solitary and curing the melancholic) but it also serves the preservation of entire species.

Addison’s argument also links beauty to sexual desire. We are “tempted” and “allured” by the beauty of other members of our own species. And even though Addison emphasises the “innocence” of the aesthetic and separates it from the “gross” bodily pleasures, this argument clearly suggests a strong connection between our attraction to the beautiful and sexual desire – one that we, as creatures of sensibility, share with “all Animals”. Again, the aesthetic, now in a biological way, is embedded into the preservation and continuance of human life. I will return to this problem when discussing Burke’s twofold treatment of the teleology of the beautiful.

Following his argument for the role of beauty in generation, Addison proposes his second final cause argument concerning the beautiful, which is not confined to the

251 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413. (my italics)
beauty of the species. I will call it the Well-Being Argument, as it will often return, with modifications, in the following chapters. Summarizing the second final cause of beauty, Addison writes that Providence

has made every thing that is beautiful in all other Objects pleasant, or rather has made so many Objects appear beautiful, that he might render the whole Creation more gay and delightful. He has given almost every thing about us the Power of raising an agreeable Idea in the Imagination: So that it is impossible for us to behold his Works with Coldness or Indifference, and to survey so many Beauties without a secret Satisfaction and Complacency.  

Thus, the other function of the beautiful in the order of things is the assurance of human happiness. This argument can be also traced back to physico-theology. Zeitz convincingly quoted some examples of design arguments drawn from the beauty of creation to prove this point. A recurring point in the works of Ray or Charleton, Zeitz argues, is that the world was created for us to enjoy it, and since we are the only ones who can appreciate it, it was a gift for us, resulting in aesthetic pleasure intertwined with pious admiration and gratitude. Needless to say, the beauty of the world is not accessible to everyone equally. But a pious and virtuous man, Derham writes, will find that

nothing is wanting to make us happy, as long as we are in this world. there being abundantly enough to entertain the Minds of the most Contemplative; Glories enough to please the Eye of the most Curious and Inquisitive; Harmonies and Consorts of Nature’s own to delight the Ear of the most Harmonious and Musical; all sorts of pleasant Gusto to gratify the Taste and Appetite , even of the most Luxurious; and fragrant Odours to please the nicest and tenderest Smell.  

As Addison’s Cheerfulness-essays attest, he must have wholeheartedly subscribed to such an “affective affirmation of being itself.” I would like to emphasise two important points in connection with Addison’s Well-Being Argument. First, note how radically human-centred this argument is. On the one hand, happiness here is

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252 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 413. (my italics)
254 Derham, *Demonstration*, 83.
255 Norton, “*The Spectator*”, 100.
understood within the domain of ordinary life, bound up with our affective-sensitive pleasures, while, on the other hand, Providence (seemingly) does nothing more than promotes this this-worldly flourishing of humans as sensible creatures. Even Derham remarks that these pleasures are “enough to make us love and delight in this World, rather too much, than too little, considering how nearly we are ally’d to another World, as well as this.”256 It is no surprise, then, that it was the Well-Being Argument that proved to be one of the most widely adopted (and refined) final cause arguments in the subsequent aesthetic theories of the British Enlightenment.

Second, note how Providence works through the universal laws that govern the human aesthetic apparatus. The final cause of the beautiful, therefore, is the final cause of the particular design of human nature that enables us to appreciate beauty. Drawing on the new notion of secondary qualities, Addison argues that “Light and Colours, as apprehended by the Imagination, are only Ideas in the Mind, and not Qualities that have any Existence in Matter.”257 This means that it is human sensibility, or, more precisely, the Boylean “congruity” between the physical world and our aesthetic apparatus that enables us to see lights and colours, and, therefore, to appreciate beauty. Without this congruity that allows us to perceive sensible qualities, “Things would make but a poor Appearance to the Eye”. A great part of our pleasure would simply be destroyed “if we saw them only in their proper Figures and Motions”. Through designing human sensibility in such a way, Providence enabled human vision to add “Supernumerary Ornaments to the Universe”, “pleasing Shows and Apparitions” and to “discover Imaginary Glories in the Heavens, and in the Earth, and see some of this Visionary Beauty poured out upon the whole Creation”. By the design of our very make-up, Providence placed us into “a pleasing Delusion”, where “we walk about like the enchanted Hero of a Romance”.258

2.3. Cheerfulness

Not long before his Imagination-series, in the spring of 1712, Addison already discussed the aesthetic components in the anthropocentric Providential Order. In a

256 Derham, Demonstration, 83. (my italics)
257 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413.
258 Addison, The Spectator, no. 413.
relatively short, three-piece series of essays (nos. 381, 387, 393), he focused on the features and various contexts or functions of “Chearfulness”. The term refers to an “excellent Frame of Mind” or “Habit of the Mind”, a “fixed and permanent” disposition, which determines how one relates to oneself, others, and to God and his creation.259 Addison’s essays, as we have seen, were meant to be the facilitators of self-cultivation, designed to instill certain “Moral habits of Mind” in his readers, among which Cheerfulness seems to have a crucial place. These dispositions were defined in moral-pious, aesthetic, and medical terms, all of which interlocked beautifully in the homogeneous universe of the early British Enlightenment.260

Besides showcasing one of the possible outputs of Addison’s project of politeness, these writings prove to be crucial for my present purposes because they are penetrated by intricate teleological accounts, which can refine and even augment the ones we have encountered in the Imagination-series. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will briefly explore the various contexts of Cheerfulness, with special attention to the functions Addison assigns to it within the Providential Order. Perhaps the best way to start exploring this manifold disposition is to look at the descriptions through which Addison introduces the concept to his readers. At the outset, Cheerfulness is described from three different points of view, reflecting on how this disposition determines one’s state of mind, conduct with others, and relation to God.

2.3.1. A Four-Chambered Concept

(1) First, Addison argues that Cheerfulness gives one a perfect mastery over one’s thoughts, intellectual and affective faculties, and judgment, making one’s “Temper [...] even and unruffled”. Thus, Cheerfulness endows one with a certain contentment in being in this world, “with a Relish to all those Goods which Nature has provided for him”.261 This description clearly suggests a moral stance, somewhat similar to the serene equilibrium of a Stoic’s virtue: “Chearfulness keeps up a kind of Day-light in the Mind, and fills it with a steady and perpetual Serenity.”262 At the same time, this “Tranquillity of Mind”, unbothered by guilt, is inextricably bound up with an aesthetic sensibility: a cheerful mind, Addison writes, “tastes all the Pleasures of the Creation

259 Addison, The Spectator, no. 381.
260 For the “fusion” of the religious/pious, the moral, and the intellectual/rational in these habits of mind, see Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, “Addison on ‘Moral Habits of the Mind’”, Journal of the History of Ideas, vol. 21, no. 3 (1960), 409–27.
261 Addison, The Spectator, no. 381.
262 Addison, The Spectator, no. 381.
which are poured about him, and does not feel the full Weight of those accidental Evils which may befal him.”

(2) Addison, then, explicitly considers the influence of cheerfulness on moral conduct, arguing that this habit of mind “naturally produces Love and Good-will” towards others, while also diffusing this “good Humour” in those with whom the cheerful person converses. Again, the aesthetic creeps into the concept, infiltrating this time into our interactions: “A Man finds himself pleased, he does not know why, with the Cheerfulness of his Companion”. The cheerfulness of others affects us immediately, in a sensuous and affective way, “like a sudden Sun-shine that awakens a secret Delight in the Mind, without her attending to it.” Note how the imagery of light and brightness keeps coming back – as we will see, it is much more than a figure of speech. Without knowing the reasons behind it, the “Heart rejoices of its own accord, and naturally flows out into Friendship and Benevolence towards the Person who has so kindly an Effect upon it.”

(3) Finally, Addison discusses the cheerful habit of mind “as a constant habitual Gratitude to the great Author of Nature.” Cheerfulness is inescapably intertwined with not only morality but piety as well: vice and atheism, Addison writes, “very reasonably deprive a Man of this Cheerfulness of Temper.” Unlike the “uneasiness” and “gloom” of atheism (again, note the visuals), Cheerfulness is “an implicit Praise and Thanksgiving to Providence under all its Dispensations”, “a kind of Acquiescence”. In short, cheerfulness inhabits a pious and virtuous mind, making it feel at home in this world.

(4) The following essay in the series (no. 387), however, makes it clear that there is a fourth dimension of Cheerfulness. Besides being a “Moral Habit of the Mind”,

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263 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 381.
264 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 381.
265 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 381.
266 For the historical transformation of ancient friendship as a political institution to the eighteenth-century intimate-aesthetic friendship, which still reserves certain political or societal relevance, see Sándor Radnóti, “A barátság filozófiája”, *Holmi*, 2013/11, 1367–75.
267 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 381.
268 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 381.
cheerfulness is also the state of *bodily and mental well-being*. Certain expressions (temper, humour) might have already suggested the close links between Cheerfulness and health. Cheerfulness is explicitly defined, on the one hand, as “the best Promoter of Health” (bodily as well as mental, since the two are never really separated in Addison’s physiology), because it consists of *the unhindered and lively motions of the animal spirits*. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was the quantity, velocity and equal distribution of these small particles and other various fluids flowing throughout the body that was seen as the key to health. And given that nervous diseases were thought to consist in the disorder of the animal spirits moving in the hollow conduits of nerves that lost their elasticity, setting these spirits and fluids into motion was seen as an effective remedy.\(^{270}\) Aesthetic experiences, as I will point out later, were thought to be of therapeutic value exactly because they could “exercise” the various human faculties.

The lively motions and proper distribution of the animal spirits, which is cheerfulness physiologically speaking, can countervail the various kinds of “nervous diseases”: the “secret Murmurs of Heart”, “imperceptible Strokes to those delicate Fibres of which the vital parts are composed”, the “violent Ferments which they stir up in the Blood”, and the “irregular disturbed Motions, which they raise in the animal Spirits.”\(^{271}\) The moral and spiritual factors that hinder Cheerfulness as a “moral habit of the mind”, one must issue from this, also “wear out the Machine [the human body, that is] insensibly”.\(^{272}\)

In this argument, Addison draws on the particular “moral biology” of enlightened pathology, often implying societal and even racial distinctions.\(^{273}\) This “moral biology”, to adapt Kevin Siena’s term, was supported first and foremost by the early modern recalculation of the Galenian six *non naturals* (environment, siet, sleep, evacuations, exercise, and passions) by the new, mechanical philosophy and medico-physiology, informed by Newtonian insights and Herman Boerhaave’s (1668–1738) work, which explained bodily and medical phenomena in terms of mechanics

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\(^{271}\) Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 387.

\(^{272}\) Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 387.

(iatromechanism). The non naturals supported the fusion of the medical and the moral because of the underlying idea that our health is partly the making of our own conduct. In this case, however, health is “a matter of moral responsibility” and is inextricably “linked to righteousness”, while disease is rooted in intemperance, debauchery and filth.

Accordingly, a cheerful, healthy disposition is defined as “the natural Effect of Virtue and Innocence”, as the “Tranquillity of Mind which is the Health of the Soul”. “Health and Cheerfulness mutually beget each other”, writes Addison, which means that as therapeutic, cheerfulness “banishes all anxious Care and Discontent, sooths and composes the Passions, and keeps the Soul in a Perpetual Calm.” The very vocabulary Addison uses makes it simply impossible to distinguish the medical from the moral.

2.3.2. A Cheerful Order of Things

Even though fusing the aesthetic, the moral, the pious, and the medico-physiological was typical of the British Enlightenment, the source of Addison’s complex four-chambered concept of Cheerfulness can be probably found in John Ray’s The Wisdom of God. In this famous work of physico-theology, Ray also connects these aspects under the umbrella of cheerfulness, very similarly to the way Addison did some twenty years later:

One Means there is which Physicians take notice of as very effectual for the Preservation of Health, which I cannot here omit, that is, a quiet and cheerful Mind, not afflicted with violent Passions, or distracted with immoderate Cares, for these have a great and ill Influence upon the Body; now, how a Man can have a quiet and cheerful Mind under a great Burthen and Load of Guilt, I know not, unless he be very ignorant, or have a fear’d Conscience; it concerns us therefore, even upon this Account, to be careful of our Conversation, and to keep our Consciences void of Offence both towards God and toward Men.

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274 See, for example, Jeremiah Wainwright, A Mechanical Account of the Non-Naturals: Being a Brief Explication of the Changes made in Humane Bodies by Air, Diet, etc. (London, 1708).
275 Siena, “Pliable Bodies”, 40–41.
276 Addison, The Spectator, no. 381.
277 Addison, The Spectator, no. 387.
Again, it seems, we end up at physico-theology. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Addison assigns an important place to Cheerfulness in the providential order of things through various teleological accounts centering on the diverse functions of the aesthetic.

In accordance with the Well-Being Argument of the Imagination-series recapitulated earlier, Addison writes that “the World, in which we are placed, is filled with innumerable Objects that are proper to raise and keep alive this happy Temper of Mind.” Given the four interrelated chambers of Addison’s concept of Cheerfulness, this means that Providence, through the various beauties of nature, instills tranquillity, morality, piety, and well being into the mind and body of man. Needless to say, in order to “keep up this Cheerfulness in the Mind of Man”, Providence had to form human sensibility “after such a manner, as to make it capable of conceiving Delight from several Objects which seem to have very little use in them”. Addison, then, anticipates his argument in the Imagination-series, which uses the Boylean congruity proviso built into his model of secondary qualities to argue that one of the primary goals of the Providential Order is to preserve and felicitate human life:

> if Matter had appeared to us endowed only with those real Qualities which it actually possesses, it would have made but a very joyless and uncomfortable Figure; why has Providence given it a Power of producing in us such imaginary Qualities, as Tastes and Colours, Sounds and Smells, Heat and Cold, but that Man, while he is conversant in the lower Stations of Nature, might have his Mind cheared and delighted with agreeable Sensations? In short, the whole Universe is a kind of Theatre filled with Objects that either raise in us Pleasure, Amusement, or Admiration.

The world, as well as the make-up of human sensibility, are designed for the pleasures and happiness of mankind, even at the cost of enshrouding the world with “imaginary”, sensible qualities.

It might seem, though, that the above argument suggests the separation of the aesthetic from the instrumental. Addison, however, also points out that there is a “double End in the Works of Nature”: “If we consider the World in its Subserviency to Man, one would think it was made for our Use; but if we consider it in its natural

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Beauty and Harmony, one would be apt to conclude it was made for our Pleasure.”

Indeed, the Providentially Order is an economic “order of mutual benefits”, as Charles Taylor suggested: “the most important Parts in the vegetable World are those which are the most beautiful.” The Sun, for instance, has an indispensable role in producing the conditions for the preservation of vegetal and animal life but, at the same time, it also “has a particular Influence in chearing the Mind of Man”. But given that Cheerfulness is a four-chambered concept, this argument also entails that the aesthetic, far from being confined to sensible pleasures and happiness, becomes a crucial driving force behind moral, pious, and medical improvement – a driving force designed by Providence.

However, Cheerfulness is not only the product of aesthetic experiences but also their necessary condition – without this open, sensitive disposition, we cannot access the full aesthetic richness of nature. This means that Cheerfulness actively contributes to the aesthetic transformation of the world:

The Creation is a perpetual Feast to the Mind of a good Man, every thing he sees chears and delights him. [...] Such a habitual disposition of mind consecrates every field and wood, turns an ordinary walk into a morning or evening sacrifice.

The transformative activity of the cheerful mind (and body) anticipates that of the polite imagination: “A Man of a Polite Imagination – Addison writes in his Imagination-essay – is let into a great many Pleasures, that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving.” A person with a cultivated sensibility “looks upon the World, as it were in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind.” In a bolder interpretation, the activity of cheerfulness is constitutive – it is the mind which creates the aesthetic. However, the textual evidence quoted above challenges these claims. The activity of a cheerful mind/imagination is more modest than that of an “aesthetic attitude”: it transforms the world not by creating the aesthetic

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287 For such a reading, see, for example, Jerome Stolnitz, “On the Origins of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness’”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1961), 142.
but by *discovering* the various properties designed to elicit pleasure and enjoying them more *intensively* or with finer *discernment*.²⁸⁸

Furthermore, the strong religious allusions in the quotation above also shows that transforming the world aesthetically was inextricably linked to its *spiritual transformation*. “Cheerfulness – Szécsényi writes – as a habitual state of mind is not contemplative, it is rather an agile, active, productive attitude to the world outside and inside, it can permanently re-shape or ‘re-create’ the world as our world and can render natural scenes sanctified reality in which the ‘transient Gleams of Joy’ of the spatial and bodily is being improved into the perpetual state of celestial bliss of the temporal (eternal) and spiritual”.²⁸⁹ Examining the third essay of the series dedicated to the pleasure of spring (no. 393), Norton pointed out another facet of Addison’s aesthetics: the Addisonian sensitive-affective “therapeutic”, Norton argued, entailed crucial spiritual dimensions because “Addison ultimately understood aesthetics to be a way of connecting with the larger order of things”. What is original in Addison thinking is that he regarded the “feeling of connectedness [to be] integral to the [aesthetic] feeling itself, and a central part of its power and appeal.”²⁹⁰

Due to a beneficial Providential Order, the natural make-up of the imagination not only fills human life with sensible pleasures but also assures an *aesthetic access* to and even some sort of *share* from *the divine order of things*. As Norton observed it, the aesthetic “is a *heightened sense of aliveness*, of connecting to the cosmic order [...]. What we find here [...] is an *affective affirmation of being itself*.”²⁹¹ These “theologico-aesthetic experiences”,²⁹² to adopt Szécsényi’s term, are in accord with the anthropocentric providentialism of the British Enlightenment. As Szécsényi sums up: we “feel that everything around exists for our sake as a personal gift from the divine. [...] we can contact the providential God.”²⁹³

So far I have examined the way Addison anchors both our (affective) happiness and spiritual experiences in the make-up of the human aesthetic apparatus, designed by Providence in order to improve human life in these areas. Now, I would like to turn to the medico-physiological undercurrent of Addison’s writings. Earlier, I have pointed

²⁸⁹ Szécsényi, “Landscape and Walking”, 73.
²⁹¹ Norton, “The Spectator”, 100. (my emphasis)
out the interlocking of a happy temper, moral and pious virtues, and bodily and mental health in the concept of cheerfulness. Now, I would like to focus on the union between aesthetic sensibility and health, and examine the teleological account – a tremendously influential addendum to the Well-Being Argument – that is built upon this union.

2.3.3. Aesthetic Exercises
The links between aesthetic sensibility and health were quite entrenched in the medical literature of the early British Enlightenment. Addison, like many of his contemporaries, was well conversed in the medico-physiological theories and practices of his day, partly due to the patronage system, partly because the still more or less monolithic body of knowledge. Addison devoted several of his Spectator-essays to somatic care, drawing on the iatromechanist understanding of the Galenian six non-naturals: “I consider the Body – Addison writes, disclosing his iatromechanist commitments – as a System of Tubes and Glands, or to use a more Rustick Phrase, a Bundle of Pipes and Strainers, fitted to one another after so wonderful a Manner as to make a proper Engine for the Soul to work with.”

Drawing on the iatromechanist medical literature, Addison emphasizes the significance of “two great Instruments of Health”, temperate diet and bodily exercise: “Physick, for the most part, is nothing else but the Substitute of Exercise or Temperance.” As for his aesthetic theory, it was the medical discussions about physical exercise that proved to be particularly significant. Drawing on the works of physicians like the “English Hyppocrates”, Thomas Sydenham (1624–1689) or Francis Fuller (1670–1706) as well as men of lettres such as Sir William Temple (1628–1699), Addison recommended horse riding, dumb bell training, and his beloved “skiomachia”, a kind of shadowboxing using short sticks, as physical exercise for their many salutary benefits.

In full consent with the medical writers of the early Enlightenment, Addison held that “As I am a Compound of Soul and Body, I consider myself as obliged to a

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double Scheme of Duties". Exercise was widely recommended by iatromechanists like Fuller or Cheyne because it was thought to (1) augment the velocity of bloodflow and (2) the velocity and quantity of the animal spirits moving through the nervous conduits; (3) to increase internal heat responsible for digestion and secretion; and (4) to contribute to the equal distribution of these fluids and particles throughout the body. At the same time, exercise also effects the “solids” (the nerve and muscle fibres, the joints, etc.) by (5) dilating the nerves and (6) keeping or restoring their healthy tension and tone. Exercise, furthermore, not only changes the body temporarily, but refashions us in an organic level, our body parts, organs, nerves or the very fibres, since it “introduces a new habit into the body”.

Thus, Addison follows the medical opinion of his age when he writes that given that “Man is made an active Being”, an exercise of its various faculties is necessary for the optimal functioning of not just the bodily organs but the mind as well:

Labour or Exercise ferments the Humours, casts them into their proper Channels, throws off Redundancies, and helps Nature in those secret Distributions, without which the Body cannot subsist in its Vigour, nor the Soul act with Cheerfulness.

The connection between physical exercise and cheerfulness is clearly stated by Addison. Given that the most feared of the nervous diseases – the “English malady”, melancholy or spleen – was also thought to consist in the disorder of the animal spirits, and rampant among women and “Men of studious and sedentary Tempers” in particular, exercise (as a form of labour) was highly recommended as an effective remedy.

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302 Fuller, *Medicina Gymnastica*, 73.
304 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 115. (my italics)
305 The “Englishness” of this nervous disorder was emphasised by the title of George Cheyne’s famous *The English Malady* (London, 1733), but appropriating this disease was a common maneuver of English writers well before that. Addison also wrote in his Cheerfulness-series that “Melancholy is a kind of Demon that haunts our Island”. Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 387.
the Effects which this [exercise] has upon all the Faculties of the Mind, by keeping the Understanding clear, the Imagination untroubled, and refining those Spirits that are necessary for the proper Exertion of our intellectual Faculties, during the present Laws of Union between Soul and Body.307

Quite remarkably, however, when it comes in the Cheerfulness-series to giving his readers examples of the mechanisms that can promote such a healthy state of mind, Addison, out of all possibilities, mentions aesthetic pleasures. In the second essay in the series, Addison refers to design arguments that identified the work of Providence in the salutary effects of green colour,308 which “comforts and strengthens the Eye instead of weakening or grieving it.” Alluding to Newton, Addison explains these beneficial effects in terms of exercise: because of the “right Mixture of Light and Shade”, the “Rays that produce in us the Idea of Green” can “give the animal Spirits their proper Play, and by keeping up the struggle in a just Ballance, excite a very pleasing and agreeable Sensation.”309 The pleasure evoked by the beauty of colours, it seems, is also a therapeutic against nervous disorders, grounded in physiological mechanisms, similar to that of the physical exercise.

Incorporating the exercising the “finer organs” as well as our intellectual powers into the medical discourse of physical exercise has been already done by physicians like Fuller. The novel and changing scenes during a horseride, a walk or a voyage “keep up the vigour of the mind”310 because these encounters with the changing environment enliven, amuse, and divert the narrowed and inert melancholic mind.311 Addison’s originality lies in that he generalised these arguments and used them to describe the physiological mechanisms underlying aesthetic experience, and to argue for their salutary benefits on mind and body. Addison, right at the beginning of his Imagination-series, argues that aesthetic pleasure functions

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308 It might well be the passage from Ray’s *Wisdom of God*: “the whole dry land is for the most part, covered over with a lovely carpet of green grass and other herbs, of a colour, not only most grateful and agreeable, but most useful and salutary to the eye: and this also decked and adorned with great variety of flowers of beautiful colours and figures, and of most pleasant and fragrant odours for the refreshment of our spirits and our innocent delight.” Ray, *The Wisdom of God*, 207. The part is also quoted by Zeitz to illustrate how sensuous-aesthetic pleasures were incorporated by design arguments. See Zeitz, “Addison’s ‘Imagination’ Papers”, 498.
309 Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 387. (my italics)
310 Fuller, *Medicina Gymnastica*,
311 Movement has also a similar diverting effect: “there is nothing like Hurrying the Body, to divert the Hurry or the Mind.” Fuller, *Medicina Gymnastica*, 146.
like a gentle Exercise to the Faculties, awaken them from Sloth and Idleness, without putting them upon any Labour or Difficulty.\textsuperscript{312}

Similarly to exercises such as walking, chasing, water travel or horse riding that “shake the whole machine”,\textsuperscript{313} aesthetic experience was thought to function like “a gentle exercise” promoting a vigorous body and a cheerful mind, because they involve (or maybe even based on) similar physiological mechanisms: aesthetic experiences have a kindly Influence on the Body, as well as the Mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the Imagination, but are able to disperse Grief and Melancholy, and to set the Animal Spirits in pleasing and agreeable Motions.\textsuperscript{314}

Addison’s adoption of the medico-physiological model of physical exercise to describe the psychosomatic mechanisms and benefits of the aesthetic had huge impact. As we will see in the next chapter, Edmund Burke, though on a differrent, vitalistic physiology, worked out his physiological aesthetics based on this often ignored medical tradition and even added his original teleological accounts based on the exercise model.\textsuperscript{315}

This medico-physiological argument, even though implicitly, lead us to the last of Addison’s teleological accounts concerning the final causes of the aesthetic. “Providence did not design this World – Addison writes – [that it] should be filled with Murmurs and Repinings, or that the Heart of Man should be involved in Gloom and Melancholy”.\textsuperscript{316} By engineering a world filled with beautiful, uncommon and sublime objects and adjusting the human aesthetic apparatus to it so that it could respond with pleasure upon encountering such objects, the author of human nature not only assured our happiness/cheerfulness, but also took care both of our bodily and mental health. The “Theatre” of nature with “Vicissitude of Day and Night, the Change of Seasons, with all that Variety of Scenes which diversify the Face of Nature [...] fill the Mind with a perpetual Succession of beautiful and pleasing Images.”\textsuperscript{317} But due to the wise make-up of human sensibility, this is also a “perpetual Succession” of exercises to maintain our well-being.

\textsuperscript{312} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 411. (my italics)
\textsuperscript{313} Cheyne, \textit{An Essay of Health and Long Life}, 95.
\textsuperscript{314} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 411.
\textsuperscript{316} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 387.
\textsuperscript{317} Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 387.
Addison attributes these medical benefits to the peculiarities of the *imagination*. Due to the intermediary place and physicality of the imagination, the pleasures of the imagination are between the “gross” pleasures of the bodily senses and the “refined” but exhausting pleasures of the understanding. We have seen how the uncommon lured the solitary scholar out of his chamber and encouraged him to engage with nature. Now it turns out, that the aesthetic engagement with the world offers a cure as well: “the Pleasures of the Fancy are more conducive to Health, than those of the Understanding, which are worked out by Dint of Thinking, and attended with too violent a Labour of the Brain.”

Thus, after being embedded into the preservation of the whole species, aesthetic experience is now assigned a function within the Providential Order of the preservation of both the bodily and mental well being of the individual. The contribution of the aesthetic to cheerfulness is given a medico-physiological explanation, while the common physiological processes of aesthetic experience and bodily exercise also imply that the Well-Being Argument is also an argument for our physical and mental health. The Providential Order is, indeed, an “order of mutual benefits”, designed to keep and further human flourishing.

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3. Nerves:

*Edmund Burke’s Physiological Aesthetics*

The short work entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published originally in 1757 and then again two years later with an additional introduction on taste, is certainly among the most widely-read works of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Its author, the Irish Edmund Burke (1730–1797), is considered now to be one of the leading minds of eighteenth-century British thought, though his fame mainly rests on his formidable political philosophy elaborated in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Burke’s *Reflections* is a classic in conservative thought, published after decades of active involvement in politics as a speaker in the House of Commons from 1765. During the 1750s, however, the young Burke dedicated his time and effort to literature rather than politics, while being an aspiring author living in London, a friend of Dr. Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith.320 Given that both the work and its author are widely recognized as classics, one might think that a chapter dedicated to Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* needs no introduction. But, unfortunately, things are not that simple.

The problem with Burke’s early philosophical work is that it has been encapsulated into the aesthetics of the sublime, that is, it is usually read only as an original and bold contribution to the blooming eighteenth-century discussion about the concept. Reading the work as a *theory of the sublime* will, naturally, focus on Burke’s account of the sensible properties that make an object “sublime” and the perception they generate in the human mind. Burke calls the former the “sources of the sublime” and defines the latter, following Locke and Hume, in terms of pleasure and pain, and the intricate economy of the passions built upon them. Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*, however, contains an original and bold *theory of beauty* as well, which analyses the perception of beauty and enumerates the sensible properties of objects that engender it.

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By Burke’s aesthetic theory I mean his *anatomy of sensibility*, which, by tracing our aesthetic perceptions of the sublime and the beautiful back to what Burke usually refers to as their “efficient causes”, seeks to reveal the *bodily mechanisms* through which we respond to physical stimuli. Just like his contemporaries in the empirico-psychological tradition, Burke held that aesthetic perceptions are not the products of rational reflexion but of “certain affections of the mind, that cause certain changes in the body; or certain powers and properties in bodies, that work a change in the mind.”\(^3\)\(^2\)\(^1\) However, unlike his contemporaries, he went “beyond the passions to the body”\(^3\)\(^2\)\(^2\) and, pointing out the close interaction between body and mind, identified the “efficient causes” of our aesthetic perceptions in *the physiological mechanisms of the nerve fibres*, while limiting the role of reason and even association. Strangely enough, the Burkean anatomy of sensibility analysed in Part IV of his *Philosophical Enquiry* is rarely explored in its entirety and within its proper historical contexts – the mid-century debates about neurophysiology and medicine. This chapter will read Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* as a scientific account of the physiological mechanisms responsible for our aesthetic perceptions and, therefore, will concentrate on “the efficient causes” rather than “the sources” of the sublime and the beautiful.

Inspired by Newton, Burke’s inductive, experimental approach uses aesthetic experiences as “experiments”, the observation of which will lead us to “facts”: the laws of human nature itself. His aim is to explain, through observing how we respond to beautiful and sublime objects, the way certain sensible properties, by striking the senses, produce certain ideas and evoke certain passions in the mind. Thus, his account of the perceptions and properties of the sublime and the beautiful is only the first step. It is followed by Burke’s attempt to trace them back to the visceral level of the human body, to the “unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves” or their “relaxation somewhat below the natural tone”.\(^3\)\(^2\)\(^3\) In short, Burke’s theory of beauty and theory of sublimity are engulfed by his aesthetic theory, which is, in turn, engulfed by “the


\(^3\)\(^2\)\(^3\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 4.5, 121, 4.19, 136.
science of man”. Read in this light, the *Philosophical Enquiry* is not a “literary” enclave within the oeuvre of a genius in political philosophy, and neither, as it is often read, political philosophy in disguise, an “aesthetic ideology” of the emerging bourgeoisie. Rather, it provides us, as Richard Bourke wrote, an “access to Burke’s theory of human nature”, a “science of the passions”. Its significance for Burke’s political philosophy is not the ideology it encapsulates, but the various implications of Burke’s science of human nature, namely “the social utility of the passions”. However, as we will see, these implications go beyond politics and medicine: “The Enquiry – as Burke’s biographer, F.P. Lock sums up – is at bottom a theological work.” I will argue, however, that what makes Burke’s work a “theological work” is his account of the physiological mechanisms that engender our aesthetic perceptions: the medical, the political, and the theological are inextricably interwoven in the very fibres of the human body within Burke’s teleological conception of human nature. As a first step, however, we should understand what it means that the method through which the *Philosophical Enquiry* approached aesthetic phenomena was scientific and how it was received in the early years of modern philosophical aesthetics.

### 3.1. “Right Down to the Tissue of Fibres”

In line with the ambition of the eighteenth-century theories of the sublime, one of Burke’s goals is to “settle a consistent idea” of beauty and the sublime, that is, “to clear and distinguish some few particulars that belong to the same class, and are consistent with each other, from the immense crowd of different and sometimes contradictory ideas” associated with these notions. Burke asserts that a proper definition of beauty or sublimity can only arise from “a diligent examination of our passions in our own

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325 Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 119.
326 Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, 98.
327 The need for a definition that must preceed and support the prescribed rules of the sublime, that is, the need for an aesthetics of the sublime beyond the rhetoric of the sublime was already explicit in John Baillie’s *An Essay on the Sublime* of 1747: “Hence it seems, that rules for the sublime should most naturally result from an inquiry what the sublime is; and if this is an inquiry which Longinus has intirely passed over, there is still room for further speculation.” John Baillie, “An Essay on the Sublime” [1747], in *The Sublime: a Reader in British Eighteenth-century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88.
328 Burke, *Enquiry*, 3.25, 112.
breasts” (Part I), a “careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions” (Parts II and III) and “a sober and attentive investigation of the laws of nature, by which those properties are capable of affecting the body, and thus of exciting our passions” (Part IV). Due to his analytical, inductive and experimental reasoning, Burke maintains, “nature is, as it were, scrutinized; and we report nothing of her but what we receive from her own information.” As F.P. Lock writes about his scientific methodology: “Burke took many current psychological and aesthetic notions, tested them against his own experience and observation, fashioned them into a new explanatory hypothesis, extended the theory as far as he could, and marshalled the evidence in its favour.”

In order to identify the “sources” and, through their effect, the “efficient causes” of our aesthetic perceptions, Burke appropriated certain elements from Newton’s scientific methodology. Herder, an early enthusiastic reader of the *Philosophical Enquiry*, even called it a “splendid, truly Newtonian system concerning the causes of the beautiful and sublime.” Aesthetic perceptions are seemingly “obscure and intricate” phenomena, however, Burke maintained, they are in fact produced by “mechanical interactions”, operating universally (causally, that is), between sensible qualities of external objects and the faculties responsible for human sensibility. Governed by “fixed principles”, “some invariable and certain laws” which are “established in our common nature”, our aesthetic perceptions are proper subjects of the experimental approach: there exists, Burke writes, “a logic of Taste”.

In order to understand this logic, we have to examine “every distinct ingredient in the composition, one by one”, followed by re-examining “the principles by the effect of the composition” as well as comparing our phenomena with familiar and contrary

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329 Burke, *Enquiry*, Preface to the first edition, 1. Given that Burke uses the term “efficient causes”, Hipple’s suggestion that one can describe the structure of the work in terms of Aristotelian causality seems viable. Accordingly, Part I deals with the “formal causes”, Parts II and III with the “material causes” and Part IV with the “efficient causes” of the sublime and the beautiful. Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), 84.
335 Burke, *Enquiry*, Introduction on Taste, 11–12;
ones building our generalisations “upon a more extensive and perfect induction.”

This is, as Steffen Ducheyne pointed out, Newton’s method of analysis (from effects to causes) and synthesis (from causes to effects) in a nutshell. As Newton proposed his method in Query 31 to his Opticks: “By this way of Analysis we may proceed from Compounds to Ingredients, and from Motions to the Forces producing them; and in general, from Effects to their Causes, and from particular Causes to more general ones, till the Argument end in the most general.” This inductive process of deriving “laws” or “principles” from natural phenomena is followed by the deductive method of synthesis, which “consists in assuming the Causes discover’d and establish’d as Principles, and by them explaining the Phænomena proceeding from them, and proving the Explanations.”

Before expounding his argument, Burke warns his reader that his work was never intended to be a full-blown theory of the sublime or the beautiful and that his primary goal “went no farther than to the origin of these ideas”. Burke, however, does not mean by this that he revealed “the ultimate cause” of our aesthetic perceptions or, as a matter of fact, that this could ever be properly done. Following Newton, who declared that “it is not the Business of Experimental Philosophy to teach the Causes of things any further than they can be proved by Experiment”, Burke, like Hume before him, rejects speculations about “ultimate causes”. “The great chain of causes – Burke writes –, which links one to another, even to the throne of God himself, can never be unravelled by any industry of ours.” Thus, Burke confines his enquiry to the “efficient causes” of the ideas of beauty and the sublime, which he finds in

336 Burke, Enquiry, Preface to the second edition, 4.
337 Ducheyne, “Communicating a Sort of Philosophical Solidity to Taste”, 62.
339 Burke, Enquiry, Preface to the second edition, 5. One could also add that it could not propose a universal theory of beauty or sublimity simply because its experimental method.
340 Burke, Enquiry, 4.1, 117.
342 “And tho’ we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, ’tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical.” David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature. A Critical Edition, ed. David Fate Norton – Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), vol. 1, 5.
343 Burke, Enquiry, 4.1, 117.
neurophysiological mechanisms: “I conceive, if we can discover what affections of the mind produce certain emotions of the body; and what distinct feelings and qualities of body shall produce certain determinate passions in the mind, and no others, I fancy a great deal will be done.”  

In the previous chapters, I have argued that the emergence of the modern aesthetic discourse was part of the “rise of sensibility” (Gaukroger), a multidisciplinary process, in which the novel medico-physiological models played a tremendous role. As we shall see, eighteenth-century medicine was a bundle of different theories, practices, institutions and identities, a period a transition, rather than of revolutionary change, during which concepts like “irritability”, “excitability” and “sensibility” were introduced as the main principles of movement, feeling and even life itself (vis vitalis) in “the science of sensibility”.

The new medico-physiological models came at handy and were incorporated into the modern aesthetic discourse from the outset, as we have seen in the case of Addison. It is crucial that we keep in mind that there was an intimate connection between medicine and the “moral sciences” in the eighteenth century. The British Enlightenment, even the Scottish pioneers of Edinburgh’s Medical Enlightenment, “did not abandon a ‘total’ view of medicine as part of a much larger whole, from which it could not or should not be isolated.” The new philosophy had a special affection for medicine. As Peter Gay wrote: “It was in medicine that the philosophes tested their philosophy by experience; medicine was at once the model of the new philosophy and proof of its efficacy. […] Nothing could be plainer than this: medicine was philosophy at work; philosophy was medicine for the individual and for society.” There was an interconnectedness on a personal level as well: not only were many of the leading minds of the age close friends with renowned physicians (think of the famous friendship between Richardson and the nerve doctor Cheyne) but several prominent “men of letters” – like Locke or Mandeville – were themselves physicians as well. Addison’s example also showed us that being conversant in traditional medical knowledge as well

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344 Burke, Enquiry, 4.1, 117.
as cutting-edge theories and practices was far less exceptional than in our fragmented and over-specialized age.

Unfortunately, by focusing almost exclusively on his theory of the sublime and neglecting his aesthetic theory and its historical medico-scientific framework, the historiography of aesthetics has mostly overlooked the physiological underpinnings and medical dimensions of Burkean aesthetics or, at best, disparaged it as a reductionist vision of the human body, a burden of his system, which weakens his theory of the sublime by crowding it with absurd implications. But even if Burke’s physiological aesthetics seems to suffer from a “mechanistic essentialism” from our contemporary perspective, his account of the sublime and the beautiful cannot be fully understood without their physiological groundwork and medical implications, in which the various aesthetic, moral, political, and theological arguments converge.

Recent scholarship has shown that Burke did not join the scientific debates of his age only through adopting the experimental method: in working out his aesthetic theory, Burke drew on the medico-scientific theories of the mid-eighteenth century. More specifically, as we shall see, interpreters such as Aris Sarafianos have compellingly argued that “a specifically medical discourse of exercise is the ‘archaeological territory’ of Burke’s science of sensibility.” Burke himself – partly because of a nervous breakdown in the 1750s that he attributed to a period of overstrained work – was well versed in medicine and physiology and was friends with several physicians. Among the latter was Richard Brocklesby (1722–1797), the avid vivisectionist and early British adherent of Albrecht von Haller’s vitalism, interested in pain and “irritability” – both crucial in Burke’s physiological theory. Even more importantly, Christopher Nugent (1698–1775), the physician who “restor’d his Life, and taught him how to Live” in the 1750s, became Burke’s life-long mentor and father-in-law. Nugent was a physician.

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348 See, for instance, Hipple’s remarks: “if the physiological theory of Part IV were replaced by a more thorough analysis of association – if it were simply deleted – the Sublime and Beautiful would remain a brilliant if incomplete system, of merit not historical but absolute and permanent.” Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 98.
352 Burke quoted in Lock, Edmund Burke, vol. 1, 75.
in Bath, “that famous center of polite amusement”, and later became Burke’s father in law, remaining his life-long beloved mentor. Nugent’s therapeutic practice was drastic: it consisted of forcing the fibres to contract and the fluids to keep in motion by shocking the body with various stimulants. As Aris Sarafianos has recently shown by pointing out the similarities between Nugent’s and Burke’s medical language, Nugent’s “shock therapies” and the physiology behind them might have influenced Burke’s aesthetics of the sublime.

Contrary to our current negligence, the importance of the physiological groundwork in the *Philosophical Enquiry* was widely acknowledged in the second half of the eighteenth century, meeting with dismissive criticism as well as enthusiastic support. A brief survey of the German reception might be illuminating. The reception of the *Philosophical Enquiry* among German-speaking authors clearly shows that it was received as an *aesthetic theory*: despite the fact that Burke had originally no intention of contributing to the novel discipline, Burke’s Newtonian enquiry into the “efficient causes” of the sublime and the beautiful was recast in the outlandish intellectual environment of the German Enlightenment as an empiricist-sensualist contender among the various competing aesthetic programmes. His was a radical physiological aesthetics that traces the aesthetic back to the visceral depth of the body.

Burke’s work was received by an enthusiastic audience in Germany shortly after its publication: after having been informed by Lessing about the new book, Moses

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353 Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* [1771], ed. Günter Jürgensmeier (Munich, 2005), 11. One of Smollett’s other character, the hypochondriac Mr. Bramble offers us a glimpse of what it meant to be the “centre of polite amusement” in the eighteenth century: “this place, which Nature and Providence seem to have intended as a resource from distemper and disquiet, is become the very center of racket and dissipation. Instead of that peace, tranquility and ease, so necessary to those who labour under bad health, weak nerves, and irregular spirits; here we have nothing but noise, tumult, and hurry; with the fatigue and slavery of maintaining a ceremonial, more stiff, formal, and oppressive, than the etiquette of a German elector.” Ibid., 34.

354 See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, 73–76.


356 The striking contrast between the vivid eighteenth-century disputes about and the later scholarly ignorance of Burke’s physiological aesthetics is also pointed out in Aris Sarafianos, “Edmund Burke’s Physiological Aesthetics in Medico-Philosophical Circles and Art Criticism, 1757–1824”, in *The Reception of Edmund Burke in Europe*, ed. Martin Fitzpatrick and Peter Jones (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 207.

357 Thus, the *Enquiry* was not only a “bridge” between the criticism of the British and the aesthetics of the German, as Robert Doran claims, but an early proof that the former was appropriated with ease by the latter. Cf Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime. From Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 141.
Mendelssohn (1729–1786) wrote a review of it as early as 1758. Burke’s sensualist theory went on to generate an intense and versatile discussion among German-speaking authors – rationalists, sensualists, psychologists and idealists alike – in the late Enlightenment and was translated into German in 1773. On the whole, it was Burke’s particular observations that were acclaimed, while his philosophical system, dichotomous structure and empiricist methodology proved to be less appealing for German readers. Herder’s remarks in his unpublished “Fourth Grove”, written around 1770, are quite characteristic: Burke “can keep everything that is system. But the actual observations contained in his treatise are real discoveries [...] in an exceedingly obscure region that from a distance seems to ordinary eyes an enchanted, cloud-wrapped isle but, when one sails through the mists, is transformed into a lush and luxuriant landscape, a Madeira.” Burke’s merit, Herder writes, consists in bringing clarity into a field of enquiry that is usually considered “obscure”. It is telling that some years earlier Herder used almost the same imagery to praise Baumgarten, the father of aesthetics himself, who “travelled through these normally mist-shrouded lands in order to find everything that was poetic in the sensitive faculty, in the imagination, in the wits, in the poetic faculty, in judgment, in the power of description, in feeling, and in the passions.”

Placing Burke’s theory within the new science of “aesthetics”, Herder sums up his radical physiological programme in the following way:

[Burke] pursues both these feelings [i.e. the sublime and the beautiful – B.Cs.] deep into our nature, right down to the tissue of fibers that immediately surrounds the soul, as it were, and [...] everywhere traces the sublime to a feeling of tension and the beautiful to a gentle relaxation of the nerves.

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359 For a brief account of the German reception of the Philosophical Enquiry, see Tomáš Hlobil, “The Reception of the Enquiry in the German-Language Area in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: August Gottlieb Meißner and Johann Gottfried Herder”, in The Reception of Edmund Burke in Europe, ed. Martin Fitzpatrick and Peter Jones (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 279–96. For the first German translation, see Philosophische Untersuchungen über dem Ursprung unserer Begriffe vom Schönen und Erhabenen (Riga: Hartknoch, 1773).
362 Johann Gottfried Herder, “A Monument to Baumgarten”, in Selected Writings on Aesthetics, 43.
The true shortcoming of Burke’s work, according to Herder, is that it did not go further in revealing the “specific varieties” of aesthetic feelings and their distinctive neurophysiological basis. Thus, a true anatomy of sensibility is “to evaluate the weight of every impression, every kind of nervous vibration, every communication and propagation of the feelings, which rush, so to speak, from nerve to nerve, and to analyze the intertwining of a multitude of fibers to form a single main category of feeling.”\textsuperscript{364} It seems that what Herder regarded to be Burke’s genuine contribution to aesthetics was not its conceptual differentiations or theory of passions, but tracing the aesthetic back to a physiological groundwork.\textsuperscript{365} This entails, however, that he read it as an “experiment” revealing the laws of sensibility – a treatise on the fringe of “natural philosophy”. It is no coincidence that when discussing the contraction and relaxation of the “irritable fibres” involved in sensation in his “On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul” (1778), Herder refers to Burke’s physiological theory.\textsuperscript{366}

Given the early reception of the Philosophical Enquiry, it comes as no surprise that Kant’s pre-Critique treatise on the beautiful and the sublime met with criticism that compared his ideas with that of Burke’s: in his 1764 review, Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) pointed out the physiological groundwork of aesthetic feelings in Burke’s theory – something that was entirely neglected by Kant. For this reason, Kant chose to define his “transcendental exposition” of the aesthetic in opposition to Burke’s “physiological exposition” in his Third Critique.\textsuperscript{367} Kant, as usual, chose his words carefully: when recapitulating Burke’s argument he picked the parts from Part IV of the Philosophical Enquiry, where Burke summarizes the particular physiological mechanisms producing the passions that trigger the sublime or the beautiful.\textsuperscript{368} Even though Kant acknowledged Burke’s method as an “extremely fine” analysis that can “provide rich materials for the favorite researches of empirical anthropology”, he thought that “only with difficulty could [it] ever lay claim to the rank of a philosophical science.”\textsuperscript{369} I will return to Kant’s criticism below. Nevertheless, the characterization of Burke’s theory as “physiological” is the product of a decades-long tradition of German

\textsuperscript{364} Herder, “Critical Forests: Fourth Grove,” 245.
\textsuperscript{365} Herder’s endorsement continues in his later works as well, such as his 1778 “On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul”. See Hlobil, “The Reception of the Enquiry”, 292–93.
\textsuperscript{367} For the importance of Burke’s German reception (e.g. Hamann’s criticism) to Kant’s analytic of the sublime, see Hlobil, “The Reception of the Enquiry”, 290–91, 282.
\textsuperscript{369} Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, §29, 158, First Introduction, 38.
reception that read Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* as a radical aesthetic programme, one to be reckoned with, which grounds the aesthetic in neurophysiology.

In the following parts of this chapter, I will start by revisiting the “Introduction on Taste” added to the second edition for it illuminates the hidden agenda behind Burke’s endeavour to ground the aesthetic in the principles of neurophysiology. Second, I will revisit his aesthetic theory, focusing on the “efficient causes” of beauty and the sublime in the physiological mechanisms of the human body: *the contraction and relaxation of the fibres*. Burke saw these mechanisms not only as productive of the passions of terror and love, in which he grounded the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful but also as beneficial “exercises” to bodily and mental health. I will try to briefly reconstruct the mid-century medico-scientific debates that were at Burke’s disposal. I want to examine how Burke’s treatment of the contractility of the fibres, the various passions, and aesthetic perceptions produced an intricate network linking medico-physiological, socio-political and aesthetic dimensions. My ultimate aim, however, is to explore the teleology of the aesthetic that lies underneath this network. Newton’s scientific method, as we have seen, could accommodate finality, so Burke had no reason to doubt its place in his “timorous method of proceeding” either. As a result, “final causes” found their way into Burke’s physiological aesthetics, lurking behind its central arguments.

### 3.2. The “Groundwork of Taste”

For Burke, writing around the middle of the Century of Taste, the stakes of successfully grounding the aesthetic in neurophysiology were extremely high: the hidden agenda of Burke’s physiological aesthetics, revealed by the new introduction added to the second edition of 1759, was to establish a natural and thus universal standard of taste. If the aesthetic naturalism of the *Enquiry* is tenable, it would mean that Newtonian science can overcome the sceptic’s challenge and can establish, in spite of the existing diversity in judgments of taste, a natural and universal standard.

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The sceptic’s challenge had to be faced in one way or another. But what exactly did this challenge consist in? In 1742, Hume famously constructed the sceptic’s challenge in his essay entitled “The Sceptic”. Aesthetic properties, the argument goes, “are merely of a relative nature, and consist in an agreeable sentiment, produced by an object in a particular mind, according to the peculiar structure and constitution of that mind”. Note that it is not the mainstream eighteenth-century relational account of aesthetic properties endorsed by almost everyone from Hutcheson through Burke to Hume and Kames. The latter, even though it implied relativism, did not constitute an insurmountable challenge for a standard of taste because it presupposed a causal connection and that human nature operates uniformly. The sceptic, however, points in a Pyrrhonian style to “that vast variety which nature has so much affected in all her operations” and to the contingent factors that can modify our aesthetic sentiments (from the erroneous workings of the organs to particular customs and prejudices). Aesthetic sentiments, for the sceptic, are inescapably the contingent products of particular minds. Furthermore, the sceptic claims that a “sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it”. From this the sceptic infers that “All sentiment is right” and, therefore, that trying to reconcile these just sentiments is a vain attempt: a standard of taste cannot be established.

The latter quotations are from Hume’s famous essay entitled “Of the Standard of Taste”, in which he rebuts the sceptic’s challenge concerning the possibility of establishing a common standard. Hume’s essay was published in the same year as Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*, which probably inspired Burke to add an introduction on the subject to the second edition two years later. Both Hume and Burke sought to beat off the subjectivist and relativist tendencies set into motion by the eighteenth-century relational theories of beauty because the demolition of the metaphysics of

376 For a nuanced reading of Burke’s “Introduction on Taste” as a “response” to Hume, see Dario Perinetti, “Between Knowledge and Sentiment: Burke and Hume on Taste”, in *The Science of Sensibility*, 283–304.
beauty, as Sándor Radnóti emphasised, went hand in hand with the reconfiguration of aesthetic experience as “social grout”. This meant that the subjectivist and relativist implications of post-Lockean aesthetics could not be “radicalized” and that the sceptic’s challenge must have been rebutted within the moderate Enlightenment. Nevertheless, Hume chose a different path than Burke, which makes his famous essay ideal for a brief comparative analysis.

For Hume, as well as for the sceptic, aesthetic properties, in Humean terms, are impressions: beauty is the felt sentiment raised by the primary impressions of an object. Hume, however, rejected the argument that one cannot get to a common standard because human nature does not operate uniformly. To the sceptic’s empirical fact (the diversity of tastes), Hume responds with another empirical fact: there are certain works that stand the test of time “and while the world endures, they maintain their authority over the minds of men.”

Given that morals and manners, customs and preferences change, Hume infers from this historical continuity that “amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame”, which can be found in the anatomy of the mind: “Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric are calculated to please, and others to displease”. Thus, one of Hume’s responses to the sceptic is that even though aesthetic properties “belong entirely to the sentiment”, “there are certain qualities in objects which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings.”

Many of Hume’s contemporaries, like Kames and Burke himself, as we will see, held that we can derive a standard directly from the supposedly uniform anatomy of sensibility. However, as Dabney Townsend pointed out, Hume did not share this view and suggested that we turn to “the practice of criticism” instead, “though it is the uniformity of human nature that makes a standard possible” for him as well.

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378 This conception of beauty, as Dabney Townsend argued, modifies the Hutchesonian account where beauty was an idea produced by a “reflex sense” and remains consistent with the epistemology of Hume’s Treatise: “What is contemplated is the things themselves, or, more accurately, the impressions and ideas that present the things themselves in the mind. Beauty is the emotion or calm passion produced by these impressions. To say that beauty is not a quality in things themselves, then, is also to say that it is a secondary impression as the Treatise explained.” Dabney Townsend, Hume’s Aesthetic Theory. Taste and Sentiment (London – New York: Routledge, 2001), 195.
381 Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”, 141. (my italics)
382 Townsend, Hume’s Aesthetic Theory, 194.
The reason why Hume rejected the idea that we can get to the sensible qualities that are “fitted by nature” to produce aesthetic sentiments directly from human nature is that introspection, the usual method of the Scottish Newtonians, will not do in this case. Our introspective “experiments” cannot be trusted because our aesthetic sentiments “require the concurrence of many favourable circumstances to make them play with facility and exactness, according to their general and established principles” and even the smallest “exterior hindrance” or “internal disorder” will “disturb” and “confound” “the operations of the whole machine”.383 Namely, it is the frequent “defects in the internal organs”, the differences in “delicacy of imagination” and other “particular incidents and situations” such as the differences in knowledge, practice, manners and prejudices that can modify the supposedly uniform operations of the mind and, therefore, individual judgments. As a result, no individual experiment can identify with certainty the sensible qualities that “naturally” produce aesthetic perceptions. In other words, the problem lies not in the method of introspection but in finding the optimal subject for our experiments: “though the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely, the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty.”384 In short, if we choose our subject improperly, “our experiment will be fallacious, and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic and universal beauty.”385

Instead of individual experiments, Hume suggests that we turn to history: the “joint verdict” of “true judges” from all ages, who possess “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice”. The “joint verdict” of such exceptional men (and women) will be presumably free from the contingent biases and prejudices of particular ages and individuals and will offer us “the true standard of taste and beauty”.386 It is not to say, as Radnóti pointed out, that Hume finds the standard in an unchangeable, authoritative canon of artworks endorsed by a small élite. Rather, Hume wants to convince his reader that the standard of taste can only arise from “the social-sociable games of taste” made up of critical “reception, appreciation, acceptance or rejection, disputation, the

opposition of good and bad critics, and the consideration, comparison and
differentiation of critical opinions”.

Burke’s contribution to the mid-century debate on the subject has similar points
of departure as Hume’s but takes a different turn right at the outset, arriving at different
conclusions and delineating a different vision of aesthetics. As opposed to the Humean
argument that “Only the historical extension of a standard of taste can be cited as a
warrant of the objectivity of a rule of criticism”, Burke, just like Hutcheson before
him and Kames some years later, derives these rules or “elements” directly from the
anatomy of sensibility. However, unlike Hutcheson or Kames, Burke does not discuss
aesthetic perceptions and judgments of taste in terms of inner senses and confines his
reasoning to the three “natural powers” that engage human beings with the external
world: the bodily senses, imagination, and judgment. Working within this framework of
a more conventional faculty psychology, Burke concludes in the “Introduction” that

what is called taste, in its most general acceptation, is not a simple idea, but is partly
made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures
of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the
various relations of these, and concerning the human passions, manners, and actions.
All this is requisite to form taste, and the groundwork of all these is the same in the
human mind; for as the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently
of all our pleasures, if they are not uncertain and arbitrary, the whole groundwork of
taste is common to all

We can see here that (1) Burke acknowledges the crucial role of the reasoning faculty
and knowledge in judgments of taste, but maintains that (2) reason and knowledge,
rather than unifying us, divide us in matters of taste by modifying the operation of the
imagination (discovering resemblances) and judgment – factors already hinted at by
Hume. As opposed to the critical judgments of taste that necessarily involve reason,
Burke claims that our aesthetic perceptions of the beautiful and the sublime are
ultimately grounded in sense perception, which, like the imagination and the passions,
operates with blind immediacy, independently from discursive reason. In line with his
iron-clad sensualist aesthetics defining aesthetic experience in terms of sense

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387 Radnóti, Jőj và lás!, 379.
388 Perinetti, “Between Knowledge and Sentiment”, 301.
389 Burke, Enquiry, Introduction on Taste, 22. (my italics)
perceptions and passions, Burke argues that even association proves to be insufficient to explain our aesthetic perceptions. Association is often a significant factor but remains contingent and derivative: “it would be absurd – Burke argues – to say that all things affect us by association only; since some things must have been originally and naturally agreeable or disagreeable, from which the others derive their associated powers”. 390

Instead of the imagination, inner senses or association, Burke chooses to define the aesthetic in terms of medical physiology. He claims that (3) it is the physiological mechanisms underlying sense perception (and, thus, imagination, association and the passions) that make up the natural and universal “groundwork” of our aesthetic perceptions. Based on this, Burke argues for a natural standard of taste. 391 This natural standard, that is, resides in the “natural properties” of things that trigger “natural” pains or pleasures in or through the human body. The Philosophical Enquiry is a quest for these sensible qualities and the psycho-physiological mechanisms they evoke.

The latter argument presupposes that there exists a causal connection between the sensible qualities of objects and their internal perception and between these internal perceptions and the pleasure or pain they mechanically evoke. Similarly to Hume, Burke recognizes that the varying acuteness and particular tones of sensibility can influence judgments of taste but rejects scepticism about sense perception and maintains that “as the conformation of their organs are nearly or altogether the same in all men, so the manner of perceiving external objects is in all men the same, or with little difference.” From this, Burke infers that “the pleasures and the pains which every object excites in one man, it must raise in all mankind, whilst it operates naturally, simply, and by its proper powers only”. 392 Unlike Hume, however, Burke holds that this “natural” operation of human sensibility and, therefore, the sensible qualities engendering aesthetic perceptions can be revealed with certainty.

It is not to say that Burke ignores the “many deviations from the natural pleasures or pains” as a result of custom. However, he makes a clear distinction between

390 Burke, Enquiry, 4.2, 118. (my italics)
391 Recent interpreters of Burke’s “extreme physiologism” have similarly recognized that it is “at the heart of his aesthetic theory” because by radically minimizing the role of reason, imagination and association it “provides the basis for his most fundamental assumption that the manner in which man is affected is uniform.” Vanessa L. Ryan, “The Physiological Sublime: Burke’s Critique of Reason,” Journal of the History of Ideas 63 (2001), 270. I agree with Ryan in that the role of imagination and association are minimised, secondary and derivate in Burke’s theory, but what should be added to her analysis is that even though this ambition of the Enquiry becomes the most visible in its discussion of the sublime (and astonishment, in particular), it is also true in the case of the beautiful, as we will see.
392 Burke, Enquiry, Introduction on Taste, 13. (my italics) For an austere reconstruction of Burke’s argument, see Perinetti, “Between Knowledge and Sentiment”, 290–91.
properties that are “naturally pleasing or disagreeable to the sense” and that are pleasing or disagreeable only because the senses were gradually habituated to them. That is, presupposing an unvitiated, innocent state of the senses, Burke distinguishes natural and universal pleasures from “acquired” or “alien” relishes formed by socially and individually contingent “habits”, “prejudices” and “distempers”. In short, the “natural pleasures” that engage the senses, the imagination, and the passions, which operate undisturbed by the demur of reason and the corrupting influence of customs and habits (social and individuals alike), are the common “groundwork of taste.” Granted that there exists a causal connection between objective features and felt sentiments, it is simply “a matter of fact whether some object causes (natural) pleasure or (natural) pain”. Well, here we go – we have arrived at the science of sensibility.

We have seen so far that Burke reduces not only the role of reason but also other cognitive operations (such as association) in aesthetic experience to the minimum in order to establish the natural “groundwork of taste” in physiological mechanisms and the affective states they raise. Again, it is not to say that Burke denies the role of judgments of reason in the critical evaluation of artworks. On the contrary, similarly to the Humean argument for the importance of the “clearness of conception”, “exactness of distinction” and “vivacity of apprehension” in appreciating the “mutual relation and correspondence of parts” in “all the nobler productions of genius”, Burke emphasises the involvement of reason in the critical appreciation of artworks. He could not have been more explicit on this: “where disposition, where decorum, where congruity are concerned, in short, wherever the best taste differs from the worst, I am convinced that the understanding operates, and nothing else”.

I have already mentioned above the peculiarity of Burke’s position that can explain this twofold argument: Burke distinguishes the natural (and universal) aesthetic perceptions grounded in the immediate visceral response of sensibility (the senses, the imagination, and the passions) from the judgments of “critical taste” grounded in knowledge, experience, and often studious deliberation. In short, aesthetic experiences and critical judgments of taste should be differentiated on the grounds of the human faculties involved in them: “sensibility and judgment, which are the qualities that compose what we commonly call a Taste, vary exceedingly in various people. From a

394 Perinetti, “Between Knowledge and Sentiment”, 290. (my italics)
396 Burke, Enquiry, Introduction on Taste, 25. (my italics)
defect in the former of these qualities arises a want of Taste; a weakness in the latter constitutes a wrong or a bad one.” 397 While Burke discusses the latter in the Introduction, he turns to the former in the following chapters of the Philosophical Enquiry, grounding his aesthetic theory, despite Hume’s sceptical remarks concerning introspective “experiments”, in the “diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts”. 398 In his aesthetic theory that follows his introductory chapter on the criticism of taste, Burke eventually works out what Vanessa L. Ryan aptly labelled “the physiological critique of reason”: 399 the sublime and the beautiful are grounded in the sensible qualities of things acting mechanically upon the sensory organs and, through them, the imagination and the passions:

So long as we are conversant with the sensible qualities of things, hardly any more than the imagination seems concerned; little more also than the imagination seems concerned when the passions are represented, because by the force of natural sympathy they are felt in all men without any recourse to reasoning, and their justness recognized in every breast. Love, grief, fear, anger, joy, all these passions have, in their turns, affected every mind; and they do not affect it in an arbitrary or casual manner, but upon certain, natural, and uniform principles. 400

Note that the price Burke has to pay for the universalism of his physiological aesthetics is freedom. As Endre Szécsényi pointed out, the Burkean “aesthetic subject is completely at the mercy of external stimuli”, acting upon the senses mechanically and producing the aesthetic perceptions according to the Providential Design. 401

It is also worthy of note that while Burke founded his Newtonian aesthetics on physiology hoping to have found universal principles of taste, Kant, on the contrary, dismissed these principles as characteristics of an “egoistic” theory. Kant argued that if aesthetic judgments are based on the natural pleasures and pains Burke sought to identify, “one must not expect of others that they will assent to the aesthetic judgments that we make; for about that everyone is justified in consulting only his own private

397 Burke, Enquiry, Introduction on Taste, 23. It means that “whereas sentiment is the causal condition for taste, knowledge is its normative condition.” Perinetti, “Between Knowledge and Sentiment”, 296.

398 Burke, Enquiry, Preface to the first edition, 1.


401 Endre Szécsényi, Társiasság és tekintély. Esztétikai politika a 18. századi Angliában (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), 137.
This is, Kant adds, a dead-end for the criticism of taste. Note that Kant did not deny that the pains and pleasures in which Burke had grounded our aesthetic perceptions “are always ultimately corporeal […] because life without the feeling of the corporeal organ is merely consciousness of one’s existence, but not a feeling of well- or ill-being, i.e., the promotion or inhibition of the powers of life”.

However, Kant rejected the idea of making affective or physiological states the founding principles of aesthetics because such a theory cannot offer “universal validity”. It is hard to say what exactly Burke’s answer would have been to Kant’s transcendental charges against his aesthetic programme. Besides arguing for a causal theory of perception, I believe he would have probably rebutted Kant’s expectations as erroneous, explaining the Prussian professor, like a true Newtonian he was, that “A theory founded on experiment, and not assumed, is always good for so much as it explains.”

It is quite ironic, though, that despite all his efforts to establish a universal standard of taste in the physiological mechanism of sensibility, Burke’s aesthetic theory has proved to be at odds with the main premises, preferences and aspirations of the Century of Taste. First, the fact that Burke’s sublime is grounded in the “violent” physiology of pain and terror, as we shall see, sets it against the neoclassicist ideals of harmony, balance and motionlessness. Second, his account of the sublime cannot be accommodated within the culture of “politeness” and “moderation”, where aesthetic pleasures, as we saw in Addison’s essays, were conceived as “gentle exercises” of body and mind. Burke’s sublime, in contrast, is an aggressive, vitalising experience of excess on the verge of bodily pain and paralysing horror. But more on that later. And third, perhaps most importantly, through uncoupling the sublime and the beautiful by tracing them back to different physiological causes and bestowing a higher rank upon the former due to its intensity, Burke’s aesthetics can be read as a considerable contribution to the dissolution of the socio-political and aesthetic order grounded in the notion of taste. An aesthetic theory built on such a binary anthropological groundwork will be at

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402 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §29, 159.
403 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §29, 159.
405 Burke, *Enquiry*, Preface to the second edition, 5. For the source of Burke’s argument in Newton’s fourth *regula philosophandi*, see Ducheyne, “‘Communicating a Sort of Philosophical Solidity to Taste’”, 64–66.
407 See Sarafianos, “Pain, Labour and the Sublime”, 72. It is no wonder, Sarafianos points out elsewhere, that the author of the *Reflections*, once having had understood the subversive potential inherent in the physiology of contractility, deployed a non-scientific language to promote a politics of moderation. Sarafianos, “The Contractility of Burke’s Sublime”, 48.
odds with the idea, prominent until the early nineteenth century, that there exists only one “good taste” – functioning as a cohesive force in the eighteenth-century culture of politeness.408

For all these reasons, it has been suggested that the 1759 “Introduction on Taste” is not an organic part of Burke’s radical aesthetics but rather a prosthetic used to accommodate the Philosophical Enquiry into the intellectual climate of the 1750s. Burke even omits the radical medico-scientific language of his work and deploys a more conventional language of faculty psychology. But even if the tensions between the concerns of the introduction and the revolutionary implications of the main body of the text are undeniable, I think that Burke’s physiological aesthetics is very much consistent with the “Introduction” – if we read it as an addendum containing yet another argument for the natural groundwork of aesthetic pleasure. Furthermore, Burke does not discuss the political implications of taste as most of his contemporaries – he is not concerned with consenting judgments of taste as the model of sociability. Instead, by investigating the visceral aesthetic perceptions of the sublime and the beautiful, Burke is looking for the guarantees of individual well-being and social cohesion built into the very fibres of the human body by Providence.

Burke focuses on natural pains and pleasures as the universal foundations of aesthetic perceptions because he considers them to operate in accordance with Divine Providence in order to promote the self-preservation of the individual as well as the cohesion of social units. It is, needless to say, hardly an original idea: one of Burke’s most important sources, the Abbé Du Bos’s Critical Reflections starts with the claim – laid down as an “uncontested truth”, presupposed, not verified – that Providence deploys “the allurement of pleasure” in order to “induce man” to “attend to his own preservation”.409 As we shall see, as a consequence of working with a more complex system of basic human drives then Du Bos, Burke adds social cohesion to the teleology of natural pleasures and pains and grounds them – in an original way – in the minute mechanisms of the fibres of the human body. For Burke, human (neuro)physiology is teleological and embedded into a Providential Order designed for human flourishing: his aesthetics works out a “two-level model” of mind and body, as F.P. Lock

408 For this tension between the Enquiry and the sociable culture of taste, see Sándor Radnóti, “A társas lét és a fenséges,” in Edmund Burke esztétikája és az európai felvilágosodás, eds. Ferenc Horkay Hörcher and Márton Szilágyi (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2011), 15–44.
emphasized, which means that “Psychological needs are determined by a wise providence, working, however, through secondary, physiological means.”

Providence, for Burke, operates in the visceral depth of the body, through the contractions and relaxations of the fibres, promoting self-preservation and social cohesion. The pleasures of the sublime, as we shall see, ensure the former, while the pleasures of the beautiful the latter. In the following parts of this chapter, I try to show how.

### 3.3. From the Passions to the Fibres

Probably the most revolutionary claim of the *Philosophical Enquiry* that set the aesthetics of the sublime to a new path is that the sublime and the beautiful are *distinct and opposite ideas with correspondingly contrary affective experiences and physiological causes*. The “ideas of the sublime and the beautiful – Burke writes – stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions.”

This dichotomous structure is noteworthy at least for two reasons: first, because Burke, by omitting novelty, demolished the Addisonian aesthetic triad and transformed the aesthetic into a bipolar field, even if he acknowledged the antithetical relationship between the aesthetic and the “stale unaffecting familiarity”. Second, the Burkean contraposition of the sublime and beautiful is an original rearrangement of the aesthetic discourse in itself: arguing for their irreconcilability was highly uncommon at the time. The sublime was usually considered to be the highest, most elevated form of beauty (as in the Longinian rhetorical tradition or Shaftesbury’s rhapsodies), and even if they were conceived to be separate categories, they were thought to be reconcilable and complementary, amplifying the overall aesthetic value of the object if joined together (as we saw in Addison’s essays).

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410 Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, 47.
3.3.1. Affective Dichotomies

What supports the dichotomous structure of Burke’s value theory is a similarly dichotomous anthropological foundation, which – through grounding the sublime in the passions of self-preservation and pain – also sets Burke against the mainstream of the eighteenth-century discourse of the sublime. Burke introduces three bipolar distinctions on three different levels built upon one another.

First, Burke argues that the “remarkable contrast” between the sublime and the beautiful rests on the fact that they are connected to opposite classes of passions: beauty is linked to the passions of “society” while the sublime to the passions of “self-preservation”, which labels designate “the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer.” Passion, in other words, are classified “with relation to their final cause”.

In the Burkean teleology of the passions, the social passions serve the purpose of maintaining propagation (“the society of the sexes”) and social cohesion (“the more general society”) by directing us towards other individuals through love or other social passions such as sympathy, imitation or ambition. The passions of self-preservation such as fear or terror, on the contrary, are “selfish” insofar they are designed to ensure the preservation of the individual when his life or health are threatened. We can see here, as Rodolphe Gasché noted, that Burke combines the Hobbesian and the Shaftesburian conceptions of human nature and presents human beings as driven by selfish as well as sociable passions. However, as I will try to show, even our selfish drives for self-preservation are designed in such a way in Burke’s Providential Order that they, by the cunning of Providence hidden in our very fibres, eventually lead to social bonds and moral conduct.

Examining the foundations of the two antagonistic classes of passions, we arrive at the second Burkean distinction. The social passions are grounded in pleasure, while the passions “which are conversant about the preservation of the individual turn chiefly

413 For Burke’s place in the tradition of the sublime, see Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 94–96; Monk, The Sublime, 86–91; Szécsényi, Társiasság és tekintély, 140–50; Doran, The Theory of the Sublime, 141–46.
414 Burke, Enquiry, 3.27, 113.
415 Burke, Enquiry, 1.6, 35–36.
416 Burke, Enquiry, 1.18, 47.
417 Burke, Enquiry, 1.8–12, 37–40.
on pain and danger”, which makes them “the most powerful of all the passions.”419 The primacy Burke attributes to the sublime in his aesthetic hierarchy rests on this anthropological foundation. Grounding the passions of society in pleasure and the passions of self-preservation in pain can fortify the first distinction because pleasure and pain, for Burke, are positive qualities, ultimate ends, independent from one another. Burke, pace post-Lockean philosophers, rejects the idea that “positive pain” resembles the feeling raised by the cessation or moderation of pleasure or that “positive pleasure” resembles the cessation or moderation of pain. He introduces the term “delight” to label this “relative pleasure” and defines it as that agreeable “feeling which results from the ceasing or diminution of pain”.420 It is this third kind of agreeable feeling, an ambivalent pleasure mingled with pain, that characterizes the experience of the sublime and distinguishes it from the beautiful rooted in positive pleasure.421 Burke’s argument, as we will see, is far from unambiguous in this matter.

Burke links beauty, as a “social quality”,422 to social passions and, thus, to positive pleasure, and in Part III enumerates the sensible qualities that engender our love and affection as the material sources of the beautiful. I will return to Burke’s teleological accounts built on these foundations in the third part of this chapter. The sublime, on the contrary, by being connected to the passions of self-preservation, turns on pain. Raw physical pain or life threatening danger, however, can never be the cause of the aesthetic: “When danger or pain press too nearly – Burke writes –, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible”. But if we sense pain or danger “at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful”.423 Thus, as György Fogarasi sums up, “The force of the sublime derives from its connection to pain, while its capacity to cause pleasure implies a mediated relation, a spatial or temporal detachment.”424 However, if the conditions above are

419 Burke, Enquiry, 1.6, 36.
420 Burke, Enquiry, 1.4, 33.
421 Pointing out the significance of Burke’s anthropological distinctions for his value distinctions has long been a customary step of every interpretation. See, for instance, Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 87–88; Sarafianos, “Pain, Labor, and the Sublime”, 59–60; Furniss, Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology, 18–19; Gasché, “…And the Beautiful?”, 25; Paul Guyer, A History of Modern Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 1, 151; Timothy M. Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition. From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 71–73.
422 Burke, Enquiry, 1.10, 39.
423 Burke, Enquiry, 1.7, 36–37.
424 György Fogarasi, “Teletrauma. Distance in Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry”, The AnaChronisT 17 (Winter 2012), 9. (my italics) Also see Fogarasi’s emphasis on the broad scope of Burke’s ‘distance’: “it seems more likely that within the Burkean lexicon ‘distance’ is meant both in a spatial and temporal
met, that is, if the threat is at a distance, imaginary, or represented by an artwork, the apprehension or anticipation of pain, *fear or terror* can and will be the “ruling principle” of the sublime:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, *whatever is in any sort terrible*, or is *conversant* about terrible objects, or operates in a manner *analogous* to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.\(^{425}\)

Note in the quotation above that besides object painful or dangerous in themselves, Burke also lists objects that become terrible through association or objects that have a similar effect on the mind or the body as terror as sources of the sublime. The latter detail will prove to be crucial when we get to the neuromuscular groundwork of love/pleasure and terror/pain.

It is also worthy of note that the power and intensity of the sublime (and, therefore, its higher place in Burke’s aesthetic hierarchy) is due to the *final cause* of terror: self-preservation. As Burke explicitly points out: “As the performance of our duties of every kind depends upon life, and the performing them with vigour and efficacy depends upon health, we are very strongly affected with whatever threatens the destruction of either”.\(^{426}\) It is another example of how Burke’s teleological conception of human nature influences his value theory.

Founding the sublime directly on terror (and, thus, indirectly on pain) – even with the safety net of distance or art – was extremely controversial when Burke published the work and was the chief reason it was attacked by his contemporaries.\(^{427}\) By the 1750s, the sublime as an aesthetic quality had long transgressed the Longinian rhetorical origins of the term and was connected not only to the “great”, the “vast” or the “immense” in nature but also to fear by authors like Dennis, Addison or Shaftesbury. However, the Longinian understanding of the sublime in terms of elevation still dominated in the first half of the century and was beginning to change only in the mid-century. The sublime that the pinnacle of Augustan neo-classicism, Alexander

\(^{425}\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 1.7, 36. (my italics added)

\(^{426}\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 1.9, 38.

\(^{427}\) See the reviews published in *Literary Magazine* (1757/2) and *Critical Review* (1757/3). See Sarafianos, “Pain, Labor, and the Sublime”, 73.
Pope could warmheartedly praise in his *Essay on Criticism* (1709) and that authors like Baillie or Gerard still celebrated, was clearly not yet the disruptive, revolutionary, dark force that is often associated with the concept after its transfusion into Gothic and Romantic sensibilities.  

As we have seen, urbane Augustans like Addison conceived the sublime in terms of elevation and transcendence, arguing that since “the mind of man naturally hates every thing that looks like a restraint upon it”, the imagination “loves to be filled with an object” or “to lose itself” while wandering freely in vast prospects that, at the same time, offer us an aesthetic access to God. John Baillie, on similar grounds, maintained that the “soul naturally supposes herself present to all the objects she perceives, and has lower or higher conceptions of her own excellency, as this extensiveness of her being is more or less limited”. The “exalted sensation” of the sublime, therefore, is rooted in the fact that great prospects and deeds “fill” and “enlarge” the mind: the sublime, for Baillie as well, is an experience of self-affirmation and elevation, even though he recognizes the terrible kind of the sublime and even decouples the sublime from morality.

Burke deploys the well-known insight that the sublime “fills the mind” but he takes the argument from here to a radically different direction. While experiencing the sublime, Burke writes, “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.” The Burkean sublime does not, by “filling the mind”, elevate or enlarge the mind, but *disarm* it: our reasoning faculty, the ability to reflect on the impressions, is paralyzed because the sublime object *forces us* to devote our *complete attention* to it. “Hence arises the great power of the sublime – Burke continues –, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.” Burke radicalises the tendency, already discernible in the sublime of Dennis and Baillie, that emphasizes “the pathetic” in the experience of the sublime. For Burke, the sublime is not a product of reason but of the aesthetic apparatus – the passions and the efficient causes of the passions: the neuromuscular activity of the sensory organs.

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431 Burke, *Enquiry*, 2.1, 53.
432 Burke, *Enquiry*, 2.1, 53.
The characteristic affective state of the sublime that disarms reason is named “astonishment”: “that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.” Instead of being an experience of elevation or, as Addison argued, liberty, Burke’s sublime is an experience of overwhelming, paralyzing terror that “robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning”. As we saw, Burke roots terror, as a passion of self-preservation, in pain. It is more than a remote or indirect connection. The intimate connection between terror and pain is based on the fact that according to Burke both consist of the same neurophysiological mechanism. This takes us to the third anthropological distinction that supports Burke’s bipartite value theory.

3.3.2. Neuromuscular Dichotomies

As we have seen, Burke grounded his distinction between social and selfish passions in the opposition between positive pleasure and pain. This latter distinction, in turn, can be traced back to opposing neuromuscular mechanisms, thus to the minutest components of the human frame, the fibres. In using the terms ‘nerves’, ‘muscles’ and ‘fibres’ interchangeably I am not being inconsistent or negligent: it is Burke’s vitalism that does not follow the clear-cut Hallerian distinction between “sensible” nerve fibres (feeling) and “irritable” muscle fibres (motion). According to the Burkean model, fibres “compose any muscle or membrane” in the body. In this “integrated perception of sensibility”, Sarafianos observes, “nerves move, muscles and organs feel, and pain, like pleasure, is both a kind of feeling and a specifically important kind of motion.”

In a rather reductionist way, Burke argues that “a relaxation somewhat below the natural tone seems to me to be the cause of all positive pleasure” and that “the passion called love is produced by this relaxation”. Given that beauty was previously linked to pleasure and love, Burke identifies this neuromuscular mechanism to be the efficient cause of the idea of beauty: “the genuine constituents of beauty have each of them, separately taken, a natural tendency to relax the fibres.” Thus, the “uniform and general effect” of beauty is taken to be that we are “softened, relaxed, enervated, dissolved, melted away by pleasure”. In short, as soon as “a beautiful object [is] presented to the sense, by causing a relaxation of the body, produces the passion of love in the mind”

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433 Burke, Enquiry, 2.1, 53.  
435 Burke, Enquiry, 1.10, 4.23, 140.  
437 Burke, Enquiry, 4.19, 136.
and, in turn, “if by any means the passion should first have its origin in the mind, a relaxation of the outward organs will as certainly ensue in a degree proportioned to the cause.”

Body and mind interact with the presumption that their operations consist of the same neurophysiological mechanism.

By contrast, pain and, therefore, fear consist in “convulsive agitations”, in the “unnatural tension of the nerves”. Pain and terror operate almost in the same way, the only difference between them is “that things which cause pain operate on the mind by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind suggesting the danger”. That is to say, pain is the sensation raised by the “tension, contraction, or violent emotion of the nerves” produced by an object striking the senses, while terror is the passion raised by the suggestion of danger that produces such convulsions and, therefore, painful sensation in the body.

The common physiology of fear and pain, together with the close interaction between body and mind and the vitalist framework of sensibility can explain why many things that are painful but not exactly terrible have a similar effect than terrible objects. Furthermore, given that “pain and fear act upon the same parts of the body, and in the same manner, though somewhat differing in degree” and that the “ruling principle of the sublime” is terror, it follows that “whatever is fitted to produce such a tension must be productive of a passion similar to terror, and consequently must be a source of the sublime, though it should have no idea of danger connected with it.” As we can see, this physiological argument will modify the theory of the sublime as well: the possible sources of the sublime exceed the terrible and encompass everything that is painful if it is powerful enough to push our aesthetic apparatus (the contractile nerves) to its limits.

Before I continue with the painful contractions of the sublime, I need to point out another important consequence of the vitalist framework Burke adapts. Grounding the aesthetic in neuromuscular activity gives Burke the possibility to break with the tradition (still upheld by Kames, as we shall see) that acknowledges only the sense of sight as the input of our aesthetic perceptions and excludes all the “coarse” bodily senses, leading to the disembodiment of the aesthetic. Burke, by contrast, broadens the scope of the aesthetic by including every sensory input of our ideas into the production of beauty or the sublime. Not only the senses of hearing and touch subvert the usual

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438 Burke, Enquiry, 4.19, 136.
439 Burke, Enquiry, 4.3, 120.
440 Burke, Enquiry, 4.3, 120.
441 Burke, Enquiry, 4.5, 121. (my italics)
hegemony of sight but also the senses of smell and taste are recognized as valid sources of aesthetic experience. Instead of their rivalry, Burke emphasizes the “similitude in the pleasures of these senses”, the “striking analogy in the effects”. What allows Burke to presume this “general agreement of the senses” is his vitalist argument for the uniform and general neuromuscular mechanism underlying every part of the body. As a result, needless to say, “the agreeable” (to use Kant’s sensual counterpoint to the aesthetic) cannot be disassembled from the beautiful or the sublime in Burke’s physiological aesthetics.

The fibres of a hand, for instance, which can move with slight resistance along the surface of a body or press into it without much effort, will relax and, therefore, engender a pleasurable sensation, which is analogous to the pleasure that the eye feels while wandering on that smooth and soft surface. Smoothness proves to be a sensible quality that produces tactile, gustatory, olfactory, auditory and visual pleasures as well, which are all based on the same neuromuscular mechanism. “Rough and angular” surfaces and bodies, by contrast, “rouse and vellicate the organs of feeling, causing a sense of pain, which consists in the violent tension or contraction of the muscular fibres”. The pain felt at the sensory organ in these cases can be, Burke claims, an efficient cause of the sublime.

The medico-physiological arguments reconstructed above can help us clarify an ambiguous point in the literature concerning the central question: how can pain (and fear) be an efficient cause of our aesthetic appreciation (even a relative or mixed kind)? There is a common interpretation of the Burkean sublime I will call here the Argument from Delight since it is based on the temporal delay or spatial removal built into Burke’s concept of delight. According to this explanation, the sublime is not the appreciation of pain or fear itself but the moderation or cessation, or, if the object is imaginary or otherwise distanced, the anticipation of pain or fear. Aris Sarafianos as well as Tom Furniss tried to reconcile the Argument from Delight with Burke’s physiological account and claimed that the Burkean sublime does not consist of the

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442 Burke, Enquiry, 3.24, 111.
443 Burke, Enquiry, 3.26, 113.
444 See Burke, Enquiry, 4.20, 137. The everyday and sometimes trivial examples offered by Burke led Gasché to question the extraordinary character of the Burkean sublime, plainly stating that “Compared to his predecessors, and especially his romantic followers, there is, as it were, nothing particularly sublime about Burke’s sublime.” By contrast, Gasché argues, it is the beautiful that is out of the ordinary in Burke’s theory. Gasché, “…And the Beautiful?”, 29. However, after having surveyed Burke’s examples of the various beauties affecting the different senses (a smoothly laid bed, a coach trip on a smooth landscape, etc.), I do not see how the beautiful is more exceptional than the sublime.
painful contraction of the fibres but the experience of overcoming the pain. We feel delight, Burke writes, “upon escaping some imminent danger, or on being released from the severity of some cruel pain.” And if the sublime is a form of delight, it follows that it must rise from the same process. In Furniss’s reading, the sublime is “the experience of the threatened self seeming to overcome or master danger through effort” while Sarafianos holds that Burke remodelled “the sublime in the form of an after-effect of actual pain.”

The problem with this interpretation is not only the Kantian perspective it unconsciously adopts but that the radical implications of the Burkean sublime are neutralised: the sublime becomes nothing more than a thrilling gaze from the distance, a relief after the threat is gone, or maybe a suspenseful anticipation before it hits us. The Argument from Delight, however, is not the definitive explanation of the Enquiry. Through the medico-physiological arguments and examples in Part IV, Burke examines the ways various material properties produce – through striking the senses – the painful contraction of the nerves and, thus, the sublime. These examples show that it is the invigorating experience of actual fear and pain – the exercise of our bodily and mental powers – that makes the sublime a source of an ambiguous pleasure and not its removal or after-effect. The difference from raw pain is only in degree: remember, “labour […] resembles pain, which consists in tension or contraction, in everything but degree.” This difference in degree is ensured by the distancing of the object by time, space or forms of representation. If there was no distance, we simply flee, fearing for our life. Due to the distance, we stay and experience the painful or terrifying stimuli,

445 Burke, Enquiry, 1.3, 32.
446 Furniss, Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology, 25.
448 For a valid criticism of the Kantian reading of Burke, see Ryan, “The Physiological Sublime”, 267.
449 See the same point in Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 72. Also see Guyer, A History of Modern Aesthetics, vol. 1, 152.
450 Burke, Enquiry, 4.6, 122.
451 The Argument from Delight was also rejected by Robert Doran but he offered a different counter-argument: Burke’s treatment of our delight in fear or pain, Doran argues, is not consistent. First, when he discusses delight as part of his anthropology, Burke links it to the removal of pain. Later, however, when discussing the sublime, “In place of the ‘removal of pain,’ Burke substitutes a concept of aesthetic distance – the idealization of pain and danger.” What we enjoy in the sublime, Doran claims, is not actual pain but only the idea of it: “virtual terror”. This interpretation solves the problem of actual fear but raises others concerning the intensity of “virtual” passions. Furthermore, Burke’s examples make it clear that it is the bodily pain and actual fear (lessened in degree) that is the source of the sublime. See Doran, The Theory of the Sublime, 151.ff.
testing our powers and pushing them to their limits. But is still, nevertheless, an experience pain and fear – moderated by distance but not yet overcome.452

Consider, for instance, Burke’s famous account of how darkness is productive of the sublime. After having rejected the Lockean associationist explanation of why darkness is terrifying, Burke proposes an account of the effect of darkness in purely mechanistic, that is, physiological terms: “whilst we are involved in darkness”, the radial fibres of the iris are “so contracted, as to strain the nerves that compose it beyond their natural tone” because of the eye’s “own efforts in pursuit of its object”. As a result of these “spasms”, “the bodily organs suffer first”, producing “a painful sensation”.453

The idea of the sublime is not the product of the removal or overcoming of pain but the painful exercise of the sensory organ itself, an assault on the body, which tries to overcome it but cannot: the sublime is an experience of overwhelming power. The same is true for the alteration of unexpected, sudden lights or sounds with total darkness or silence that keep us alarmed and in “fearful anxiety” by striking our senses again and again. It is not the removal of pain but the persistent onslaught on the nerves by the sudden changes between opposite extremes that is the source of the sublime.454

The senses are pushed to their limits, to the verge of pain, triggering the passions of self-preservation, which gives an unmatched intensity to the experience – and this is exactly the vitalising exercise, enhancing our bodily and mental alertness, which gives rise to the sublime. This physiological account of exercise will be the key to our paradoxical appreciation of and even attraction to pain and fear and will lead us to Burke’s final cause arguments.

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452 Cf. Fogarasi’s argument, which is different from mine but also supports the rejection of the Argument from Delight: “the sublime remains in constant danger of relapsing into danger, and thus, into a state of panic fear. […] Neither is it immediate pain, nor is it pure painlessness. It simultaneously involves the mediatedness or structural anaesthesia of any instances of trauma (i.e. the distance of what is near), and the disruption of our safe detachment from events occurring in other spaces or times, through some sort of telesensing, or telaesthetic traumatism (i.e. the nearness of what is far away). At the same time that it articulates, it also disrupts the conceptual distinction between pain and the sublime (or, passion and sympathy), and becomes the site of their spectral contamination.” Fogarasi, “Teletrauma”, 13.

453 Burke, *Enquiry*, 4.16, 132–33. (my italics) Burke’s explanation was rejected as an absurd proposition by many of his contemporaries. Richard Payne Knight, for instance, pointed out that “the slightest knowledge of optics would have informed him that the sheet of paper, upon which he was writing, being seen thus close to the eye, reflected a greater, and more forcible mass of light; and, consequently, produced more irritation and tension, than the Peak of Teneriffe or Mount St. Elias would, if seen at the distance of a few miles: – yet, surely he would not say that the sheet of paper excited more grand and perfect ideas of the sublime.” Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytic Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805), quoted in Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, 74.

454 Sarafianos’s reading of Burke’s sublime as an experience comprising “the aggravated cycles” of contraction and relaxation supports my interpretation. Cf. Sarafianos, “The Contractility of Burke’s Sublime”, 40–48.
3.4. From the Fibres to the Providential Order

So far we have explored the anthropological (affective and physiological) groundwork of the “eternal distinction” Burke draws between the sublime and the beautiful. Establishing them as “ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure”, makes it possible for Burke to unanimously trace beauty and sublimity back to sensible qualities and divide these material sources into two opposite groups:

- Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent: beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line; and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive.

It should be clear by now that Burke’s enumeration of sensible qualities cannot be decoupled from his bipartite theory of the passions, which, in turn, is grounded in his physiological theory. The sensible qualities that make a body an object of love will be the sources of the beautiful, while the ones making a body an object of terror (and/or pain) will be the sources of the sublime.

Both Burke’s physiology and theory of the passions, as we have seen, presuppose a teleological conception of human nature. Burke, just like Hume, firmly believed that it is not reason but sensibility, our pains and pleasures, desires and hopes, affections and fears, that has the most power over our actions. Furthermore, unlike Hume, Burke firmly held that the workings of sensibility – even the mechanisms of its minutest constituent, the fibres – are in accordance with the Providential Order:

> Whenever the wisdom of our Creator intended that we should be affected with anything, 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,

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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.\footnote{Burke, Enquiry, 3.7, 97.}

Given that the sublime and the beautiful are grounded in this teleological sensibility, the aesthetic is also embedded into the Providential Order. Since Burke distinguishes the sublime and the beautiful in terms of passions directed to different ends, exploring the final cause arguments of the Enquiry seems to be quite an easy job: the final cause of the beautiful is social cohesion, while the final cause of the sublime os self-preservation. I will argue that the Burkean teleology of the aesthetic is more complex than that. Let’s start with the teleology of the beautiful.

### 3.4.1. The Teleology of The Beautiful

Burke gives several definitions of beauty throughout the Enquiry, which, together with his dyadic teleology of the social passions, leads to several concepts of beauty. Not contradictory concepts but not entirely overlapping either. At the beginning of Part III, dedicated to beauty, one finds a succinct definition of the beautiful. Given that the term “beauty” is often used in a figurative sense within an “uncertain” and “indeterminate” discourse, which often “distracts” the reckless both in the criticism of taste and moral philosophy, Burke strictly confines the term to the “merely sensible qualities of things”. In terms of physiology, “beauty acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system”, which is the mechanical cause of positive pleasure and, therefore, the social passions that turn on pleasure.\footnote{Burke, Enquiry, 4.19, 136.} Burke offers his succinct definition as follows: “By beauty, I mean that quality, or those qualities in bodies, by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it.”\footnote{Burke, Enquiry, 3.1, 83.} Beauty is, in other words, a “direct force” of the sensible that attaches us to others “merely on being viewed”.\footnote{Burke, Enquiry, 3.12, 102.}

Before turning to the final cause implicit in this definition, let’s see some significant implications of this sensualistic (or physiological) concept. If beauty is “some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses”, then it does not depend on any act of rational reflexion: beauty, Burke sums up, “is no creature of our reason”.\footnote{Burke, Enquiry, 3.1, 83.} If discursive reason plays no role in aesthetic
experience, then the beautiful can be decoupled both from proportion and utility. On the one hand, Burke argues against Hutcheson’s uniformity amidst variety formula and talks with contempt about the geometrical approach to beauty, which still resonates in many of Hutcheson’s examples, though overall Hutcheson has also got much more to say on this matter. On the other hand, Burke joins Hutcheson in arguing against the involvement of reflection in the immediate, sense-like, visceral response that characterizes aesthetic pleasure, which sets them against Berkeley, Hume or Kames in the debate concerning the aesthetic value of utility.

Confining the beautiful to the sensuous also leads Burke to reject formulating moral concepts in aesthetic terms. Affection, love or care felt towards others can often be traced back, for example, to certain “softer virtues” – explicitly labelled as “feminine” virtues by Burke – “which engage our hearts, which impress us with a sense of loveliness” as opposed to “great virtues” of masculinity that produce admiration but keep is at a distance. Burke entertains here the application of the beautiful/sublime distinction to the catalogue of moral virtues, but eventually discards the experiment: applying the term ’beauty’ to these “amiable virtues” such as “easiness of temper, compassion, kindness, and liberality”, will confuse these concepts as one can see in “an infinite deal of whimsical theory”. The aestheticised morals and moralized aesthetics of the Shaftesburian-Hutchesonian tradition. Aesthetics, Burke suggests here, can be but only a “visionary and unsubstantial” foundation of morality – “the science of our duties” should be based on reason, relations, and necessities.

This is not, however, Burke’s last word on the relationship between morality and beauty. A bit later, in the section dedicated to “Physiognomy”, Burke writes that “The manners give a certain determination to the countenance; which, being observed to correspond pretty regularly with them, is capable of joining the effect of certain agreeable qualities of the mind to those of the body.” It seems here that even though the beauty is produced by the mechanical stimuli of sensible qualities, there is more to human beauty: “to form a finished human beauty, and to give it its full influence, the face must be expressive of such gentle and amiable qualities, as correspond with the

462 For Burke’s case against the beauty of proportion and utility, see his Enquiry, 3.2–5 and 3.6–7.
464 Burke, Enquiry, 3.10, 100.
466 Burke, Enquiry, 3.11, 102.
467 Burke, Enquiry, 3.19, 107. (my italics)
softness, smoothness, and delicacy of the outward form."468 Beauty has nothing to do with morality, but the beauty of a human being will be necessarily defective if it is not expressive of certain moral virtues. Burke’s default physiological account adjoins his expressive account in the section about the beauty of the eyes. We find an eye beautiful, on the one hand, because of sensible qualities such as clearness, languid motion or its gentle lines. However, Burke continues, “Besides all this, the eye affects, as it is expressive of some qualities of the mind, and its principal power generally arises from this; so that what we have just said of the physiognomy is applicable here.”469 Surprisingly, as we see from this sentence, Burke gives priority to the expressive power of the eye in producing the affective and physiological response that is characteristic of the beautiful. The natural, sensible expressions of moralist is still paramount in human beauty, just like it was in Hutcheson’s aesthetics: “it is some apprehended Morality, some natural or imagin’d Indication of concomitant Virtue, which gives it [personal beauty – B.Cs.] this powerful Charm above all other kinds of Beauty.”470 Burke is a late and reluctant heir of the discourse of the je ne sais quoi, which became in the hands of the eighteenth-century Britons “a morally relevant beauty”, as Endre Szécsényi pointed out.471

It is time to turn to Burke’s teleological account of the beautiful. As it was already implied in his initial definition of beauty, Burke proposes a version of the social cohesion argument: the final cause of the beautiful, as a “sociable quality”, is to create social bonds through love and similar social passions. But given that there are two “societies” in Burke’s socio-anthropology, the “society of the sexes” and “society in general”, beauty has actually two final causes. Everything comes down to his concept of love.

At the outset, Burke defines love as the passion subservient to the society of the sexes, which means that it is to promote the purpose of “the generation of mankind”. Even though love, even in this narrow sense, is differentiated from mere lust, Burke argues that it “contains a mixture of lust; its object is the beauty of women.”472 Following Burke’s earlier account I will refer to this concept of beauty as “the beauty of

468 Burke, Enquiry, 3.19, 107. (my italics)
469 Burke, Enquiry, 3.20, 108. (my italics)
470 Francis Hutcheson, “Treatise II”, 2.6.3, 166.
472 Burke, Enquiry, 1.18, 47.
the sex”. Ensuring the survival of the species, as we have seen, was one of the functions of the beautiful in Addison’s teleology, so it was not a heretic idea at the time. I believe, however, that simply defining the generation of the species as the final cause of the beauty of sex is to misrepresent Burke’s teleological account. In a subtle argument, Burke points out that beauty, in this narrow sense, attaches us to particular persons – the beauty of the sex is emphatically personal. It follows that the true final cause of the beauty of the sex is the formation of intimate, meaningful, loving relationships between individuals – which involves but is not confined to affectionate intercourse between individual bodies, one that eventually leads to procreation.

Beauty as a personal quality functions by particularising society – or at least modern commercial society, where the value individuality, refined intercourse and “feminine” manners are valued as a result of the civilising process. The beauty of the sex, as a distinctive feature of the individual, is nowhere to be found among “the brutes”. Also pointing to the particularity of the beautiful, Rodolphe Gasché, as opposed to the interpreters criticising Burke’s concept of beauty as patriarchic or downright sexist, argued that “Although subtended by the purpose of procreation, love is a relation to another individual, rather than to a member of the same species, and beauty indexes that this relation is one to him or her as a distinct other.” If one also takes into account, Gasché continues, that Burke dissociates the beautiful from the useful or proportional, it is fair to say that he “endows the beautiful thing, or human body, with an autonomy and integrity of its own”. As much as I would like to agree with Gasché’s interpretation, I am afraid it finds something in Burke’s aesthetic that is not there. Adam Phillips captured Burke’s view better when he emphasized that beauty, just like the sublime is “coercive, irresistible, and a species of seduction.” In order to fulfil its social (and biological) function, it gently forces us to engage the objects or bodies that bear its mark, even if this is not a possessive or appetitive engagement: “The sublime is a rape – Phillips sums up –, Beauty is a lure”.

473 Burke, Enquiry, 1.10, 39.
474 Burke, Enquiry, 1.10, 39.
475 For this connection between the social functions of Burke’s concept of beauty and the conjectural histories of his contemporaries, see Lászó Kontler, “Beauty or Beast, or Monstrous Regiments? Robertson and Burke on Women and the Public Scene”, in Aspects of the Enlightenment. Aesthetics, Politics, and Religion, eds. Ferenc Hörcher and Endre Szécsényi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004), 252–53.
476 Gasché, “…And the Beautiful?”, 30, 32.
At the end of the first book, Burke transposes love from the society of sexes to society at large. Here, love is defined in a more general way as a passion that belongs to “the great society with man and all other animals”. This second concept of love “has no mixture of lust”: Burke explicitly distinguishes the passion of love from that of desire/lust: the latter “hurries us on to the possession of certain objects” and engendered by qualities independent from beauty. 478 In contradistinction, love is defined as “that satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating anything beautiful”. 479 Burke does not hesitate to offer us a characteristically Burkean example to justify his distinction: “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.” 480

Given that Burke refers to desire and lust as “violent and tempestuous passions” leading to “emotions of the body”, his argument does suggest here that the passion of love evoked by beauty is gentle and moderate – an “innocent pleasure” as Addison put it half a century earlier. This distinction is completely in line with the physical cause of love: the relaxation of the fibres produce “an inward sense of melting and languor” 481 – quite the contrary affective state than the possessive urge of desire, which implies effort and action. Burke’s distinction could also be suggestive of the concept of “aesthetic disinterestedness”. However, remember that his earlier argument concerning the beauty of sex does not exclude desire (and everything it invites from violent passions to bodily reactions) from aesthetic experience: he clearly states that “desire may sometimes operate along with” beauty and the passion of love evoked by it. 482 What Burke wants to make clear is simply that the beautiful in itself has nothing to do with sexual desire but is also not incompatible with it, especially when desire, instead of being an animalistic drive, is directed to an individual for his or her own personal beauty. Thus, Burke’s is not an argument for aesthetic disinterestedness. It leaves a door open for a sexualised notion of beauty.

Burke’s second concept of love has naturally a different object than the first. Instead of the beauty of the sexes, Burke defines a kind of societal beauty, referring to “all such qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness, or some

478 Burke, Enquiry, 3.1, 83. (my italics)
479 Burke, Enquiry, 3.1, 83. (my italics)
480 Burke, Enquiry, 3.1, 83.
481 Burke, Enquiry, 4.19, 135.
482 Burke, Enquiry, 3.1, 83. (my italics)
other passion the most nearly resembling these."\(^{483}\) In his second version of the social cohesion argument Burke argues that beauty not only resides in the endearing, caring interpersonal relations of men and women but it is at work in our relations towards animals and inanimate objects as well: their beauty makes us attend to them and care for them – we become concerned with the fate of beautiful things and bodies, enjoying their company as long as we can:

I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them (and there are many that do so), they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary.\(^{484}\)

Beauty turns out to be nothing less than one of “the great principles of human association”, as Neal Wood pointed out in his seminal paper on the politics at the heart of Burke’s science of sensibility. The social principle of beauty is to be found “in the natural domestic virtues of affection, compassion, and tenderness.” By contrast, the political principle built into the sublime is the principle of authority and associated with the political community based on admiration, respect and even fear. “These two principles of human association – Wood concludes – are rooted in the aesthetic sensibilities, in the beautiful and sublime, feelings which arise because of man's physical nature.”\(^{485}\) While beauty is at home in sociable relations, Endre Szécsényi adds, the sublime has the potential to become unbound and disrupt the relaxing intimacy of communities held together by the beautiful through presenting the individual “with the outermost frontiers of human existence”.\(^{486}\) The sublime, that is, functions as the physiological foundation of authoritarian politics or a subversive individualistic force. In the following, I will try to argue that there’s also a social function, the function of sympathetic engagement, built into the Burkean sublime.

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\(^{483}\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 1.18, 47.

\(^{484}\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 1.10, 39.


\(^{486}\) Szécsényi, *Társiasság és tekintély*, 147.
3.4.2. A Short Detour: The Paradox of Negative Emotions

In order to explore the teleology of the sublime, we have to start where we have suspended the discussion of the sublime: at the perplexing psychological and moral problem of enjoying terror, suffering or somehow painful things. Interestingly, even though the expressions of “delightful Horrour”, “terrible Joy”, 487 or “agreeable kind of Horror” 488 were commonly used to describe the experience of sublimity, and despite Dennis’s emphasis on the significance of terror, 489 the sublime remained so loosely associated with the terrible that this problem unfolded in its own right, though not independently of the sublime, under the umbrella of the paradox of tragedy. 490

The paradox of tragedy was one of the most popular problems in eighteenth-century aesthetics 491 but goes back to as far as Aristotle’s Poetics and became associated with various aesthetic properties (from the sublime to the disgusting) and genres (from tragedy to horror). A simple formulation of the paradox of tragedy looks something like this: how are we to explain the fact that we enjoy the representations of objects that are otherwise disagreeable (terrible, ugly, disgusting etc.) and elicit painful feelings in us (aversion, terror, pity etc.)? Or even shorter: what explains “the pleasure which comes from pity and fear through representation”? 492

The answers given to this question varied but the main configurations can be grouped into four arguments. The first one can be found in Hutcheson’s aesthetics but was proposed earlier by Addison in his Imagination-series. 493 Let’s call it now the Imitation Argument. The argument is based on the notion that a distinct pleasure rises from the mind’s own activity of comparing the ideas of representation with the ideas of...

487 John Dennis, Miscellanies in Verse and Prose (London, 1693), 134.
488 Joseph Addison, Remarks on Several Parts of Italy (London, 1718), 261, 262.
489 Dennis defined the sublime – following Longinus – as “a great thought” that (through its poetic expression) “commits a pleasing rape upon the very soul of the reader”, exciting what he called “enthusiastic passions”. Dennis predates Burke in emphasizing that terror and domination “contribute extremely to the sublime”, though he does not originate it exclusively from these sources. As a critic, Dennis focused on ideas that produce “enthusiastic terror” (mainly the religious idea of an angry God). Ideas which produce terror are accompanied with “admiration” and “surprise”, and also with “astonishment”. See John Dennis, “The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry,” in The Sublime: a reader, 36–39. For a recent revaluation of Dennis’s role in the formation of the aesthetic sublime, see Doran, The Theory of the Sublime, 124–40.
490 Addison, for instance, discusses the pleasure of “the great” (no. 413) and the paradox of negative emotions (no. 418) apart from one another, with only some slight references to their connection.
the originals. This can explain, to adapt Addison’s example, why even a “Description of a Dunghill is pleasing to the Imagination, if the Image be represented to our Minds by suitable Expressions”. Given the distinction between primary and secondary pleasures, the Imitation Argument implies – at least Addison’s version – that our pleasure in the terrible, revolting, or tragic is the product of the understanding – an additional pleasure that overbalances our aesthetic aversion.

Referring to the Imitation Argument, Burke acknowledges that when we encounter human suffering in art, there is “a pleasure resulting from the effects of imitation” added to the delight we feel. It is not to say, Burke adds, that we are pleased by reflecting on the fact that what we see is fiction – reason, again, is silenced. The power of an artwork – its power of engaging our passions, that is – depends upon the reality effect of imitation, which can be destroyed by an act of reflection. However, Burke, pace Addison, holds that representations will never have as powerful effect upon us as real suffering and since everything in his aesthetic comes down to the affective power of an object, the imitative arts will be given a secondary place in the aesthetic hierarchy. Burke infamous example sets before us a theatre left empty due to a public execution nearby: “the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts”.

The second argument is similar to the Imitation Argument but they are not to be confounded. The Conversion Argument, as it is often called, was also designed to explain the aesthetic allure of represented calamities. The best elaboration of the Conversion Argument was probably done by Hume in his 1757 essay entitled “Of Tragedy”. Hume also wanted to explain the “unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other
passions that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy.”

He argued that “the pleasure which poets, orators, and musicians give us, by exciting grief, sorrow, indignation, compassion” is produced not simply by the “force of imitation” but also by “the energy of expression, the power of numbers, the charms of imitation” which are intrinsically agreeable. Thus, this argument is not based simply on our pleasure in imitation rooted in reflection: it is the aesthetic force and beauty of the means of representation (the “absolute beauty” of poetic representation in Hutcheson’s terminology), which can achieve that an originally disagreeable feeling is “converted into pleasure”.

The third argument was also proposed by Addison and proved to be an important adversary in the Enquiry. Just for fun, I will call it the Dead Monster Argument. This argument states that our pleasure in terrible objects comes from an act of reflection on our own safety. When we witness a terrifying scene represented by art, remember a horrible event from our past, or look at “a Precipice at a distance, which would fill us with a different kind of Horror, if we saw it hanging over our Heads”, we compare the dangers or sufferings we witness to our own safety, recognizing the objects as “Dreadful and Harmless” at the same time (which, needless to say, is a very problematic couple in itself). “In short – Addison writes –, we look upon the Terrors of a Description, with the same Curiosity and Satisfaction that we survey a dead Monster.”

Burke rejects the Dead Monster Argument off-hand as a faulty argument, a category mistake, the result of not making a distinction between the necessary condition and the efficient cause of aesthetic pleasure. The Dead Monster Argument, Burke adds, also attributes “the cause of feelings which merely arise from the mechanical structure of our bodies, or from the natural frame and constitution of our minds, to certain conclusions of the reasoning faculty”. Our passions, however, are not the products of reflection. It is especially true in the case of the sublime: in the state of astonishment, we simply cannot compare our “good Fortune” to the suffering of others because every cognitive activity is paralyzed by fear.

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499 David Hume, “Of Tragedy”, in Selected Essays, 126. For the parallel between Kames and Hume, see Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 101–104.
502 Addison, The Spectator, no. 418.
503 Burke, Enquiry, 1.15, 44.
504 Burke, Enquiry, 1.13, 41.
Note that so far all these arguments confined themselves to mimetic art and carefully avoided the aesthetic power of actual suffering. Addison, for instance, rebuts the charge of sadistic voyeurism by claiming that the Dead Monster Argument was designed to explain only represented, imagined, and recalled suffering, not actual distress in front of us: “the Object presses too close upon our Senses – Addison writes –, and bears so hard upon us, that it does not give us Time or Leisure to reflect on our selves.”\(^{505}\) However, Burke, as we have seen, is adamant that actual suffering and pain is a source of delight as well.

The fourth answer to the paradox of negative emotions helped Burke answering the problem of actual pain. It was categorically rejected by Hume before and Kames after Burke but he ardently endorsed it nevertheless. This is the solution proposed by the Abbé Du Bos in 1719. Let’s call it now the Exercise Argument. Du Bos famously suggested that the reason why we enjoy tragedies and are attracted to the distress of others and even to the risky excitements that endanger ourselves is that our anthropological disposition drives us to escape the pain of the inactivity and languor of the mind. The arts, according to Du Bos, by exciting “superficial” or “artificial passions”, can function as \textit{stimulants} by “exercising” our passions. The pain of inaction is so dreadful, Du Bos argues, that we often turn either to amusements with painful consequences like gambling or to harmless but “frightful spectacles” like tragedies or executions in order to keep ourselves “in continual agitation” by exercising our passions. Du Bos infers that the “allurement” of suffering is naturally programmed into human sensibility by divine providence to ensure our self-preservation.\(^{506}\) One aspect of the Exercise Argument that it is not confined to mimetic art but can also explain real-life cases given that they do not seriously threaten or harm the individual.

\subsection*{3.4.3. The Teleology of the Sublime and the Cunning of Providence}

Burke’s answer to the paradox of negative emotions – raised by either real or represented objects – leads us to his teleological account of the sublime. Burke claimed that our response to “the feelings of our fellow creatures in circumstances of real distress” will give us the clue to represented distress as well. “I am convinced – Burke writes boldly – we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others”. Scenes of suffering and calamities make us

\(^{505}\) Addison, \textit{The Spectator}, no. 418.

“approach” and “dwell upon” them, Burke holds, explicitly saying that “there is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity.” It seems that “terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too closely; and pity is a passion accompanied with pleasure, because it arises from love and social affection.” Some distance from the object of experience is, again, considered to be a necessary condition of delight – nothing new here. But why is terror always delightful? Burke actually gave us two answers, one based on sympathy (A), which he borrowed from Kames and one that is a physiological recalibration of Du Bos’s Exercise Argument (B). The former is designed to explain the sublime raised by the distress of others, while the latter is to explain the sublime produced by the painful “spasms” of the nerves.

(A) In Part I, explicitly joining the discussion on the subject, Burke’s explains the problem by focusing the conditions that make affective engagement with artworks and other persons possible in the first place: sympathy, the favourite passion of the British Enlightenment. Sympathy, as we have seen, is listed as a social passion by Burke: it breaks our indifference as insipid spectators by allowing us to “enter into the concerns of others” and to be “moved as they are moved”. We are naturally – instantly, instinctively, one might even say, aesthetically – drawn, as Hutcheson earlier claimed, to “almost anything which men can do or suffer”. Sympathy, in other words, is “a sort of substitution” or “transfusion” of affective states – a conception similar to the one proposed in Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments a few years later. It is, thus, not surprising that Burke discusses sympathy under the rubric of social passions that serve the purpose of society in general. But do not social passions turn on pleasure? Well, this is the point where the argument gets interesting.

If by sympathy “we are put into the place of another man”, it follows that – depending on the feelings of the other – the object of sympathy can be both pleasure and pain, that is, both social affection and self-preservation. And when “turning upon pain”, sympathy “may be a source of the sublime.” Interestingly, sympathy, just like the social passions of ambition and imitation, is “a limit case” in Burke’s theory of the passions, an “intermediate zone of love and terror”, as Rodolphe Gasché put it.

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507 Burke, Enquiry, 1.14, 42, 43.
508 Burke, Enquiry, 1.14, 42.
509 Burke, Enquiry, 1.13, 41.
510 Burke, Enquiry, 1.13, 41.
511 Gasché, “…And the Beautiful?”, 34, 30.
Throughout his treatment of the passions of general society, as Robert Doran noted, Burke utilizes concepts that invoke the sublime (he explicitly refers to Longinus in the case of the self-aggrandisement of ambition). As a result, Burke’s social passions subvert his bipartite anthropological structure.512

Explaining the paradox of negative emotions in terms of sympathy, Burke turns to finality to finish his account:

Whenever we are formed by nature to any active purpose, the passion which animates us to it, is attended with delight, or a pleasure of some kind, let the subject matter be what it will; and our Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy; he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight; and there most where our sympathy is most wanted, in the distress of others.513

We are attracted to and strangely pleased by the suffering of others simply because God annexed delight to sympathetic engagement in order to promote social cohesion. Again, we arrive at Burke’s “theological instinct theory”.514 Burke’s argument is indebted to Lord Kames’s original contribution to the debate in his 1751 essay, “Out Attachment to Objects of Distress”. In this essay, as we will see in the next chapter in more detail, Kames argues that Providence programmed into us “an appetite after pain” in order to promote social bonds through “the sympathetic principle”.515 Kames does not stop here and argues that Providence did not only make us stand by and stare as eager spectators (with empathy in our hearts) at the suffering of our fellow-creatures: beyond “draw[ing] us to them”, objects of distress also “inspire us with a desire to afford relief.”516 The sympathetic principle leads to moral conduct. Burke, following Kames, also argues that the ultimate goal of Providence is to make us help others:

This is not an unmixed delight, but blended with no small uneasiness. The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer; and all this antecedent to

513 Burke, Enquiry, 1.14, 42.
516 Kames, “Our Attachment”, 15.
any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes, without our concurrence.\textsuperscript{517}

The sublime, which was originally linked to self-preservation and conceived to be individualistic, turns out to be a force of social cohesion and moral conduct when it is raised by the distress of others. Vanessa L. Ryan saw in this argument Burke’s most original contribution to the debate about the paradox of negative emotions: Providence ensured that by being attracted to suffering we face existential and somatic fragility. But since it is an experience “blended with no small uneasiness”, we will cease being sympathetic spectators and help the suffering when they need it the most: “Rather than leading us to an experience of self-preservation or self-exaltation – Ryan concludes –, Burke’s sublime overpowers the self and our instinct to self-preservation motivates us to relieve our pain by relieving that of others.”\textsuperscript{518} Moral action is, therefore, the product of social as well as selfish passions, the amalgam of pleasure and pain.

Man, however, must be also \textit{prepared} for this action: “If this passion [i.e. sympathy – B.Cs.] was simply painful, we would shun with the greatest care all persons and places that could excite such a passion; \textit{as some, who are so far gone in indolence as not to endure any strong impression, actually do.}”\textsuperscript{519} The function of creating this strong self and body, ready to act, is the other function of the sublime designed by Providence. It is high time we turn to this.

(B) Burke modifies the Exercise Argument by adding a physiological dimension, placing Du Bos’s psychological account onto a new groundwork, reconfiguring the argument in terms of medico-science. Naturally, the key is the physiology underlying the passion of fear – \textit{the physiology of pain}. In a crucial point of his work, Burke equates the physiology of pain with the physiological mechanisms involved in \textit{physical exercise or labour}:

\begin{quote}
labour is a surmounting of \textit{difficulties}, an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles; and as such resembles pain, which consists in tension or contraction, in everything but degree.\textsuperscript{520}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{517} Burke, \textit{Enquiry}, 1.14, 43.
\textsuperscript{518} Ryan, “The Physiological Sublime”, 277.
\textsuperscript{519} Burke, \textit{Enquiry}, 1.14, 42–43. (my italics)
\textsuperscript{520} Burke, \textit{Enquiry}, 4.6, 122.
The supposedly common physiological mechanism of convulsive spasms makes it possible for Burke to capitalize on the medico-scientific discussions of his age that argued for the beneficial effects of physical exercise in order to give a medico-scientific solution to the paradox of tragedy.

We already saw how Addison utilized the late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century medical literature on physical exercise in his essays, where he compared the psychosomatic mechanisms involved in aesthetic experience to those involved in physical exercise and labour. Addison worked out his aesthetic theory against the background of iatromechanism, which has become obsolete by the time of the 1750s. Instead of the mechanistic vision of the body as a hydraulic machine, a vitalistic model started to become accepted throughout Britain through debates concerning, among others, reflex action and the involvement of the soul, or the animating principle of life itself. The vitalistic model, which was itself polarised by mechanistic (Haller) and animistic (Whytt) approaches, revealed the body as a sensitive network of contractile fibres, irritable and/or sensible. Proper stimulation and exercise for the fibres were conceived as crucial techniques ensuring the elasticity of the fibres, the key to both bodily and mental health.

Thus, it is probably a vain attempt to search for a single medico-physiological model behind Burke’s physiological aesthetics given that medicine and neuroscience was made up by constantly changing and transfusing models and ideas: “The old framework of ideas, animal spirit, subtle fluids, spiritual substances and hollow nerves lived on, in spite of the evidence, because it was difficult to see until the very end of the period with what they could be sensibly replaced.” Burke drew on iatromechanists like Fuller or Cheyne (emphasizing the unhindered flow of fluids) but was also influenced by Hallerian vitalists such as his friend, Brocklesby or other adherents of the physiology of contractility like Nugent (emphasizing the elasticity of fibres).

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524 For recent attempts to entangle Burke’s medical background, see Sarafianos, “Pain, Labor, and the Sublime” (Fuller’s therapeutic use of exercise, Brocklesby’s vitalism and experiments on irritability and
In line with eighteenth-century medical practice, Burke argued that “the nature of rest is to suffer all the parts of our bodies to fall into a relaxation, that not only disables the members from performing their functions, but takes away the vigorous tone of fibre which is requisite for carrying on the natural and necessary secretions.” In a body, weakened by indolence, the nerves will also become “more liable to the most horrid convulsions, than when they are sufficiently braced and strengthened”, which leads to maladies like melancholy and often even suicide.525 “The best remedy for all these evils – Burke writes – is exercise or labour”, given that it is moderate and balanced by rest: overstraining the body – just like excessive pain – “destroys the mental faculties” as well as exhausting the mental powers “induces a remarkable lassitude of the whole body.526 Emphasizing throughout the interdependence of the bodily and mental faculties, Burke then sums up the importance of physical exercise or labour:

Labour is not only requisite to preserve the coarser organs, in a state fit for their functions; but it is equally necessary to these finer and more delicate organs, on which, and by which, the imagination and perhaps the other mental powers act. […] Now, as a due exercise is essential to the coarse muscular parts of the constitution, and that without this rousing they would become languid and diseased, the very same rule holds with regard to those finer parts we have mentioned; to have them in proper order, they must be shaken and worked to a proper degree.527

Burke’s argument is not original because it notes the importance of exercise or labour, a commonplace of his age, but because it conceives exercise to be “a mode of pain” based on the physiological mechanism of contraction. And given the connection established earlier between pain and terror, he argues that the experience of the sublime also functions as an exercise:

As common labour, which is a mode of pain, is the exercise of the grosser, a mode of terror is the exercise of the finer parts of the system; and if a certain mode of pain be of such a nature as to act upon the eye or the ear, as they are the most delicate organs, the

525 Burke, Enquiry, 4.6, 122.
526 Burke, Enquiry, 4.6, 122–23.
527 Burke, Enquiry, 4.6, 122–23.
affection approaches more nearly to that which has a mental cause. In all these cases, if
the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not
carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the
person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine or gross, of a dangerous and
troublesome incumbrance, they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort
of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-
preservation, is one of the strongest of all the passions. Its object is the sublime. 528

Invigorating the body and the passions through painful stimuli, the demanding
experience of the sublime, challenging both to our sensory organs and to our passions of
self-preservation, restores the alertness, power and stability of the body as well as the
mind (as a kind of “mental hygienic function”) 529. A vehicle of self-preservation,
designed by Providence, the sublime is an experience of self-preservation and vital energy:
“Astonishment, the state of ‘delightful horror’ – as Gasché writes –, is nothing more but
the sudden awareness of being alive.” 530

Now, it seems that the terrain of Burkean aesthetics is finally mapped: it is “the
insipidity of the beautiful” and the “labours of the sublime”, as Sarafianos put it, that
constitute its polar opposites. 531 Burke’s medical argument is a prime example of the
peculiar fusion of various discourses in the Age of Sensibility, uniting the medical, the
political, the moral, and the pious. The medico-scientific underpinnings of the Enquiry
were seen as the encapsulation of Burke’s “aesthetic ideology” that introduces class
distinctions into the work: the sublime stands for the laborious rising middle class
against the indolent, softened and weak aristocracy. Tom Furniss famously argued that
Burke presents an “aesthetics for the strong” and that the “sublime's role is to reaffirm
the sense of self as a kind of heroic [middle-class] labourer, purging itself of weakness
through individual effort”. 532

My objection to Furniss’s oft-cited thesis is the following. As the above
reconstruction shows, both labour/exercise and rest were regarded to be significant in
medical practice: it is the balanced oscillation between contraction and relaxation that

528 Burke, Enquiry, 4.7, 123.
529 Cf. Szécsényi, Társiasság és tekintély, 152.
530 Gasché, “…And the Beautiful?”, 29.
532 Furniss, Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology, 27, 29. For a recent take on Furniss’s approach that treats
the sublime and the beautiful as “proxies for socio-political categories” and Burke’s aesthetics as an
attempt to create a “heroic subjectivity”, a “bourgeois hero”, see Doran, The Theory of the Sublime, 160–
64.
constitutes health. The reason why the former was given more emphasis is the fact that it was the lack of physical exercise that threatened the well-being of the urbane Enlightenment élites. Burke’s argument draws on the medico-scientific criticism of the sedentary and luxurious lifestyle of urban living in the new commercial world: “nervous disorders” such as melancholy, whether they consisted in the “disorder of the spirits” or the lack of “elasticity and force in the fibres”, were understood as products of modern society. Exercise was seen as a remedy that can counterbalance the malaises of civilisation. However, the emphasis on exercise in the age of gout and melancholy does not change the fact that the relaxing pleasures of the beautiful were also seen as beneficial if balanced by exercise. And just like in the maintenance of health, László Kontler argued, the two forces of beauty and sublime cooperate in “mutually reinforcing ways to maintain a sound social and political order”, functioning much like “a system of checks and balances”. Burke’s politics, just like his physiology, is not based on the struggle but on the equilibrium of opposing forces – social as well as vital.

We have already encountered the “moral biology” (Siena) of Enlightened pathology. A characteristic feature of this sometimes insidious compound of medical science, medical practice, moral and religious theories, and entrenched social prejudices, was the close association of exercise with labour, which also found support from theology. A recurring argument in the medical literature of Burke’s age is that health, just like prosperity, is not something that we are given: we are only given the tool to obtain it, the marvellous but fragile human body, but we have to work for it. Fuller and Cheyne emphasized how the human body is made an optimal vehicle for work: it improves through exercise and use, unlike our everyday objects that wear away. What is behind these words of the privileged, urban intellectual, is the Scripture itself: Cheyne, writing about exercise, reminds his readers to God’s words to Adam after the Fall: “That in the Sweat of his brow he shall eat bread”. These words, Cheyne argues, reflect the beneficence and prudence of Providence: it is “a salutary penance”, a “punishment”, that is, which functions as a “remedy” against diseases of indolence and luxury.535

533 See Cheyne, The English Malady, i–ii.
534 Kontler, “Beauty or Beast”, 254. For a subtle analysis of the “constitutive function of the aesthetic” in the Burkean politics of organic order and balance, see Szécsényi, Társiasság és tekintély, 152–66.
535 Cheyne, An Essay of Health, 90. See also Addison’s similar argument: “nothing valuable can be procured without it. Not to mention Riches and Honour, even Food and Raiment are not to be come at without the Toil of the Hands and Sweat of the Brows. Providence furnishes Materials, but expects that we should work them up our selves. [...] and as for those who are not obliged to Labour, by the Condition
Similarly, it is the Providential Order that is called upon by Burke in his physiological take on the Exercise Argument, which leads us to Burke’s *teleological account of the sublime*:

Providence has so ordered it, that a state of rest and inaction, however it may flatter our indolence, should be productive of many inconveniences; that it should generate such disorders, as *may force us to have recourse to some labour*, as a thing absolutely requisite to make us pass our lives with tolerable satisfaction.\(^{536}\)

Thus, Burke’s medico-physiological version of the Exercise Argument is ultimately rooted in the teleology of the neuromuscular activity and, thus, in the Providential Order. Through the wise constitution of the minute mechanisms of the fibres, Providence guides us back to labour (if we are insipid) and keeps us busy (if we are engaged in it) by making the painful labours of the body delightful. Furthermore, these sublime exercises, by strengthening our body, training our passions, and keeping us alert, also prepare us for moral action when it is needed the most: when others in pain need our help. This is what I have called *the cunning of Providence* in the *Enquiry*, by which the design of human nature ensures the activities essential to our everyday life, health, moral as well as pious conduct, consisting, on the one hand, in *labour* and, on the other hand, in *sympathy*. The individual’s freedom that Burke’s physiological aesthetics sacrifices is not only sacrificed for universal scientific principles but also *for the purposes of Providence* concerning individual as well as social flourishing.\(^{537}\)

Burke’s striking originality lies in the fact that he identified the operation of Providence in the mechanisms of nerve and muscle fibre, fusing the medical, the moral, the political within a Providential Order. Indeed, “no part of this discourse may be judged of by itself, and independently of the rest”.\(^{538}\)

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\(^{536}\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 4.6, 122. (my italics)

\(^{537}\) Cf. Ryan, “The Physiological Sublime”, 266.

\(^{538}\) Burke, *Enquiry*, 1.19, 50.
4. Train of Ideas, Emotions, Passions:

*Lord Kames’s “science of rational criticism”*

In 1762 Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782), one of the leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, a judge of the Court of Sessions and then the High Court of Justiciary, a central member of the most important polished societies of the vibrant intellectual atmosphere of Edinburgh, a friend of Adam Smith and Thomas Reid and a distant cousin of David Hume, published his three-volume *Elements of Criticism*.\(^{539}\) Kames’s work is not only voluminous but also bold in its endeavour: Kames sets out to “discover” the “genuine principles of the fine arts”, which he claims to deduce from “the sensitive branch of human nature”.\(^{540}\) This method, Kames argues, has the potential to transform criticism and the fine arts into “a rational science”,\(^{541}\) which is part of the science of human nature, since it not only utilises anthropological knowledge but also enriches it due to the intimate relationship between human sensibility and the arts.

The *Elements of Criticism* soon became one of the most widely read works in criticism in the polite societies and universities of the Scottish Enlightenment, where the disciplines of rhetoric, criticism and belles lettres were being transformed and enjoying popularity. Needless to say, Kames’s own contemporaries in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Glasgow did not read the *Elements* as part of a new discipline – or at least not that of aesthetics. For authors like Smith, Campbell, Blair or Priestley, who at the time also worked in the field of rhetoric or taught popular courses on the subject, the *Elements* was part of the disciplinary context of ‘rhetoric and belles lettres’ – a booming field of study and university education from the 1750s and 60s onwards. However, despite the wide-ranging influence of Kames’s work on eighteenth-century education of rhetoric and criticism (there were six editions in Kames’s own lifetime, followed by many more used in college education throughout the nineteenth century), its treatment in the

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\(^{541}\) Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 14.
histories of these disciplines was diverse. It has been recently argued, that Kames’s neglect can be attributed to the historically changing “disciplinary configurations” between rhetoric and criticism, which was further entangled by the particular “disciplinary angst” of these disciplines. As soon as the explanatory and descriptive philosophical aspects of the work started to come into prominence instead of the prescriptive and normative ones aiming at generating criticism, the *Elements* was not considered proper rhetoric and placed within the critical tradition.\textsuperscript{542}

Kames’s ideas, however, soon became disseminated in a completely different intellectual space. Through a German translation published only one year after its original publication,\textsuperscript{543} Kames’s “science of rational criticism”\textsuperscript{544} entered into not only a different intellectual but also a novel disciplinary space. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, in the wake of Baumgarten’s installation of the new philosophical discipline, many other competing aesthetic programmes emerged, all searching for the proper definition, method and subject matter of the new science. The 1763 translation of Kames’s theory turned out to be crucial in transmitting the “psychological aesthetics” of the British Enlightenment to this novel disciplinary space, where it was disseminated by the “Popularphilosophen” and the blooming eclectic “university aesthetics” from the last third of the eighteenth century. Kames’s criticism soon became one of the contenders among the competing new aesthetic programmes.\textsuperscript{545} The fact that Kames’s criticism is based on an anthropological foundation was also influential, or at least met with a sympathetic reception in Germany, where the new project of aesthetics was not only considered as part of a new philosophical anthropology, but where “anthropological knowledge served to lay the foundation for the aesthetic [die ästhetische Begründungsfunktion des anthropologischen Wissens]”.\textsuperscript{546}

Despite its central role in the early days of the new discipline, Kames’s *Elements of Criticism* was largely neglected by the historiography of aesthetics compared to the


\textsuperscript{544} Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 16.

\textsuperscript{545} The “Homean path” was explicitly mentioned as one of the possible paths aesthetics as a science could take by Riedel in his letters of 1768. It well indicates Kames’s fame among German authors, even if Riedel’s conception of aesthetics is largely known today through Herder’s annihilating criticism in his *Fourth Grove*. See Friedrich Justus Riedel, *Ueber das Publicum. Briefe an einige Glieder desselben*, Jena: Christian Henrich Cuno, 1768, Erster Brief, 3–18.

aesthetic theories discussed in the previous chapters. Even though Kames’s theory is often acknowledged as a significant representative of the associationist aesthetic theories in the histories of eighteenth-century aesthetics and an early contribution to the aesthetics and philosophy of art of “Common Sense School”, 547 which was later developed by Kames’s close friend and protégée, Thomas Reid, 548 it is usually praised as a vast synthesis of earlier insights, rather than an original theory worthy of attention on its own merits. Kames has been also criticised for claiming originality and novelty, even though he utilizes the concepts and arguments of authors like Addison, Hutcheson, Hume or Burke: “Kames writes as if he owed no debts and anticipated no objections.” 549 Several of Kames’s contemporaries – who otherwise acknowledged Kames’s encompassing erudition, excellence as a stylist and the richness and relevance of his critical observations – already pointed out these shortcomings, namely that the Elements was lacking systematicity and originality. In Germany, Herder criticised the Elements for having “no system” and “no order in its plan”, thus remaining “a forest of experiences, observations, and phenomena relating to the soul”, 550 while in England, Dr. Johnson famously remarked in 1769 that “The Scotchman has taken the right method in his Elements of Criticism. I don’t mean that he has taught us any thing; but he has told us old things in a new way.” 551

Nevertheless, the reception is not altogether disparaging. Hipple praises the Elements as “one of the most elaborate and systematic treatises on aesthetics and

547 See Timothy M. Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition. From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 95–104. It is symptomatic of Kames’s neglect that while Costelloe calls Kames “the founding father of associationist aesthetics”, his name is not even mentioned in James Shelley’s article that originally suggested the differentiation of “the three main lineages” of eighteenth-century British aesthetics. See James Shelley, “18th Century British Aesthetics”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/aesthetics-18th-british/>. As I will later argue in this chapter, Shelley’s classification (or Costelloe’s label) is hardly applicable to Kames’s encompassing aesthetic theory.

548 As for the vocabulary of the Common Sense School, Reid himself also admits at the beginning of his Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (1785) that his understanding of certain terms is influenced by Kames’s Appendix to the Elements that contains the explanation of the philosophical terms used in the work. See Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 38–39. Nevertheless, Reid’s philosophy of art, as an early version of “expression theories”, is built on different grounds than Kames’s criticism. For Reid’s philosophy of art, see Peter Kivy, “Reid’s Philosophy of Art”, in The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 268–88.


criticism of any age or nation”, while Wilhelm Dilthey also attributes to the *Elements* an important historical place in his long-forgotten essay on *The Three Epochs of Modern Aesthetics* of 1892. Dilthey is certainly among the very firsts who emphasized the crucial role of the empirical analysis of “aesthetic impressions” elaborated by the British beside the “rationalist aesthetics” of the Leibnizian tradition and the “historical method” of the nineteenth century. Dilthey’s early periodization of the history of aesthetics is quite unique inasmuch he chooses the *Elements* as the representative work of British empirical aesthetics and argues that “due to a rare familiarity with the poets and, at the same time, an extremely skilled use of the results of the Scottish psychology of the day [...] the *Elements* was the most mature and thorough eighteenth-century investigation of the beautiful.” Dilthey then mentions Kames’s influence on Lessing, Herder, Kant and Schiller together with Adam Smith’s praise of Kames as “the master of the analytic method” “in spite of some logical and systematic weaknesses” of the work itself. One may, of course, question Dilthey’s praising or decision to choose the *Elements* as the representative achievement of the aesthetics of the British Enlightenment (or, as a matter of fact, his characterization of the aim of the work as the “investigation of the beautiful”). But even if Kames’s aesthetics seems to us less important than the theories discussed before, I believe that there are good reasons to devote the final chapter entirely to it.

Kames’s *Elements of Criticism* would be worthy of our attention even if it only had a historical significance: it was the great synthesis that transmitted the criticism of taste of the British Enlightenment to the novel disciplinary space of aesthetics in Germany and Central Europe. However, there seem to be two further features that may compel one to revisit Kames’s aesthetic theory. On the one hand, Kames’s theory signifies a shift in the history of aesthetics, and, on the other, it is the first to make the underlying ambition of his predecessors explicit: Kames’s aesthetics stands at the crossroads – at the end of a tradition, belonging to its “final flowering”, while also pointing towards novel terrains.

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The *Elements* signifies a shift in early modern aesthetics inasmuch Kames, unlike Addison, Hutcheson or Burke, focuses almost exclusively on “the fine arts”: poetry, painting, sculpture, music, gardening, architecture. Kames works out a systematic treatise of the *principles* that *explain* the aesthetic experience of the various arts and *guide* critical evaluation with the final ambition of *improving taste* and, with taste, the state of society as well. But since these principles are worked out through close critical engagement with the arts, Kames’s theory marks the beginning of the transformation of aesthetics into the *general theory of the fine arts*. From the 1770s onwards, several proposals were made throughout Europe to redefine aesthetics as the general theory of the fine arts, which at the same time also wanted to keep the conception of aesthetics as the criticism of taste and the science of sensibility, i.e. to explore the socio-political and moral implications of a general theory of the arts grounded on anthropological foundations. These developments are hardly independent of the fame of Kames’s twofold project.

However, just like in the cases of Addison, Hutcheson or Burke, Kames’s final goal is not to elaborate a general theory of the arts, but to investigate – for their possible role in the improvement of society – our aesthetic apparatus, in particular the functioning of sense perception, association, memory and emotions. Kames still belongs to the tradition that regards aesthetics as the *anatomy of sensibility*. He is the first, however, to use the term “criticism” to denote a general theory of the fine arts that is deduced from the laws of sensibility, and, in turn, enriches our knowledge of human nature: as we will see, Kames argues – following the remarks of Hume on criticism as part of the science of man – that through exploring the principles of the fine arts one “advances far into the sensitive part of our nature.” Furthermore, he is the first, *who makes it explicit* that he is intent on contributing to the novel endeavour of *the science of human nature*. In a way, Kames does what Hume did not want to or could not do. As

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557 Which should be emphatically differentiated from the transformation of aesthetics into *the philosophy of art*, a transition marked by Hegel’s grandiose endeavour.


560 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 32.
I mentioned earlier, Hume famously emphasized the “close and intimate” connection of “Criticism” (beside logic, morals and politics) to human nature regarding “our tastes and sentiments” and, therefore, its place in the “compleat system of the sciences” made possible by the explanation of the principles of human nature. However, it was Kames who worked out a systematic treatise of criticism as a general theory of all the fine arts based on an anthropological foundation with the open intention of integrating criticism into the science of man. Or to sum up Kames’s position to the theories of the British Enlightenment discussed earlier differently: the “careful and exact experiments” of his criticism are also directed to the exploration of the anatomy of sensibility, they also examine the “particular effects” that “different circumstances and situations” have on our aesthetic apparatus (senses, association, memory, emotions), but he carries out his “observations” in the field of the fine arts and not that of “nature” as his predecessors, choosing the “circumstances and situations” occasioned by the fine arts instead of natural objects.

The following parts of this chapter will examine Kames’s concept of criticism in detail and explore its various contexts, and then turn to Kames’s aesthetic theory. Since Kames traces back the aesthetic to the principles of perception, association, memory and emotions, i.e. to our aesthetic apparatus, the analysis of his aesthetics must start with the analysis of his anatomy of sensibility. For our present purposes, it is crucial since Kames elaborates his teleological accounts of the aesthetic by reference to the final causes programmed into the aesthetic apparatus by Providence. In discussing Kames’s aesthetic theory, I will not only draw on his Elements of Criticism but also revisit some of his earlier essays published originally anonymously in the collection entitled Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion in 1751. These essays, which are arguably among the central philosophical works in Kames’s oeuvre, written as reactions to Humean scepticism, work out “a deistic defense of commonsense

563 For the method and aim of the science of man as the “anatomy of the mind”, see Hume, Treatise, vol. 1, 5; 2.1.12., 211–12.
564 A methodological point already emphasized by Hipple in his The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 99.
notions of morality and epistemology”. The volume is crucial since it contains Kames’s arguments for the authority of sense perception and their authority over belief, his application of the new moral psychology in a framework of natural law, the sympathetic engagement with and the paradoxical pleasure of tragedy, and our knowledge of God. The analysis of Kames’s aesthetic theory will occasionally draw on his *Sketches of the History of Man* as well, the author’s magnum opus published in 1774. The work, which follows the historical stages of the progress of the human species, was written by Kames as part of the unfolding endeavour of the science of human nature, just like his *Elements of Criticism*. But while the *Sketches* aims to explore human nature through the history of the species, the *Elements* wants to do it through the anatomy of sensibility, which shows how the various conceptions of the science of man coexisted and even cooperated in the Scottish Enlightenment.

### 4.1. Criticism as the Science of Man

Even though the various attempts in Germany in the 1760s and 70s to redefine aesthetics as the general theory of the fine arts (while also reconciling the new subject matter with aesthetics as the science of sensibility) can be traced back to the *Elements of Criticism* (and its similarly twofold project), the most attentive contemporary readers of the *Elements* saw exactly where Kames real interest lay. In his *Fourth Grove*, Herder plainly writes that “nothing was further from his [Kames’s] mind than a *theory of the beaux arts and belles lettres*”. What he wanted, Herder argues, was “to deliver principles or rather observations of criticism”. The two endeavours are not to be

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566 Mary Catherine Moran, *Introduction to Kames, Essays*, xiii.
568 The introductory paragraph added to the second edition suggests that by then (1778) Kames regarded the anatomy of the mind a successfully finished project and thought that there are more possibilities in “natural history” for the science of man: “The Human Species is in every view an interesting subject, and has been in every age the chief inquiry of philosophers. The faculties of the mind have been explored, and the affections of the heart; but there is still wanting a history of the species, in its progress from the savage state to its highest civilization and improvement.” Kames, *Sketches*, vol. 1, 11.
569 A good example of this cooperation is the aesthetics of David Hume. As Schwabe pointed out, the anthropological foundations of Hume’s criticism of taste incorporated not only psychological investigations, but the exploration of the historical and cultural contexts as well. See Schwabe, “‘Science of man’ und ‘Criticism’”, 246.
confounded, since “criticism”, in a Kamesian sense, is broader than the theory of the fine arts, the latter being used only as “examples”.

it is plain that Home wishes to analyze our sensitive nature rather than beauty in objects; that his book is consequently the most estimable contribution to one aspect of aesthetics, the subjective aspect; that the objective [i.e. the theory of art – B.Cs.], though, is treated only in scattered remarks or imperfect observations ranged at the end, as in the third section. Can an attentive reader view the principal aim of the book as a theory of the arts? [...] Home infers deductively throughout, starting from above with the emotions and passions and working his way down, and only then does he look for examples. [...] What are examples ripped from their context? Faded, wilted flowers, which perhaps may yet show traces of their former color and beauty but are pale, withered, dying, for they have been removed from their soil, from their roots, from their sap, and lie isolated and alone.571

In the following section, I will focus on Kames’s conception and method of criticism in order to understand Kames arguments concerning sensibility and the arts in their proper context – hopefully, to give them back their “former color and beauty”.

4.1.1. Experimental Science, Modernity, Authority

In the Introduction, Kames self-consciously sets his criticism against neo-classicist poetics and art treatises dedicated to various genres, naming “the celebrated French critic”, René Le Bossu’s Treatise of the Epick Poem of 1675 as an example.572 The historiographer of aesthetics may welcome such a self-interpretive gesture, as it seemingly complies with one of the widespread narratives of the emergence of modern aesthetics, namely with the paradigm shift in criticism suggested by M.H. Abrams. I have argued earlier that in the new (aesthetic) critical practice, it was the ascertained “principles” or “laws” of sensibility that became the warrants of critical arguments concerning the making and evaluation of artworks. But even though the prime example of this critical practice is the Elements of Criticism, Kames’s argument for distancing

his criticism from traditional treatises on art does not utilize neither the concept of “disinterested contemplation” nor that of “aesthetic autonomy”. His argument for the radically modern character of his criticism stands on different footing. On the one hand, Kames argues that his Elements satisfies certain methodological criteria that the traditional treatises did not and could not satisfy – the criteria of Newtonian science. On the other hand, Kames regards his criticism as rational and scientific in the sense that he takes the critical arguments presented in his work to be grounded in universal anthropological principles.

Just like Burke, whose methodology was examined in the previous chapters, Kames also seeks to satisfy the criteria of what these authors take to be Newton’s method. Kames frequently refers to “noted observations”, seeking to validate his reasoning by emphasizing that they are “confirmed by experience,” i.e. introspection. In the first two chapters devoted to establishing the principles of human nature, Kames – following the Newtonian methodology – “ascends” from “facts and experiments” to general principles (analysis) and then deduces the elements of the criticism concerning the fine arts from these anthropological principles (synthesis).

Kames also presents an interesting argument concerning the aesthetic appeal of the analytic method: “a sensible pleasure” accompanies the inductive method, which is compared to the movement of “mounting upward”, making it “more agreeable to the imagination” than the synthetic. The synthetic method, on the other hand, which consists in “descending regularly from principles to their consequences”, Kames remarks, “will be preferred by those only who with rigidity adhere to order, and give no indulgence to natural emotions”. This remark is interesting, because Kames, when it comes to the principles of the fine arts, as Herder already pointed out, “infers deductively throughout, starting from above with the emotions and passions and working his way down, and only then does he look for examples.” Kames’s Elements, indeed, is designed to be a work of regularity and order as a result of the predominance of deductive reasoning – establishing anthropological principles and deducing from them the elements of criticism. And while this design made the work appealing to the Scottish Enlightenment fascinated by order and stability, they also made Kames’s “critical practice authoritarian

573 See, for instance, Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 24.
574 Ibid., vol. 1, 18. Also see Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 103–104.
and exclusive in nature”. The fact that Kames’s aesthetics does not strike the reader as a rigid, ordered authoritarian system but rather one characterized by a “kaleidoscopic complexity” may be due to its “tendency […] to dichotomize feelings or qualities often taken as simple” while appealing to various internal senses and corresponding properties in a providential order: Hipple justly discerns “an extraordinary proliferation of clear-cut literal distinctions […] without systematic necessity”, which “gives the Elements an eclectic air”. Nevertheless, Kames’s “criticism – as distinguished from his aesthetics – has great particularity and precision, and a very considerable degree of systematic consistency.”

Interestingly, Kames argues that it is his anti-authoritarian approach that differentiates his criticism from that of his predecessors like Le Bossu’s. Kames accuses the traditional practice of criticism of being “slavish in its principles” and “submissive to authority” since it prescribes technical instructions to the artist based solely on the practice and authority of the ancients, without questioning “whether, and how far, do these rules agree with human nature.” Kames continues to argue that this “blind obedience” of traditional criticism threatens to bring disorder into the practice of art, since it not only submits to rules that are in accordance with “human nature” and “rational principles”, but to ones left behind by the “arbitrary will” of the ancients as well. In contrast, Kames argues for a novel kind of criticism that is anti-authoritarian since it is grounded in human nature and, therefore, can establish rational and universal principles: a “science of criticism”.

A similar distinction between rules which were “dictated by reason and necessity” and which were “enacted by despotic antiquity” was already made in

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578 See Manolescu, “Traditions of Rhetoric, Criticism, and Argument”, 237–39, the quotation is from page 239.
579 Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 100, 112.
580 Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 113.
581 Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 115.
582 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 17, 18.
583 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 18.
584 Kames viewed the anthropological approach to be a remedy against a system of education grounded solely in authority. Kames legal writings attest that he thought this problem to be more general, pertaining also to students of law who, because of their education, do not dare to think for themselves. See Beth Innocenti Manolescu, “Kames’s Legal Career and Writings as Precedents for Elements of Criticism”, Rhetorica, XXIII:3 (2005), 250–51.
585 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 15. [My italics.]
England by Samuel Johnson in his *Rambler* essays. Johnson clearly formulated the future task of criticism as well:

> the task of criticism [is] to establish principles; to improve opinion into knowledge [...]. Criticism reduces those regions of literature under the dominion of science, which have hitherto known only the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription.

As these quotations attest, Kames’s argument seems to reiterate the rhetoric of power and submission inherent in the Johnsonian vision of the science of criticism: the anarchy or tyranny of the arbitrary caprices of old customs must be replaced with the rationally ordered dominion of science. In both cases, history is transformed into a “legal process”, where not even the critical practice of a Homer, Virgil or Aristotle can escape the “tribunal of reason”, which also leads to “an understanding of time that sundered future from past.” Kames, however, views this transformation as anti-authoritarian and does not see that the science of criticism brings not only emancipation but submission to a new form of authority as well. These are the universal principles established by reason, and it is only their authority that can rightfully oblige us to submit ourselves – and to which, the argument implies, we happily submit: “Submission to authority is an explicit desideratum for Kames.”

Of course, Kames’s argument is not particularly interesting as a self-conscious gesture of the ‘moderns’ against the “Rude ages [that] exhibit the triumph of authority over reason”, neither as a document of how “rational criticism” became “Utopian”. Dr. Johnson’s essays already suggested that the idea of transforming criticism into a “rational science” was ‘in the air’ around the middle of the century. However, it was only in the universities and polite societies of the Scottish Enlightenment that it became an urgent task, undertaken by many professors and intellectuals in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow. Kames was not alone in this, and it is important to see the general appeal of a science that can establish universal principles of composition. The appeal was,

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587 Samuel Johnson, “*Rambler* no. 92” [1751]. [My italics.]
589 Manolescu, “Traditions of Rhetoric, Criticism, and Argument”, 237.
590 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 17.
591 For the “Utopian” character of rational criticism, see Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 10.
indeed, general in the sense that the same goal was formulated in different disciplines at
the same time: while Kames focused on establishing the principles of the fine arts in his
criticism, many of his contemporaries and friends searched for the principles not only of
literary but also rhetoric composition and speech communication under the label of
“rhetoric and belles lettres”. In a period of lively, fluid disciplinary configurations, the
discipline of rhetoric became associated with the popular notion of belles letters, and, with
this notion, problems of criticism, psychology, social communication and the
anatomy of the human mind itself came to be integrated into the discipline. Displacing
logic, rhetoric and belles letters was gaining attention in university education – a highly
significant factor given the fact that the intellectual culture of the Scottish
Enlightenment was closely bound to its institutions.

4.1.2. The “Sensitive Branch of Human Nature”
Emerging in such a disciplinary and institutional context, Kames’s Elements of
Criticism becomes important not only because he chooses the term “criticism” and
reduces the field of inquiry to the fine arts, but because of the anthropological
foundation on which he seeks to build the science of criticism. Kames argues that in
order to transform criticism into a science one has to exhibit the “fundamental
principles” of the arts, and in order to get to these principles, one has to explore “the
ture source of criticism”, which is human nature – human sensibility to be exact –, and
deduce these principles from there. Thus, Kames elaborates his theory of criticism as
a general theory of the fine arts grounded in what he takes to be universal
anthropological principles:

592 The way the Aberdonian Robert Eden Scott defines rhetoric as synonymous with “Criticism, Eloquence, or the Belles Lettres” and states the task of rhetoric in his Elements of Rhetoric (1802) – which title is in itself indicative of the fluidity of disciplinary boundaries – is symptomatic: “Among the ancients Criticism was chiefly cultivated as an art, and consisted rather in practical rules than in scientific investigation: it is to the Moderns, and those too of a very late date, that we owe a philosophical investigation of that science of Rhetoric, and an analysis of those faculties of the mind, upon which peculiar effects are produced, by literary composition, in its various kinds.” Robert Eden Scott, Elements of Rhetoric for the Use of the Students of King’s College (Aberdeen, 1802), iii. Quoted in Joan H. Pittock, “The Scottish Enlightenment”, in The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Vol. 4: The Eighteenth Century, ed. H.B. Nisbet – Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 546.
593 For these developments, see Pittock, “The Scottish Enlightenment”, 546–47. Kames’s criticism is sometimes read as part of this development: “Elements is an exemplar of a transition from the study of rhetoric as civic oratory to rhetoric as bellestristic criticism.” Manolescu, “Kames’s Legal Career and Writings as Precedents”, 243.
594 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 18.
The design of the present undertaking [...] is, to examine the sensitive branch of human nature, to trace the objects that are naturally agreeable, as well as those that are naturally disagreeable; and by these means to discover, if we can, what are the genuine principles of the fine arts. Hence a foundation for reasoning upon the taste of any individual, and for passing sentence upon it: where it is conformable to principles, we can pronounce with certainty that it is correct; otherwise, that it is incorrect, and perhaps whimsical. Thus the fine arts, like morals, become a rational science; and, like morals, may be cultivated to a high degree of refinement.595

This quotation shows how Kames’s authoritarian critical practice operates: “For Kames principles of human nature warrant the application of rules to performances in the fine arts.”596 The structure of the Elements reflects this practice: the first two chapters – focusing on the perception and association of ideas (ch. 1) and the passions and emotions (ch. 2) – establish the principles of sensibility, which then serve as foundations for the “inquiries to such attributes, relations, and circumstances, as in the fine arts are chiefly employ’d to raise agreeable emotions”597 (ch. 3–11). In this second section, Kames discusses “attributes of single objects” such as beauty or grandeur as well as attributes “depending on relations” such as uniformity amidst variety or grace. After discussing some “coincidental matters” such as the influence of custom or the external signs of passions (ch. 12–17), Kames applies the principles of human sensibility thus established to the various arts (ch. 17–24), and closes his work with a chapter devoted to the standard of taste (ch. 25),598 which, according to Kames, can be established deductively from the anatomy of sensibility.599 We have run a full circle. Thus by starting with laying down the principles of sensibility and then applying them as warrants to establish rules for criticism, the “Elements trains readers in the act of criticism itself – in production of critical arguments – and not simply in receptive competence.”600

595 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 14. (my italics)
597 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 141.
598 For Kames’s sketch of the “general view of the intended method”, see Ibid.
599 See Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 120.
600 Manolescu, “Traditions of Rhetoric, Criticism, and Argument”, 231. Hipple also emphasizes the “practical bias” of Kames’s aesthetics and points out its goal of “forming taste and regulating creativity”. Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 114.
Given its anthropological foundations, Kames’s criticism can be regarded as an aesthetic criticism: Kames deduces the rules of criticism from the principles of sensibility, from the workings of our aesthetic apparatus. More importantly, the various attributes such as beauty, sublimity or novelty are discussed in terms of sensibility – in terms of emotions, to be exact. On the one hand, he investigates the specific affective response these attributes evoke, while, on the other, these attributes are sometimes defined as emotions themselves. I will return to the problem of localizing aesthetic qualities in the second part of this chapter in detail. It will suffice for the time being to say that Kames, just like Hutcheson, defines aesthetic qualities as anthropocentric, i.e. by reference to our sensible engagement with artworks (which involves the senses, the emotions and reflection as well), while he also seeks to establish some objective criteria by pinpointing certain attributes of the objects themselves.

Although Kames’s aesthetic theory is famously encompassing, the emotive impact of the arts is at the heart of it. Art, for Kames, “exists primarily to touch our emotions and passions”, therefore, it is intimately connected to human action, morality, and politics, which makes the attempt to understand the principles of efficient emotive impact a practical matter with moral and social stakes. In his essay on modern aesthetics, Dilthey aptly sums up the Kamesian approach to aesthetic qualities: “Kames found a simple natural correlation between the emotion involved in an aesthetic impression and a specific property of an aesthetic object or process,” which not only led Kames to understand affective reactions “as the true locus of aesthetic apprehension,” but also to conceive criticism as a science grounded in universal principles. In a recent article on Kames’s theory of tragedy, Rachel Zuckert describes the Kamesian approach as an explanatory and normative aesthetic naturalism based on, as we will see, a teleological and normative conception of human nature: Kames not only explains aesthetic phenomena by reference to the principles of human sensibility but also maintains that these principles establish standards for the aesthetic.

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602 Considering Kames’s position among the three models of the aesthetic (the models of truth, emotions and play), Guyer emphasizes that the Elements offers an “almost unrivaled” synthesis of these models but adds that “if one of these three factors in aesthetic experience enjoys pride of place in Kames’s work, it is surely the emotional impact of aesthetic experience.” Guyer, A History of Modern Aesthetics, vol. 1, 180.
605 Zuckert, “Kames’s Naturalist Aesthetics”, 149.
As we have seen so far, Kames’s science of criticism incorporates the philosophical investigation of human sensibility in order to establish warrants for its critical judgments. However, the close critical engagement with the arts can, in turn, enrich our knowledge of human sensibility:

*The principles of the fine arts, appear in this view to open a direct avenue to the heart of man.* The inquisitive mind beginning with criticism, the most agreeable of all amusements, and finding no obstruction in its progress, *advances far into the sensitive part of our nature; and gains imperceptibly a thorough knowledge of the human heart, of its desires, and of every motive to action; a science, which of all that can be reached by man, is to him of the greatest importance.*

The science to which rational criticism can contribute “imperceptibly” and which is “of the greatest importance” is, of course, the science of human nature. Through the critical engagement with the arts, the “complicate machine” of human nature is revealed, a partly selfish, partly social machine, which is constructed in the way it is “in order to answer its various purposes”: for Kames, our aesthetic apparatus is teleological. Kames’s science of criticism, thus, is not sovereign but incorporated into the general project of the science of man. Of course, this disciplinary configuration is hardly surprising in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment: studying the arts for their own sake is not only incompatible with the conception of the arts as means of social communication (closely linked to agency), but also with the “supervenient value” of *improvement, “the clarion call of the Scottish Enlightenment”.*

Kames follows the path started by Hutcheson, but the idea of subordinating the science of literary and rhetoric composition to the science of man was present among Kames’s own friends and contemporaries as well. One can read, for instance, something very similar in John Millar’s account of Adam Smith’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* first held in 1748 in Edinburgh. Millar writes that Smith, who was originally to give a lecture on logic, started with “exhibiting a general view of the powers of the mind, and explaining so much of the ancient logic as was requisite to gratify curiosity

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606 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 32. (my italics)
607 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 33.
with respect to an artificial method of reasoning,” but then “dedicated all the rest of his
time to the delivery of a system of rhetoric and belles-lettres.” Millar, then, probably
reiterating his teacher’s ideas, argues for the significance of the study of communication
and composition for the anatomy of the mind:

The best method of explaining and illustrating the various powers of the human
mind, the most useful part of metaphysics, arises from an examination of the
several ways of communicating our thoughts by speech, and from an attention to
the principles of those literary compositions which contribute to persuasion or
entertainment. By these arts, every thing that we perceive or feel, every
operation of our minds, is expressed and delineated in such a manner, that it
may be clearly distinguished and remembered. There is, at the same time, no
branch of literature more suited to youth at their first entrance upon philosophy
than this, which lays hold of their taste and their feelings.

Thus, according to Smith, the science of rhetoric and belles lettres is far from a
sovereign field of sturdy: its value resides in the explanations and illustrations it offers
of the anatomy of the human mind, and in its close links – through persuasion and
entertainment – to human action. Note that literary compositions and other acts of
communication are not strictly distinguished from each other: Smith and his
contemporaries like Kames and Hume discuss the arts in the context of human social
life and action – “works of art are pleasurable means of communication between human
beings, and so the preconditions of effective communication apply to art as much as to
other means”.

4.1.3. From the Utility of Rational Criticism to the Design of Sensibility

In his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Smith attributes to rhetoric and belles
lettres a significant role in the system of education due to their unique ability to engage
young minds thanks to the affective response their particular field of inquiry, literary
compositions, evoke. Kames, as we have seen, also emphasizes that “criticism, the most
agreeable of all amusements” can function as an entry for the “inquisitive mind” into

609 Quoted in J. C. Bryce, Introduction to Adam Smith: Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, ed. J. C.
the discovery of human sensibility, action and social life. Criticism as a “regular science”, Kames argues, has the ability to enhance and prolong the pleasure of the arts, since it requires the exercise of certain powers of the mind such as judgment of taste and imagination. The significance of criticism in the system of education is also supported by the exercise criticism offers to the powers of the mind: “the practice of reasoning upon subjects so agreeable, tends to a habit; and a habit, strengthening the reasoning faculties, prepares the mind for entering into subjects more intricate and abstract.” Again, criticism is treated not as a sovereign field of inquiry, but “as a middle link”, “an inviting opportunity to exercise the judgment”, which connects “the different parts of education into a regular chain.”

For Kames, rethinking the role of criticism in education also meant rethinking its role in the promotion of the “social vision” of the Scottish Enlightenment, which was closely bound to its educational theory. This vision involved the material well-being of society as well as the moral excellence of individuals and recast the liberal arts in education so that they prepare citizens – by shaping their character – for a virtuous life amidst the challenges posed by modern commercial society (such as luxury, vanity and selfishness). Commerce was often seen as the promoter and the mark of the fourth, highest stage achievable for the human species in the conjectural histories of the Scottish Enlightenment. On the whole, Kames shared this idea, however, like many of his contemporaries, held that the biggest danger of a thriving commercial economy resides in its tendency to produce luxury, which often led him to condemn the modern “degenerate age” of luxury, vanity and selfishness. Kames sought antidotes to these tendencies in a late work entitled Loose Hints upon Education, Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart (1781). In this treatise, Kames focuses specifically on the

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612 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 32.
613 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 14–15.
614 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 15.
615 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 15.
618 “In all times luxury has been the ruin of every state where it prevailed. Nations originally are poor and virtuous. They advance to industry, commerce, and perhaps to conquest and empire. But this state is never permanent: great opulence opens a wide door to indolence, sensuality, corruption, prostitution, perdition. […] In the savage state, man is almost all body, with a very small proportion of mind. In the maturity of civil society, he is complete both in mind and body. In a state of degeneracy by luxury and voluptuousness, he has neither mind nor body.” Kames, Sketches, vol. 1, 333.
education of children and emphasizes that education – even if entails the cultivation of the understanding – essentially consists of the cultivation of sensibility.619

Recognizing the dangers of commercial modernity and the potential in education as “the culture of the heart”, Kames argues that rational criticism also has intellectual as well as moral utility. Kames argues that the fact that criticism – unlike mathematics or metaphysics – requires the exercise of judgments of taste and, therefore, “prepares us for acting in the social state with dignity and propriety.”620 The critical engagement with the arts “tends to improve the heart no less than the understanding” by moderating the selfish affections and “invigorating” the social ones such as sympathy understood here as pity or compassion. Criticism, by improving sensibility and taste – a faculty involved in moral as well as in aesthetic judgments – gradually improves one’s overall moral character and contributes to a well-ordered and peaceful society, making criticism “a great support to morality”: “a just relish of what is beautiful, proper, elegant, and ornamental, in writing or painting, in architecture or gardening, is a fine preparation for the same just relish of these qualities in character and behaviour.”621 In other words, the science of criticism serves the purpose of moral and social improvement in the moderate Enlightenment of Scotland.622

Kames’s practice of criticism aims at regulating our pleasures and, through refashioning our sensibilities, at forming a standard of taste, which is seen as the aesthetic groundwork of social cohesion.623 Note that if the science of criticism lays down the general principles of human nature, then the regulation of our pleasures means adjusting one’s pleasures to “common human nature”.624 Again, Kamesian criticism guides us towards submitting to an unquestionable authority. It may be worth pointing out, that while Hume argued for the personal benefits of cultivating a taste in the arts

620 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 16.
621 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 17. (my italics)
622 For the instrumental value of criticism, see Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque*, 103.
623 See Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque*, 103. Note, that Kames dedicates the work to George III with the following opening lines: “The Fine Arts have ever been encouraged by wise Princes, not singly for private amusement, but for their beneficial influence in society. By uniting different ranks in the same elegant pleasures, they promote benevolence: by cherishing love of order, they enforce submission to government: and by inspiring delicacy of feeling, they make regular government a double blessing.” Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 3.
624 See Zuckert, “Kames’s Naturalist Aesthetics”, 159.
(strength of judgment leading to the tranquillity of mind and intimate friendships), Kames focuses primarily on the promotion of social cohesion. He argues for the value of a standard of taste (in terms of “final causes”) by pointing out, first, that the production of artworks often requires the cooperation of individuals, which would be impossible without the uniformity of their taste. Second, Kames emphasizes the political value of aesthetic experiences that are commonly shared by members of a community who are otherwise separated from one another: “Such meetings, where every one partakes of the same pleasures in common, are no slight support to the social affections.”

We can see from the arguments discussed above, that in order to cultivate the uniformity of taste and benefit from its “illustrious” final causes concerning social cohesion, Kames’s science of criticism joins the eighteenth-century British project of naturalizing social power by “refashioning the human subject from the inside”. When discussing the role of emotions in art experiences, I will examine Kames’s arguments concerning how art experiences (as “exercises of virtue”) can facilitate this aesthetic refashioning of one’s moral character.

What makes Kames’s aforementioned argument for the moral and political value of criticism interesting is that while his predecessors usually attributed these benefits to engaging with the arts, Kames attributes them to the practice of criticism itself. The reason behind this shift probably resides in Kames’s distinction between the experience of someone for whom the arts are “mere pastime” and that of the professional critic who is forced to exercise the faculties of judgment and imagination. Kames not only breaks with the tradition of belittling the professional critic or even disputing that his experience can be properly called aesthetic (a view represented, among others, by Hutcheson), his argument also implies that the exercise of “sentiments”, the affective engagement with the work of art in itself is not enough and that the knowledge of and

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626 For the discussion of Kames’s arguments for the moral and political benefits of a standard of taste, see Guyer, A History of Modern Aesthetics, vol. 1, 183–84.
627 Kames, Elements, vol. 2, 724.
629 The novelty of the argument is also pointed out by Guyer who adds that Kames’s claim that art criticism will lead to social cohesion through increasing sensibility and developing moral emotions might seem more plausible if one keeps in mind that “the paradigm of art” for Kames is the poetry of Milton and Shakespeare. See Guyer, A History of Modern Aesthetics, vol. 1, 182.
630 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 14.
reflection on the “principles” of the arts has a crucial role in aesthetic experience because it gives “scope to judgment as well as to fancy”. 631

Besides these arguments for the value of criticism, there is one more proposed by Kames, which concerns the very function or purpose of critically engaging with the arts – a teleological argument, as we will see. Kames confines the pleasures of the arts to visual and auditory pleasures, and he does that for a very simple reason concerning the difference between the various ways of perceiving external objects. In order to understand it, however, first, we have to briefly look at some aspects of Kames’s theory of perception. Anticipating the Scottish Common Sense School, Kames rejects the “terrible doctrine” of representational theories of perception and argues for a direct theory of perception in order to restore the solid foundation of our knowledge of the external world and God. 632 In Kames’s theory of perception, the term “impression” has a narrower meaning than in Hume’s: 633 the Kamesian term “impression” or “organic impression” refers only to the effect made upon the sensory organ by an external object, excluding affective responses or internal perceptions. In contrast, the term “perception” signifies the “internal act by which we are made acquainted with external objects” 634 (and the object of this act as well). Impressions are the necessary bodily conditions of perceptions: “we cannot perceive an external object till an impression is made upon our body”. 635 Bodily impressions either become sensible – as in the cases of taste, touch, or smell – producing a “sensation”, an “internal act by which we are made conscious of pleasure or pain felt at the organ of sense”, or they remain “insensible” – as in the cases of visual or auditory perceptions – since we are not conscious of the image of the object

631 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 15.
632 In the appendix, Kames argues that representational theories of perception (what he calls “the ideal system”) not only lead us into “a labyrinth of metaphysical errors”, but produce such “extravagant consequences” as the “death and destruction to the whole world, levelling all down to a mere chaos of ideas” (in the philosophy of Berkeley) and the similar destruction of the immaterial world, “leaving nothing in nature but images floating in vacuo, without affording them a single mind for shelter or support” (as in the scepticism of Hume). Kames, Elements, vol. 2, 734. Kames’s argument for direct perception is not, however, purely theoretical. On the contrary, Kames attributes not only epistemological (our knowledge of substances and qualities) but also theological importance (our knowledge of the Deity and the fitness of provident design) to the question: “the sense of seeing is given us to perceive things as they really exist; and did it not make us acquainted with things as they exist, we would be ill qualified for living in this world.” Kames, “External Senses”, in Kames, Essays, 151.
633 For Hume, impressions are “all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will, [...] distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned”. David Hume, An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, ed. Peter Milligan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12–13.
634 Kames, Elements, vol. 2, 731.
painted upon the retina and how the vibrations of air strike the drum of the ear.\textsuperscript{636} Kames, not surprisingly, neglects the somatic aspects of visual and auditory perceptions, and thus he is able to exclude bodily responses from art experiences in general.

Since in the cases of visual and auditory perception the “organic impression” is not “sensible”, these perceptions, one might say, are transparent: “being insensible of the organic impression, \emph{we are not misled} to assign a wrong place to the pleasant or painful feelings caused by that impression; and therefore we naturally place them \emph{in the mind, where they really are}”.\textsuperscript{637} The lack of sensible organic impression also makes these perceptions “\emph{more refined and spiritual}” than the ones occasioned by the merely “corporeal” senses. These arguments imply that the pleasures of the fine arts are also more refined and spiritual, in contrast to the morally and intellectually suspicious bodily pleasures. The argument also assigns the visual and auditory pleasures of the arts – just like in the case of Addison’s pleasures of the imagination – a \emph{“mixt nature and middle place between organic and intellectual pleasures”}.\textsuperscript{638} At this point, just like Addison,\textsuperscript{639} Kames emphasizes the “salutary effects” of the “exhilarating pleasures of the eye and the ear”: as opposed to organic pleasure and intellectual exercise, the pleasures of the eye and the ear can provide a “remedy […] for many distresses” by “gently relaxing the spirits”.\textsuperscript{640} Kames clearly draws on the Addisonian salutary physiology of the “innocent pleasures” of the imagination and suggests the \emph{therapeutic value of the arts}, but it is not the point I want to make here.

Instead, I would like to point out that Kames places the engagement with the arts and the practice of criticism into a \emph{process of moral improvement} which is made possible by divine providence “in order to advance our happiness”.\textsuperscript{641} Kames argues that the “pleasures of the eye and ear have […] a \emph{natural aptitude} to draw us from the immoderate gratification of sensual appetite”, and thus they gradually prepare the mind to enjoy “internal objects where there cannot be an organic impression”,\textsuperscript{642} i.e. to enjoy

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{636} Kames, \emph{Elements}, vol. 2, 731–32.
\bibitem{637} Kames, \emph{Elements}, vol. 1, 11–12. (my italics)
\bibitem{638} Kames, \emph{Elements}, vol. 1, 12. (my italics)
\bibitem{639} See Addison, \emph{The Spectator}, no. 411.
\bibitem{640} Kames, \emph{Elements}, vol. 1, 12.
\bibitem{641} Kames, \emph{Elements}, vol. 1, 13.
\bibitem{642} Kames, \emph{Elements}, vol. 1, 13.
\end{thebibliography}
the pleasures of morality and religion. In a teleological argument, Kames continues that this progress is due to divine providence:

the author of nature, by qualifying the human mind for a succession of enjoyments from low to high, leads it by gentle steps from the most groveling corporeal pleasures, for which only it is fitted in the beginning of life, to those refined and sublime pleasures that are suited to its maturity.

It is a providential framework, but also a framework of pleasure (similarly to the frameworks of Addison or Hutcheson): both the progress and the goal of this development are defined by pleasure. Kames’s argument culminates in stating that “We stand therefore engaged in honour as well as interest, to second the purposes of nature, by cultivating the pleasures of the eye and ear”. Thus, the critical engagement with the arts turns out to be God’s assistance in the gradual transformation of the individual in order to achieve “the purposes of nature”: the science of criticism is not only subsumed to the science of man and the civilising process, but to a teleological conception of human nature in a benevolent providential design. It follows, that the Elements not only trains its reader for producing critical arguments but serves “as a manual of sorts, describing and prescribing the path ordained by God, a preparatory and revelatory guide to an aesthetic and moral vocation”.

I have pointed out earlier that the ultimate goal of the transformation through critical engagement with the arts is the improvement of social relations (obtaining stability and economic prosperity) through developing social affections. Now we see how it is grounded in a providential framework supported by Kames’s theory of perception. It means that – similarly to Addison, Hutcheson, and Burke – Kames’s aesthetic theory is built on what Charles Taylor labelled “Providential Deism”, the modern, anthropocentric understanding of the providential order (which had been formed as a consequence of the modern moral and economic order): it is an “order of

643 Keep in mind that moral and religious improvements were closely interrelated in the Scottish religious Enlightenment. For a recent discussion of this shift from doctrine to moral conduct and social virtues in the context of theology (and the problem of salvation in particular), see Thomas Ahnert, The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805 (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2014).
644 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 13.
645 Ibid. [My italics.]
646 Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 96.
mutual benefit”, in which “human life is designed so as to produce mutual benefit”, i.e. “mutual benevolence”.⁶４８ Kames was also closely linked to the group of Scottish Presbyterians called the “Moderates” (including Hugh Blair, Adam Ferguson, James Beattie or Thomas Reid), who conceived moral philosophy in terms of culture.⁶４９ Consistently, Kamesian “aesthetic culture” gradually transformed the self, following a providential design promoting human flourishing, through its sensitive-affective encounters with art and nature.

Kames’s teleological argument for the transformative potential of the experiences of art shows that one cannot fully understand the place and function attributed to the arts and the practice of criticism in the Scottish Enlightenment without considering the larger frameworks of “the science of man”, “Providential Deism” and what I earlier called “aesthetic culture”. Kames’s argument, however, is not only symptomatic of the period but it also encapsulates the character of the philosophy of an author, who “is fond of discovering everywhere a final cause on the part of God, and a progress on the part of man”.⁶５０ “Nothing, indeed, is more characteristic of Lord Kames – Hipple writes – than the regular detection of benevolent contrivance in every phenomenon”⁶５¹ – even if it meant sacrificing free human agency.⁶５２

### 4.2. Train of Ideas: Inner Senses and Association

The literature on Kames has mostly focused on his treatment of the emotions and passions but his encompassing aesthetic theory concerning certain properties cannot be properly understood without understanding his theory of perception and association embedded into a teleological conception of human nature. Therefore, the second part of the chapter is devoted to this aspect of the anthropological foundation of Kamesian

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⁶４８ Taylor, A Secular Age, 177.
⁶４９ On the “Moderates” and their complex relation to Hume and Kames, see Ahnert, The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 66–93.
⁶５０ McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, 181.
⁶５２ In his essay “Liberty and Necessity” Kames argued that not only the physical world but also human actions are determined by universal laws and final causes ordained by God, and that we act and choose only with the illusion of freedom implanted in us also by God. Kames’s argument concerning necessary agency and God as deceiver understandably generated a controversy among the Scottish clergy, which almost led to his (and Hume’s) excommunication in 1755. The motion of censure against Hume and Kames, however, did not pass in the General Assembly thanks to the Moderates. For the controversy, see McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, 176–80; Moran, Introduction, xiv–xvii; Ahnert, The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 66–93.
criticism. In the first chapter of the *Elements*, Kames seeks to lay down the universal principles of our mental operations, the laws governing the “train of perceptions and ideas”. These principles are later utilized as warrants to establish aesthetic criteria for the arts. Earlier, I have already attempted to clarify some of the terms in Kames’s direct theory of perception such as “organic impression” and “idea”, “perception” and “sensation”, pointing out that defending a direct theory of perception after the theories of Berkeley and Hume was, for Kames, an issue not only of epistemological but also of theological relevance. Now, let’s turn to the anthropological principles established in the first chapter in order to see their implications for his normative aesthetic naturalism.

Exploring these principles might also help to clarify the role of inner sense and association in Kames’s aesthetics. Kames’s position regarding inner sense and association theories (to borrow Shelley’s classification again) is far from clear: even though Kames is often associated with inner sense theories, inner senses, as Peter Kivy pointed out, actually play a relatively insignificant role in his aesthetics: “the fact is that although entirely within the moral sense tradition and indeed often cited as an example of its excesses, Kames does not adhere to the internal sense doctrine in aesthetics except in a rather offhand manner.” Kivy goes as far as stating that “For Kames, there is no ‘sense of beauty’ properly so called,” which, Kivy adds, “does not, however, mean that he rejected the entire internal sense doctrine outright. On the contrary, Kames frequently appealed to inner ‘senses’ of various kinds”. Kames took these inner senses to be natural, universal, and unanalysable, answering various purposes ordained by providential design. His frequent reference to these powers interlocks with his questionable strategy of explaining problems by reference to finality instead of efficiency. Critically evaluating Kames’s often used strategy of turning to finality when efficiency proves to be hard to explain, Hipple rightly remarks that “One of the conspicuous features of Kamesian aesthetics is the tendency to stop short in the investigation of efficient causes – usually with the postulation of a sense which is original and unanalysable – and to replace such investigation with specious indications of finality.” Kames would probably answer, that neglecting the consideration of final causes would mean neglecting the very laws of human nature: reiterating the shared preference of the century, Kames considers the urge to understand the final causes of an

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of design to be grounded in human nature: “our curiosity is always more enflamed by the final, then by the efficient cause.”

Be that as it may, even though inner senses explain everything and nothing, they make their way back to Kames’s anthropological groundwork, again and again, sometimes to help him explain away difficult problems, sometimes to further his teleological accounts. However, the inner senses will not give full access to Kames’s aesthetics. Taking another approach, Timothy M. Costelloe has recently labelled Kames “the founding father of associationist aesthetics”. But is Costelloe’s claim justified? Is it really the mental process of association that holds the key to Kames’s theory?

4.2.1. An Anatomy of the Mind

Kames proposes a model of mental operations in his first chapter, where he establishes the principles that govern the “train” or “flow” of perceptions and ideas. By “ideas” Kames means “secondary perceptions” derived from memory, representation or imagination, which ideas, similarly to Hume’s Copy Principle, resemble the original “primary perceptions” – ideas are less distinct and vivid “secondary perceptions”. This resemblance is crucial for Kames’s aesthetics since it also implies that ideas raised by art will have the same emotional impact as the ones raised by primary perceptions, with the only difference that the emotional impact of ideas is less vivid.

Perceptions and ideas, according to Kames, are always experienced as embedded in a “flow” constituted by the causal succession of other perceptions and ideas. Kames argues that no object of perception appears isolated: every object is perceived as connected to other objects through various kinds of relations. Due to these causal, spatial, temporal etc. relations our perceptions and ideas give rise to other perceptions and ideas in the mind: which is to say that the relations between objects necessarily generate a “train of perceptions and ideas”. Kames calls this the “law of succession”. The relations are responsible not only for “uniting our perceptions into one connected chain” but for composing the produced flow of perceptions into a certain order. Kames seeks to explain the orderly succession of perceptions and ideas by referring to a

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656 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 248–49.
657 Costelloe, The British Aesthetic Tradition, 96.
658 Hume formulates his famous principle concerning the relation between ideas and impressions in the Treatise as follows: “all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv’d from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent.” Hume, Treatise, 1.1.1.7, 9.
“principle of order” “implanted in the breast of every man”, which “governs the arrangement of his perceptions, of his ideas, and of his actions.”

Kames argues that the orderly succession of thoughts is universal and grounded in nature: he discerns a “natural course” of perceptions and ideas since the process of association follows the course set by the various relations, some of which (e.g. uniformity, resemblance, equality) are regarded by Kames, contrary to Hume, as objectively existing, independent of the mind. Furthermore, Kames assumes a natural hierarchy between the relations, differentiating between “intimate” and “strict” “primary” connections and “slighter” “secondary” connections: the “natural train” of perceptions will follow “the strictest connections” unless varied by will, attention, the particular tone of mind, or the specific dispositions of the faculties (judgment, memory, wit) of a given person. To put it in another way: the “natural train of ideas” is composed in consonance with the supposed order of nature, and it makes no difference whether the external object is actually present or only its ideas are raised by memory, representation or imagination: “in thinking or reflecting upon a number of objects, we naturally follow the same order as when we actually survey them”.

As Kames formulates this consonance between the principles of the human mind and that of nature:

*The principle of order* is conspicuous with respect to natural operations; for it always directs our ideas in the order of nature: thinking upon a body in motion, we follow its natural course; the mind falls with a heavy body, descends with a river, and ascends with flame and smoke: in tracing out a family, we incline to begin at the founder, and to descend gradually to his latest posterity: on the contrary, musing on a lofty oak, we begin at the trunk, and mount from it to the branches: as to historical facts, we love to proceed in the order of time; or, which comes to the same, to proceed along the chain of causes and effects.

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662 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 22.
663 “Equality, uniformity, resemblance, proximity, are relations that depend not on us, but exist whether perceived or not; and upon that account may properly be termed primary relations. Propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity, are perceptions of an internal sense, having no existence in the objects perceived.” Kames, “External Senses”, 156.
666 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 25. (my italics)
Kames proceeds with an argument, which proves to be crucial for the anthropological groundwork of his aesthetic theory:

It now appears that we are framed by nature to *relish order and connection*. When an object is introduced by *a proper connection*, we are conscious of a certain pleasure arising from that circumstance.\(^667\)

Kames’s statement – which, again, evokes the notion of the (inner) sense of order operating in consonance with providential design, and which, incidentally, encapsulates the *aesthetic* core of the moral and social philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment – clearly suggests that the aesthetic is not located in certain properties but rather in the relations of things. More importantly, the pleasure is felt upon the orderly (natural) succession of our perceptions and ideas – an order, which, as we have seen, is in consonance with the order of nature. That is, our (aesthetic) sense of order is in consonance with the order of nature. Paul Guyer has recently argued that Kames’s argument makes his theory a version of what Guyer calls the “play theory” since it suggests that “we take pleasure in the sheer experience of order and connection”\(^668\) regardless of any other content or value of that experience.

After exploring the implication of Kames’s theory of mental operations to aesthetic experience, let us now return to the question of the role of internal senses and association in his theory. So far we have seen that even though internal senses are present as natural and unanalyzable faculties, they are in themselves insufficient to explain aesthetic experiences. Instead, it is the mental operation of association that serves as a framework. However, calling Kames’s aesthetics “associationist” might be misleading as well. First, both the orderly succession of perceptions and the pleasure felt upon it are explained in terms of the (internal) sense of order. Even if there are types of aesthetic experience (e.g. the appreciation of the beautiful),\(^669\) which are not explained in terms of an inner sense, at least in some cases (e.g. the appreciation of order and uniformity of variety) Kames argues for the involvement of an inner sense which is triggered by the orderly flow of perception. Second, Kames rejects Hume’s criticism of causality and argues for a natural course of perceptions determined by

\(^{667}\) Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 26. (my italics)


\(^{669}\) See Kivy, *The Seventh Sense*, 234.
certain hierarchically arranged connections independent of and prior to experience. Neither our perception nor our train of thoughts is accidental or arbitrary – they are determined by the order of nature. Kames’s aesthetics leaves little room for freedom, similarly to his doctrine of necessity concerning human action.

Association, however, does contribute to the pleasure felt upon the orderly succession of perceptions and ideas. Later in the Elements, when discussing the operations of emotions and passions, Kames points out that our pleasure felt upon such natural trains of perceptions may not only produced by the sense of order but also by acts of association. The pleasure accompanying the various perceptions of the trains may be conveyed to other perceptions through their relations: “an agreeable object makes every thing connected with it appear agreeable; for the mind gliding sweetly and easily through related objects, carries along the agreeable properties it meets with in its passage, and bestows them on the present object, which thereby appears more agreeable than when considered apart.”670 Aesthetic value, again, is defined in terms of relations, but this time by reference to acts of association. To conclude, Kames seems to search for a middle path by explaining the aesthetic in terms of associative mental processes (the law of succession, emotional association) while also installing various inner senses to further his teleological arguments or explain away difficult problems.

After having established the principles of mental operations, Kames utilizes his anthropological principles to establish principles for art criticism:

Every work of art that is conformable to the natural course of our ideas, is so far agreeable; and every work of art that reverses that course, is so far disagreeable. Hence it is required in every such work, that, like an organic system, its parts be orderly arranged and mutually connected, bearing each of them a relation to the whole, some more intimate, some less, according to their destination: when due regard is had to these particulars, we have a sense of just composition, and so far are pleased with the performance.671

Paul Guyer aptly summarized Kames’s anthropologically grounded argument when he wrote that “his view is that art pleases insofar as it creates the same kind of orderly flow

671 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 27.
of perceptions and ideas as the experience of nature does. His model of mental processes led Kames to rethink the classicist notion of uniformity amidst variety in terms of proper relations of parts producing an orderly succession of ideas that mimic the experience of nature. Kames utilizes his view to defend his neo-classicist taste and even to scorn the declining taste of his contemporaries, who, by celebrating “profuse ornament” and “artificial refinements” in art and manners, lose sight of the “enchanting effect” of “simplicity”: the “crowdedness” and “luxury” of the modern age are symptoms of decline as far as they destroy simple, natural, orderly arrangements produced by proper relations.

4.2.3. The Three Orders of Beauty

“Uniformity of variety” is, however, far from being central in Kames’s aesthetics. It is only one among the many constituents that make up Kames’s complex concept of beauty – uniformity of variety is mentioned among the properties that contribute to the beauty of figure. Even though the quality of beauty is “the most noted of all the qualities that belong to single objects”, it is discussed in a relatively short chapter in the Elements. The overall significance of beauty seems to be far less than that of moral emotions in Kames’s criticism, which is not surprising given that it conceives art as part of “moral culture” and the passions and emotions as incentives to action. Nevertheless, Kames presents a complex theory of beauty in the Elements, already worked out in his earlier essays. In order to understand his teleological account in its complexity, I will draw on Kames’s earlier essays such as the “Foundation and Principles of Morality” and “External Senses” and focus on two principal themes: the beauty of utility and, more importantly, the teleological arguments concerning the perception of the beauty of colour. As we will see, Kames’s theory of beauty brings together several threads of the earlier theories of Addison, Hutcheson or Hume, it also offers some novel arguments placed within a strong teleological conception of human nature that accommodates every single phenomenon as a contribution to individual and social flourishing.

In the chapter dedicated to beauty, Kames starts by stating that the term properly understood should be confined to the pleasure raised by the objects of sight: “objects of

673 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 147.
674 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 141.
675 Kames’s normative naturalism is reflected in the fact that in the 1751 and 1758 editions of his Essays, this essay is titled “Of the Foundation and Principles of the Law of Nature”. See the “Appendix”, in Kames, Essays, 238.
the other senses may be agreeable […]; but the agreeableness denominated beauty belongs to objects of sight." After clarifying the object of his inquiry, Kames emphasizes the complexity of the perceptions of beauty due to the complexity of the objects of sight themselves. Each part of an object has a beauty of its own (the particular beauty of colour, size, figure, and motion), which are then “united” “striking the eye with a combined force”. However, Kames adds that “the various emotions of beauty maintain one common character, that of sweetness and gaiety.” This initial statement clearly suggests that Kames – in a Humean manner – conceives beauty as a visual perception that occasions a definable set of emotions. At the end of the chapter, Kames returns to the problem of localizing beauty in the interaction between certain attributes of an object and a sensitive being, i.e. one possessing an aesthetic apparatus. Based on the entrenched distinction between primary and secondary qualities (the latter understood by Kames as “effects caused by […] bodies in a sensitive being”, having “no existence but in the mind of the spectator”), Kames asks whether beauty can be conceived as a secondary quality. The question, in this form, is too general for Kames since there are several kinds of beauty and thus the answer has to be specified.

In the Elements, Kames distinguishes two kinds of beauty: intrinsic and relative. Though it might seem that he borrows Hutcheson’s distinction between absolute and relative beauty (which, as we have seen, goes back to Addison’s distinction between the primary and secondary pleasures of the imagination), Kames’s distinction is based on a different foundation. For him, “intrinsic beauty […] is discovered in a single object viewed apart without relation to any other”, which means that the pleasure of intrinsic beauty is produced only by the visual perception of certain attributes without any further act of reflection: the intrinsic beauty of a river or an oak tree “is an object of sense merely”. In contradistinction, relative beauty – even though often “intimately connected” with the intrinsic kind – is “founded on the relation of objects”, which means that the “perception of relative beauty is accompanied with an act of

676 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 142.
677 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 142.
678 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 142. (my italics)
679 In his Treatise, Hume defines aesthetic qualities in terms of pleasurable and painful emotions: “beauty of all kinds gives us a peculiar delight and satisfaction; as deformity produces pain […] Pleasure and pain, therefore, are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity, but constitute their very essence.” Hume, Treatise, 2.1.8., 195.
680 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 148.
682 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 142.
683 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 142.
understanding and reflection”. Appreciating the beauty of an engine (to use Kames’s example) involves reflecting on how the object, with its various parts and their arrangement, relates to its “use and destination”. Depending on certain attributes of the object, “intrinsic beauty is ultimate”, while “relative beauty is that of means relating to some good end or purpose”. Thus, while relative beauty, for Hutcheson, meant the pleasure raised by the apprehension of a successful imitation “or a kind of Unity between the Original and the Copy”, relative beauty for Kames is a wider concept – it is simply the beauty of utility.

Nevertheless, Kames believes that both kinds of experience of beauty support the view that beauty can be conceived of as a secondary quality. Whether one defines beauty by reference to sense perception as in the case of the beauty of colour or by reference to reflection as in the case of the beauty of utility, beauty – as a secondary quality or as a “conception of the mind” – turns out to be the product of the aesthetic engagement with the object: “beauty, in its very conception, refers to a percipient; […] its existence depends on the percipient as much as on the object perceived, [and thus it] cannot be an inherent property in either.” On the one hand, note that Kames, unlike Hutcheson, argues for the involvement of reflection in aesthetic experience. On the other hand, note that Kames, just like Hutcheson, is quite careful to keep the objective criteria of beauty as well by pointing out certain definable attributes that excite aesthetic response. In the case of the intrinsic beauty of figures, these attributes are, not surprisingly, regularity and simplicity when one perceives a figure as a whole, and uniformity, proportion and order when one perceives the relations among its various parts.

When it comes to the discussion of the grand and the sublime, Kames’s argument is different than in the case of beauty, however, the goal is clearly the same, i.e. to define the sublime and the grand in terms of specific emotional qualities, but also keep a definable set of attributes in the object. In connection with the grand and the

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684 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 143. Peter Kivy accurately summarizes the Kamesian model of the pleasure of beauty in the following way: “whereas the perception of intrinsic beauty involves but two mental acts, (i) an act of perception by which the external object is brought to consciousness and (ii) an act of sensation by which the feeling of intrinsic beauty is experienced; the perception of relative beauty requires three mental acts, (i) an act of perception by which the object is brought to consciousness, (ii) an act of understanding by which the relation of means to ends is discovered, and (iii) an act of sensation by which the feeling of relative beauty is experienced.” Kivy, The Seventh Sense, 234.

685 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 143.


687 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 148–49.

688 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 143–44.
sublime, Kames writes that they have “a double signification: they commonly signify the quality or circumstance in objects by which the emotions of grandeur and sublimity are produced; sometimes the emotions themselves.” Kames’s strategy of “double signification” can be considered as an early contribution to the aesthetics of the Common Sense School, as a reaction against the epistemological scepticism of Hume or Berkeley.

But let’s return for a moment to Kames’s treatment of the beauty of utility. We often forget that in spite of the famous arguments proposed by Hutcheson and Burke for the exclusion of utility from the necessary conditions of beauty, the debate about the relation between beauty and utility was far from over in the mid-eighteenth century – it excited thinkers such as Berkeley or Hume and remained an intricate problem even for Kant’s Third Critique. But what exactly is Kames’s position in this debate?

Berkeley, refusing Hutcheson’s conclusions, argued for the significance of utility in his Alciphron of 1732. The proportions of a certain object, Berkeley writes, seem to us just or beautiful, only if the object is “perfect in its kind”, i.e. if it “answers the ends for which it was made […] The parts, therefore, in true proportions must be so related, and adjusted to one another, as that they may best conspire to the use and operation of the whole?” And since comparing the parts of an object and relating them to the whole and to an end are operations of reason, “beauty is […] an object, not of the eye, but of the mind.” I have argued in the third chapter, that beauty is not an object of mere sensory response but “an object of the mind” in Hutcheson’s aesthetics as well, but not because of the involvement of the operations of reflexive reason as suggested by Berkeley – or Kames, for that matter. Kames would not only agree with Berkeley that the appreciation of an object with a discernible destination is rooted in great measure in our understanding of how it serves that destination, but also that the object of this appreciation is justly labelled beauty – a proposition strictly rebutted by Hutcheson or Burke, both of whom argued that the appreciation of utility or fitness is a

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689 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 151. [My italics.]
“distinct rational pleasure”\textsuperscript{694} that has nothing to do with the pleasure of beauty. As we have seen, Kames clearly considers the urge to understand the final cause of an object of design an anthropological given of the human mind.\textsuperscript{695} which view also implies that the consideration of the fitness of means to these ends cannot be neglected when establishing the principles of aesthetic experience.

However, Kames’s position is closer to that of his cousin, David Hume. Both of them attempt to find a middle way by distinguishing two varieties of beauty – one produced by the apprehension of utility and one that is independent of it.\textsuperscript{696} It seems obvious, Hume writes, that “The order and convenience of a palace are no less essential to its beauty than its mere figure and appearance.”\textsuperscript{697} The reason behind Hume’s decision to consider both kinds of beauty as belonging to the same genus is his questionable assumption that the pleasure they evoke is the same (or at least very similar): “All the sentiments of approbation, which attend any particular species of objects, have a great resemblance to each other, tho’ deriv’d from different sources […]. Thus the beauty of all visible objects causes a pleasure pretty much the same, tho’ it be sometimes deriv’d from the mere species and appearance of the objects; sometimes from sympathy, and an idea of their utility.”\textsuperscript{698} But as Paul Guyer points out, it is only in principle that Hume treats the beauty of figure and the beauty of utility as equally significant classes: Hume is quite clear that the beauty of utility prevails in most cases of beauty: “Most of the works of art are esteem’d beautiful, in proportion to their fitness for the use of man, and even many of the productions of nature derive their beauty from that source. Handsome and beautiful, on most occasions, is not an absolute but a relative quality, and pleases us by nothing but its tendency to produce an end that is agreeable”.\textsuperscript{699}

As we have seen, Kames follows Hume in arguing for a common emotional response to all varieties of beauty, and in distinguishing the beauty of figure or colour (intrinsic) and the beauty of utility (relative) – beauty as an object of sight and as an object of reflection. However, while Hume argues for the numerical prevalence of the beauty of utility in our lives, Kames sets up a hierarchy among the three “ranks” or “orders” of beauty, in which he attributes a higher place to relative beauty. Kames

\textsuperscript{694} Hutcheson, “Treatise I”, I.I.XIII., 25. 
\textsuperscript{695} Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 248–49. 
\textsuperscript{696} For Hume’s take on the beauty of utility, see Guyer, “Beauty and Utility”, 115–18. 
\textsuperscript{697} Hume, Treatise, 2.1.8., 195. 
\textsuperscript{698} Hume, Treatise, 3.3.6., 393. 
\textsuperscript{699} Hume, Treatise, 3.3.1., 368–69, quoted in Guyer, “Beauty and Utility”, 116.
proposes his hierarchical classification in his essay entitled “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, where he explicitly writes that “Objects considered simply as existing, without relation to any end or any designing agent [i.e. objects having only intrinsic beauty], are in the lowest rank or order with respect to beauty”. The lowest order of intrinsic beauty is followed by “works of art and design” that “are considered with relation to some end”. Artworks, for Kames, just like for Hume, are beautiful because of their utility. In these cases, “we feel a higher degree of pleasure or pain”, since “a building regular in all its parts, pleases the eye upon the very first view: but considered as a house for dwelling in, which is the end purposed, it pleases still more, supposing it to be well fitted to its end.” In the case of architecture, understanding the end and how the design of the object serves that end is quite simple. But understanding the end and utility of a given work of literature or painting seems to be more complicated: it requires interpretation. Before Kames, it was Hume who argued that the proper experience of an artwork (as a mean of communication) – one that involves the comprehension of its meaning and appreciation of its value – presupposes interpretation, “the active involvement of the mind” beyond the engagement of the senses and the emotions to understand the end (the intention) of the work. Similarly, Kames thinks that recognizing the beauty of human action often presupposes our knowledge of the intention, but “as intention, a capital circumstance in human actions, is not visible, it requires reflection to discover their true character.” Arguably, it is the same in the case of the products of intentional human actions, “works of art or design”, and it may be one of the reasons why Kames attributes such a crucial role to criticism as a science that can improve one’s interpretive skills: the critic is a better judge because (s)he can discover beauties that others cannot – beauties that require interpretation, the apprehension of intention, i.e. the “use or destination” of the work of art.

We have thus seen that Kames attributes a higher rank to the beauty of utility among the ranks of beauty. The reason behind this is probably his assumption that intrinsic beauty is merely a pleasurable sense perception, while the perception of relative beauty “is produced not barely by a sight of the object, but by viewing the

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700 Kames, “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, in Kames, Essays, 26.
701 Ibid., 27.
703 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 34.
704 For a slightly different argument concerning this point, see Peter Jones, Introduction to Kames, Elements, vol. 1, xv.
object as fitted to some use, and as related to some end”. Kames continues to argue that since reflection contributes to the perception of relative beauty, these perceptions include a specific pleasure what he calls “approbation” that is missing from the lowest class of beauty:

 approbation, when applied to works of art, means our being pleased with them or conceiving them beautiful, in the view of being fitted to their end. Approbation and disapprobation are not applicable to the lowest class of beautiful and ugly objects. To say, that we approve a sweet taste, or a flowing river, is really saying no more but that we are pleased with such objects. But the term is justly applied to works of art, because it means more than being pleased with such an object merely as existing. It imports a peculiar beauty, which is perceived, upon considering the object as fitted to the use intended.

It might seem that the term “approbation” – the appreciation of utility – involves moral judgment concerning the end, but Kames quickly points out that the perception of relative beauty can arise solely “from considering its fitness to the end purposed, whatever that end be.” Does it mean that Kames leaves the door open for arguing for the beauty of immoral artworks? Needless to say, Kames quickly adds that when the end in itself proves to be worthy of our approbation “there is discovered a beauty or ugliness of a higher kind than the two former. A beneficial end strikes us with a peculiar pleasure; and approbation belongs also to this feeling.” Unfortunately, he does not offer examples from the fine arts, only the beauty of a ship designed to promote commerce and, through commerce, individual and social flourishing. Kames concludes his brief survey of “the three orders of beauty” by saying that “Considered with respect to its end, the degree of [an object’s] beauty depends on the degree of its usefulness” and that “as the end or use of a thing is an object of greater dignity and importance than the means, the approbation bestowed on the former rises higher than that bestowed on the latter.” At his point, it seems that Kames dissolves the appreciation of beauty into

705 Kames, “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, 27. This has also been pointed out by Kivy: “The higher rank of relative beauty is explained by the fact that it is, in the fullest degree, an intellectual perception.” Kivy, The Seventh Sense, 234.
706 Kames, “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, 27. (my italics added)
707 Kames, “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, 27.
708 Kames, “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, 27.
the “approbation” of fitness and that the aesthetic is engulfed by the consideration of means and ends.

4.2.3. The Teleology of the Beautiful

The three hierarchical orders of beauty serve in Kames’s essay as stepping stones for the introduction of the concept of moral beauty, and through that concept the discussion of the operation of the moral sense or conscience. Nevertheless, Kames’s three-level theory of beauty is integrated into an even wider framework – the framework of theology. In his essay called “Knowledge of the Deity”, Kames argues against Clarke’s a priori argument for the existence of God emphasizing that the “Deity hath not left his existence to be gathered from slippery and far-fetched arguments.” “Human reason – Kames writes echoing Hume – is commonly overvalued by philosophers.” Even though he admits that reason can help us understanding final causes and recognize how wisdom and goodness are present in the world, Kames objects that “the application of the argument from final causes to prove the existence of a Deity, and the force of our conclusion from beautiful and orderly effects to a designing cause, are not from reason”. Instead, Kames attributes them to “an internal light, which shows things in their relation of cause and effect”, and concludes that “These conclusions rest entirely upon sense”. By “internal light”, Kames probably thinks of the supposedly natural mechanism of the human mind: whenever “contrivance” or “usefulness” is discovered in the effect, the human mind necessarily infers that they are products of a designing mind and attributes the properties of the effect to the cause through association. That is, Kames adheres to the time-worn teleological argument (dismantled by his cousin in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion) exploiting associationist psychology.

Instead of a priori arguments for the existence of God, “We need but open our eyes, to receive impressions of him almost from every thing we perceive.” However,

710 Conscience (after Joseph Butler) is defined as “a direct perception, which we have upon presenting the object, without the intervention of any sort of reflection”. However, contrary to Hutcheson, the primary object of the moral sense is not acts of benevolence but acts of justice, which satisfy the moral duties and obligations: “we perceive the action to be our duty, and what we are indispensably bound to perform.” Through the notions of moral duty and obligation, it was Kames’s goal to place morality upon a more solid foundation, that of natural law, and to defend justice (distinct from benevolence) as a primary and natural virtue against the Humean historicist approach. See Ibid., 32–36., quotations from 34. Also see Moran, Introduction, xiii–xiv.

711 Kames, “Knowledge of the Deity”, in Essays, 207.

712 Kames, “Knowledge of the Deity”, 212.

713 Kames, “Knowledge of the Deity”, 212.

714 Kames, “Knowledge of the Deity”, 207.
given that recognizing “contrivance” or “usefulness” involves reflection, merely “opening our eyes” turns out to be insufficient to discover God in his works. Or, in other words, intrinsic beauty cannot open our eyes to divine creation, only the relative beauty of utility functions as a proof of God and as a discovery of the divine attributes of power, wisdom and goodness, because only the second and third classes of beauty involve the recognition and appreciation of the fitness of means to an end. Kames sums up this view when he writes that “the Deity cannot be long hid from those who are accustomed to any degree of reflection. No sooner are we prepared to relish beauties of; no sooner do we acquire a taste for regularity, order, design, and good purpose, than we begin to perceive the Deity in the beauty of the operations of nature.”

Besides the claim that only aesthetic experiences involving reflection have such spiritual relevance, Kames also proposes that a cultivated taste is a necessary condition of recognizing and appreciating the work of God. Granted that “taste for order and regularity unfolds itself by degrees” through the disciplining processes of society, it is the “disciplined”, “improved state” of civilized sociability, in which “the beauty of the creation makes a strong impression; and we can never cease admiring the excellency of that Cause, who is the author of so many beautiful effects.”

We have seen that Kames takes beauty to be a pleasurable perception of a sensible being, but he nevertheless emphasizes that both the intrinsic and relative kinds of beauty “are equally perceived as belonging to the object”. In the case of the beauty of utility, it is easily explained with the mechanism of the association of ideas: “the beauty of the effect, by an easy transition of ideas, is transferred to the cause; and is perceived as one of the qualities of the cause.” Due to association, even “a subject void of intrinsic beauty”, such as a Gothic tower, may appear “beautiful from its utility”. Again, the beauty of utility proves to prevail over the intrinsic beauty of figure or colour.

In the case of intrinsic beauty, however, the psychological fact that we perceive beauty as if it was an inherent property of objects is harder to explain – as if “by an illusion of nature” some perceptions of the mind “are placed upon external objects”. Characteristically, Kames turns to a teleological explanation: he argues that this is a

715 Kames, “Knowledge of the Deity”, 207.
716 Kames, “Knowledge of the Deity”, 208.
717 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 143. (my italics)
718 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 143.
719 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 143.
720 Kames, “External Senses”, 155.
“singular determination of nature” and “when nature to fulfil her intention prefers any singular method of operation, we may be certain of some final cause that cannot be reached by ordinary means.” Kames already touched this problem in his essay “External Senses”, where he also proposes this age-old argument for final causes: “Nature never goes out of the direct road in vain. This illusion must be contrived for some valuable purpose that cannot be obtained in the direct road.” Similarly, Kames chooses to focus on final instead of efficient causes when he faces the problem of why certain properties evoke aesthetic pleasure: “To inquire why an object, by means of the particulars mentioned [i.e. regularity, simplicity, uniformity, proportion, order], appears beautiful, would, I am afraid, be a vain attempt: it seems the most probable opinion, that the nature of man was originally framed with a relish for them, in order to answer wise and good purposes.” Bracketing the entire eighteenth-century British aesthetic discourse built on the groundwork of “Providential Deism”, Kames then adds that “To explain these purposes or final causes, tho’ a subject of great importance, has scarce been attempted by any writer”. This bold (and false) statement is then followed by Kames’s own account teleological account of the aesthetic, which are, however, echo the teleological accounts of Addison and Hutcheson. Hipple even writes that they had become “truisms” by the time of the publication of the Elements. However, even though Kames’s teleological accounts are not entirely original and not as subtle as the ones proposed for instance by Hutcheson, some of his arguments are original and it is important to see their significance in his philosophy.

Kames proposes his versions of each of the three main teleological accounts of the aesthetic: the well-being argument, the apprehension argument, and the social cohesion argument. As for the well-being argument, Kames’s argument is not original:

One thing is evident, that our relish for the particulars mentioned, adds much beauty to the objects that surround us; which of course tends to our happiness:

721 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 149. (my italics)
722 Kames, “External Senses”, 155.
723 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 144–45. (my italics)
724 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 145.
725 Kames’s final causes, Hipple argues, “prove to be truisms: beauty is an aid to apprehension; it adds to the delight of life; the determination of our nature to see it as objective attaches us to external objects and promotes society.” Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque, 109.
726 For Hutcheson’s subtle arguments concerning the interlocking final causes of the internal sense of beauty (comprehension, well-being, prudence) and his conclusion that both the constitution of our internal sense and the “vast Theatre” of Creation prove the “sagacious Bounty” of God, see Hutcheson, “Treatise I,” I.VIII.II–III., 79–82.
and the Author of our nature has given many signal proofs, that this final cause is not below his care. We may be confirmed in this thought upon reflecting, that our taste for these particulars is not accidental, but uniform and universal, making a branch of our nature.\footnote{Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 145.}

In his essay on the external senses, Kames already proposed the well-being account in an argument that is clearly indebted to Addison (no. 413): “Consider what would be the face of nature did we perceive nothing around us but bodies and their primary qualities as they really exist, without any notion of what are termed secondary qualities.”\footnote{Kames, “External Senses”, 155.} Kames even borrows Addison’s trope of “enchantment”: “We are placed as in a fairy land full of enchantments. Behold that flower-parterre, insipid in itself and void of ornament, yet cloathed apparently with splendid colours, in perfect harmony! […] Yet all this beauty of colour is a mere illusion, a sort of enchantment.”\footnote{Kames, “External Senses”, 156.} Just like Addison, Kames here talks about the beauty felt upon the perception of secondary qualities like colours or sounds. However, while Addison argues for the final cause of our ability to perceive secondary qualities (and their beauty), Kames focuses on the final cause of the psychological fact that the mind perceives these qualities as if they were properties of the objects.

At this point, Kames’s well-being argument merges with his more original version of the social cohesion argument: “were this delusive curtain withdrawn, men, finding no pleasure but within, would be entirely occupied with internal objects, without paying any regard to their external causes. Society would be greatly relaxed, and selfish passions would prevail without any antagonist.”\footnote{Kames, “External Senses”, 156.} Due to the tendency of the mind to attribute the beauty of colours and sounds to external objects, while, in fact, they are only perceptions of the mind, we are attracted, influenced, and entertained by the world around us. This particular configuration of our aesthetic apparatus turns and connects us to the surrounding world: “this illusion is the cement of society, connecting men and things together in an amiable union.”\footnote{Kames, “External Senses”, 156.} The same holds for the pleasure of those relations which are mind-dependent (e.g. propriety or congruity) but perceived as belonging to the objects perceived. The (moderate) pleasure raised by “external beauty”,
in short, “concurs in an eminent degree with mental qualifications, to produce social intercourse, mutual goodwill, and consequently mutual aid and support, which are the life of society.”

Thirdly, Kames proposes his version of the apprehension argument, even if it is less refined than Hutcheson’s original in the Inquiry:

At the same time it ought not to be overlooked, that regularity, uniformity, order, and simplicity, contribute each of them to readiness of apprehension; enabling us to form more distinct images of objects, than can be done with the utmost attention where these particulars are not found.”

In spite of his original statement that beauty proper should be confined to visual pleasures, Kames analyzes many examples of beauty “as a figurative expression”. He even discusses the Hutchesonian themes of the beauty of theorems and that of general laws. Kames seemingly deviates from Hutcheson’s account insofar he attributes their beauty to simplicity, not uniformity amidst variety. But a closer look reveals that he basically reiterates Hutcheson’s argument that the beauty of theorems and natural laws consist in their capacity to create an “Agreement, or Unity of an Infinity of Objects”.

“General theorems” – Kames writes – “abstracting from their importance, are delightful by their simplicity, and by the easiness of their application to variety of cases. We take equal delight in the laws of motion, which, with the greatest simplicity, are boundless in their operations.” It is, after all, uniformity amidst variety and not simplicity that explains their beauty.

So far, after analysing how Kames lays down the anthropological foundations concerning mental operations, which were, as I pointed out, already filled with concerns of finality, I have reconstructed Kames’s versions of the well-being argument, the social cohesion argument, and the apprehension argument, and argued that even if his versions echo the ones proposed by Addison and Hutcheson, there are some novel arguments. Next, I would like to focus on Kames’s theory of emotions and passions with special attention to his treatment of the problem of tragedy, not only because they are of crucial

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732 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 149.
733 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 145.
735 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 147.
importance in his overall aesthetic theory and art criticism, but because Kames’s original arguments for the final causes of aesthetic experience are hidden there.

4.3. Emotions and Passions

As creatures endowed with sensibility, our interaction with the surrounding world is necessarily qualitative: we respond with pleasant or painful feelings to the objects we perceive. “We are not so constituted” – Kames writes – “as to perceive objects with indifference: these, with very few exceptions, appear agreeable or disagreeable; and at the same time raise in us pleasant or painful emotions.” To be more precise, Kames argues that the objects we perceive through sight or hearing appear either agreeable or disagreeable, which terms refer to qualities of the objects of perception. The perceptions of agreeableness and disagreeableness are accompanied by feelings of pleasure or pain, which are, in contrast, qualities of the felt emotions or passions. In short, “the pleasant emotion is felt as within the mind; the agreeableness of the object is placed upon the object, and is perceived as one of its qualities or properties.” Thus, Kames offers his reader “a very simple proposition”: “we love what is agreeable and hate what is disagreeable”. Pleasant or painful emotions and passions are instantaneously felt upon the perceptions of external (e.g. size, force, regularity) and internal (e.g. power, courage, benevolence) properties that are naturally agreeable or disagreeable. Note, that Kames does not connect agreeable perceptions exclusively to pleasant emotions, or disagreeable perceptions exclusively to painful emotions. When our emotions become reflectively the objects of perceptions, even painful emotions such as sympathy or pity can be perceived as agreeable, which is crucial for Kames’s argument concerning our seemingly self-contradictory tendency to be attracted to painful social emotions.

4.3.1. An Anatomy of Affectivity

The most important of the many differentiations Kames introduces into his theory of affections is the distinction between emotions and passions. Kames argues that we can

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738 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 34.
739 See Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 78–79. This significant aspect has been pointed out by Zuckert in her “Kames’s Naturalist Aesthetics”, 153.ff.
distinguish between the two kinds of affective response even though they cannot be differentiated on a phenomenological level. The difference is simply based on the absence or presence of desire: “[a]n internal motion or agitation of the mind, when it passeth away without desire, is denominated an emotion: when desire follows, the motion or agitation is denominated a passion.”740 Kames draws on the entrenched conviction that desire is the “internal act, which, by influencing the will, makes us proceed to action”, 741 which implies that only passions prompt us to act in order to satisfy our selfish, social or “dissocial” desires. In this sense, Kames shares Hume’s conviction that it is the sentiments that govern human action. However, contrary to Hume,742 Kames argues that albeit these affections are non-cognitive (although he maintains that there are “deliberative passions” originated in reflexion), they are in no way irrational: our affections are consistent not only with common sense but with a benevolent providential design as well.

Contrary to passions, emotions, “being without desire, are in their nature quiescent”.743 Such “quiescent”, “passive feelings” are raised upon looking at a “beautiful garden, a magnificent building, or a number of fine faces in a crowded assembly” or “a capital picture in the possession of a prince”. In contrast, the pleasant emotion raised by a beautiful painting on sale involves the desire for its possession.744 The latter examples clearly suggest that Kames acknowledges the significant role the contingent circumstances or environments in aesthetic experience. More importantly, however, they also show that Kames does not exclude desires, and, therefore, passions from aesthetic experiences. Kames, as Paul Guyer has pointed out,745 does not argue for disinterested aesthetic emotions as opposed to passions involving desire. On the contrary, it is crucial for Kames to prove that artworks can and should raise certain passions, which involve desires that can contribute to moral self-cultivation and social cohesion. Next, I will focus on how Kames seeks to prove this transformative potential of the aesthetic.

As a crucial step, Kames introduces the notion of “sympathetic emotion of virtue”, a unique feeling, which accompanies our perceptions of virtuous actions.

740 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 37.
741 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 37.
742 I am referring here to Hume’s rejection of teleological explanations and do not suggest that Hume considers sentiments irrational. See Dabney Townsend, Hume’s Aesthetic Theory. Taste and Sentiment (London – New York: Routledge, 2001), 121. ff.
743 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 38. (my italics)
744 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 36.
Kames argues that witnessing virtuous acts raise in us a “separate feeling” besides the usual emotions like gratitude, admiration or veneration. This additional feeling can be justly called a “sympathetic emotion of virtue” because it disposes us to virtuous action. For instance, I not only feel veneration towards a person who did something heroic but I also feel “an unusual dignity of character” disposing me to “great and noble actions”.  

In short, acts of virtue transform our dispositions and raise in us the desire to mimic virtuous acts without directing that desire to any specific object. Similarly, Kames grasps the emotional impact of absolute music in terms of this specific emotion: melancholic music, for instance, evokes the feelings of grief or pity without directing them to a specific object. As these examples illustrate, the sympathetic emotion of virtue has a unique status in Kames’s taxonomy of affections: it involves desire but it is not a passion since it does not have a proper object. Contrary to passions, it only “longs for proper objects upon which to exert this emotion”. It resembles what Kames calls “appetites”, i.e. passions with desire directed to “general objects” such as esteem or fame. Kames considers this feeling “an incitement to virtue”, which is programmed into human nature in order to pursue us to follow the examples set by acts of virtue:

We approve every virtuous action, and bestow our affection on the author; but if virtuous actions produced no other effect upon us, good example would not have great influence: the sympathetic emotion under consideration bestows upon good example the utmost influence, by prompting us to imitate what we admire.

The idea encapsulated in Kames’s notion of the “sympathetic emotion of virtue” is that we respond to virtuous acts with a desire to imitate such acts. This idea is already present in Hutcheson’s moral psychology: acts of virtue such as generosity or humanity trigger our moral sense and, therefore, “excite our Admiration, and Love, and Study of Imitation, wherever we see them, almost at first View, without any such Reflection”. Analysing Hutcheson’s enumeration of immediate responses to virtue, Alexander Broadie has recently pointed out that both the Latin ’studium’ and the eighteenth-

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746 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 50.  
747 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 49.  
748 The objects of our passions – the objects desire may be directed to – can be of two sorts: particular and general objects. Kames calls the passions directed to general objects “appetites” and argues that they can precede the objects, while passions are necessarily dependent upon the presence of a particular object. See Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 38.  
749 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 51. (my italics)  
750 Hutcheson, “Treatise II”, II.I.IV., 94. (my italics)
century English ‘study’ incorporated the meanings of ‘zeal’ and ‘enthusiasm’. Thus, the Hutchesonian term of “study of imitation” refers to his view that “By our nature we respond to a generous or humane act not only, as Hutcheson says, with admiration and love, but also with a ‘study of imitation’, that is, an enthusiastic desire to imitate such behaviour.” For Hutcheson, there is, so to speak, an aesthetic appeal of acts of benevolence, which also explains his commitment to the conception of the moral philosopher as a painter, whose “verbal paintings” – through the “bright, lively, ingratiating and seductive account of the virtues, and the darkly hued, sinister, threatening and disturbing account of the vices” function as moral motivation.

Similarly to Hutcheson’s “study of imitation”, Kames’s sympathetic emotion of virtue involves desire to imitate the admired virtue. These affective experiences, however, not only prompt us to develop our moral character, but they also function, as Kames says, as “exercises of virtue”: “virtuous emotions of that sort, are in some degree an exercise of virtue”. The mental exercise model is based on the Aristotelian idea that exercising the proper feelings is an integral part of a virtuous act, or, rather, that virtue consists in exercising the proper feelings habitually. In accordance with the ancient insight of virtue ethics, Kames suggests that “every exercise of virtue, internal and external, leads to habit; for a disposition or propensity of the mind, like a limb of the body, becomes stronger by exercise.” These affective exercises of virtue, in other words, contribute to the affective-aesthetic transformation of one’s overall moral character from the inside, inscribing, through “constant exercise”, “the authority of virtue” unto the visceral responses of the aesthetic apparatus.

If one’s moral culture is bound to exercising the moral emotions, it becomes an urging question what can offer such exercises. Beside “intercourse with men of worth”, Kames mentions “histories of generous and disinterested actions” and points out the importance of “frequent meditation upon them”. But what kinds of “histories” are these? Is it possible for fictional stories to function as exercises of virtue? A positive answer to this question would imply that fiction is able to evoke a sympathetic

752 Ibid., 14.
753 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 51.
755 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 51.
756 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 51.
757 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 51.
engagement. It follows that we must answer a more fundamental question as well: how can fiction engage our emotions and passions at all?

Before reconstructing Kames’s answer, however, let’s clarify the Kamesian notion of sympathetic engagement. Kames uses sympathy in the narrow sense of pity or compassion as well as in the broad sense of “communication of joys and sorrows, hopes and fears”.758 Adopting this broad sense of sympathy, Kames clearly follows Hume and Smith, but, as Zuckert has emphasized, his notion of sympathy also differs from theirs: instead of being an imaginative identification with someone else’s emotional state, Kamesian sympathy is rather “the propensity to feel for another as other.” It is, more generally, “the human propensity to take an emotionally charged interest in the actions and fortunes of others, affectively to wish them well-being and success.”759 I would also add that Kames’s own conception of the sympathetic emotion of virtue makes his notion of sympathy even more complex and unique, and one must keep in mind how multifaceted his notion is when discussing the sympathetic engagement with the arts.

4.3.2. Ideal Presence

As I have mentioned earlier, Kames explicitly states that not only primary but also secondary perceptions, i.e. ideas of memory, representation and imagination are productive of emotions and passions. The emotional responses produced by ideas are the same in kind, the only difference is that they are proportionally fainter than the ones produced by the stronger primary perceptions.760 But how exactly can ideas raised by memory, verbal or visual representation, and imagination lead to sympathetic engagement if the objects of these emotions are either not present or not even real? The answer to this infamous question of philosophy of art lies in the famous Kamesian concept of ideal presence. Kames does not introduce the notion of ideal presence as a critical term. First, he needs to prove the more general problem concerning human nature, i.e. the question of how ideas of memory, representation and imagination can evoke emotions and passions. In order to explain how it is possible, Kames first investigates the ideas of memory and then – based on analogy – the ideas of representation.

758 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 17.
760 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 36.
Introducing the notion of ideal presence as a product of memory, Kames’s argument goes as follows: when recalled as a “complete idea of memory”, a perception that previously left a strong impression can appear so distinctly and vividly so that it is perceived as if it were really present: “I am imperceptibly converted into a spectator, and perceive every particular passing in my presence, as when I was in reality a spectator [...] conceiving myself to be in the place where I was an eye-witness.”

Ideal presence as a product of memory is distinguished from the “real presence” of primary perceptions and the “incomplete” ideas of “reflective remembrance”. Kames emphasizes that every reflection is inhibited during these experiences: “in a complete idea of memory there is no past nor future: a thing recalled to the mind with the accuracy I have been describing, is perceived as in our view, and consequently as existing at present.” The phenomenological features of this kind of remembrance lead Kames to compare ideal presence to a “waking dream”, a kind of “reverie” during which one “forgets oneself”. This, needless to say, also implies that this immersive remembrance is destroyed if I reflect upon my present situation, breaking the exclusive and focused attention to the object. The idea that such an absorption into a complete idea of memory has its own temporality and inhibits reflection (and even the awareness of remembering) also means that it will be almost as persuasive and, therefore, as affectively engaging as sensory perceptions themselves.

The perceptual analogy between ideas of memory and primary sense perceptions is crucial: in Kames’s theory of perception, perceptions of external sense inhibit reflection and, therefore, possess, as I have earlier pointed out, supreme authority over our belief (due to providential design): “there is nothing to which all men are more necessarily determined, than to put confidence in their senses. [...] We entertain no doubt of their veracity, being so constituted as not to have it in our power to doubt.”

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761 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 67.
762 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 68.
763 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 67.
764 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 68.
765 Claiming that this awareness is missing from the immersive experiences of complete ideas of memory, Kames breaks with both the Lockean and the Humean theories of remembrance. Kames’s interesting (and quite problematic) position concerning the awareness of remembering has been pointed out in Zsolt Komáromy, Figures of Memory. From the Muses to Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 195–96.
766 Kames, “External Senses”, 158. [My italics.] The analogy between mental images and sense perceptions was widely held in the empiricist tradition and did not only refer to the epistemological primacy of the latter, but to a “scale of vivacity” as well. See Komáromy, Figures of Memory, 190.
However, it is not only ideas of memory that can produce such a consciousness of reality and, therefore, belief.

Kames applies these insights to the problem that if emotions are belief-dependent, how (and why) does fiction engage our affections. Peter Kivy aptly described the structure of Kames’s argument when he wrote that the problem of affective response to ideas of memory constitutes a “psychological stepping stone from the arousal of emotions in perception to their arousal in literary fiction.” Similarly to ideas of memory, ideas represented by linguistic or visual means can also produce ideal presence, even if one has never seen them before or even if they are fictitious. The necessary condition of ideal presence is the *vivacity of representation*.

A lively and accurate description of an important event, raises in me ideas no less distinct than if I had been originally an eye-witness: I am insensibly transformed into a spectator; and have an impression that every incident is passing in my presence. On the other hand, a slight or superficial narrative produceth but a faint and incomplete idea, of which ideal presence makes no part.

In a crucial passage, Kames continues to argue that our affective responses to ideas of verbal representation, in general, depend on the production of what he calls “perceptions of reality” or “consciousness of present” similar to direct perceptions:

The power of language to raise emotions, depends entirely on the raising such lively and distinct images as are here described: the reader’s passions are never sensibly moved, till he be thrown into a kind of reverie; in which state, forgetting that he is reading, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness. [...] Upon the whole, it is by means of ideal presence that our passions are excited; and till words produce that charm, they avail nothing.

In her article on the Kamesian notion of ideal presence, Eva Dadlez aptly points out that ideal presence is not only described as a “reverie” but also as a “dwelling on” the object of our perception, which clearly suggests that ideal presence “involves both a

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768 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 68–69.
769 Kames, *Elements*, vol. 1, 69, 72.
concentrated focus of attention on particular content and an abstraction from occurrent concerns.”

Given that he considers every reflection inhibited in ideal presence, Kames draws the conclusion that “it makes no difference whether the subject be a fable or a true history” and that “even genuine history has no command over our passion but by ideal presence only”. As a matter of fact, Kames follows Hume in maintaining that art seems to be even better at producing ideal presence than historical accounts of past events, partly because a well-arranged narration or description omits every insignificant detail and focuses on every significant circumstance creating vivid sensory imagery.

Therefore, art elicits not only a stronger affective response than historical accounts but also what we would now call the “unwilling suspension of disbelief”. As we have seen in the case of the vivid ideas of memory, belief and affective response are the two sides of the same coin: “Nor is the influence of language, by means of ideal presence, confined to the heart: it reacheth also the understanding, and contributes to belief.”

Dadlez is right to point out that belief is, in itself, not a sufficient condition of affective response. But it is important to add that Kames – just like his contemporaries such as Hume or Campbell – argues that the immersive experience of ideal presence does constitute the necessary condition of belief. Based on the assumption that we universally and naturally rely on our external senses and that ideal presence is analogous to these

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770 Dadlez, “Ideal Presence”, 123.
771 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 70, 71.
772 “A poetical description may have a more sensible effect on the fancy, than an historical narration. It may collect more of those circumstances, that form a compleat image or picture. It may seem to set the object before us in more lively colours.” Nevertheless, Hume holds that the ideas produced by such lively pictorial representation will be “weak and imperfect” compared to sense impressions. Hume, Treatise, 1.3.10, 85. For context, see Townsend, Hume’s Aesthetic Theory, 130. ff.
774 Kivy, Once-Told Tales, ch. 7. For a more subtle description of Kames’s position, see Dadlez, “Ideal Presence”, 121. For Kames’s own argument for the superiority of art at producing belief, see Elements, vol. 1, 74.
775 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 74. His 1779 essay entitled “Belief”, in which Kames argues with Hume’s suggestion that belief consists in “the liveliness of the conception”, testifies that Kames later refined his argument. The lively conceptions of literature supported by our sympathetic engagement and the beauty of language “will not on the whole contribute to produce belief.” Vivid and lively representations only occasionally result in belief, “when it affects us so much as to draw off our attention from every other object, and even from ourselves. [...] This belief however is but momentary. It vanisheth like a dream, as soon as we are roused to a consciousness of ourselves, and of the place we occupy.” Thus, Kames seems to have refined his argument after the Elements: ideal presence rarely occurs and is only momentary in art experience. Kames, “Belief”, 146.
777 Briefly surveying this context, Zsolt Komáromy points out that even though Hume’s conception of belief was widely debated (Kames also rejected it), many authors (such as Campbell or Kames himself) accepted the connection between vivacity and belief as a rhetorical principle. See Komáromy, Figures of Memory, 192.
perceptions, Kames holds that the vivid pictorial representation produces a perception of reality that is similar to the one produced by primary sense perceptions.

Emphasizing the role of the imagination, Kames’s interpreters often conceive the perception of ideal presence as an “imaginative activity” and an “imaginative immersion”, which is consistent with the mainstream argument in the Scottish Enlightenment, where vivacity was mostly seen as a quality of the ideas of imagination. Zsolt Komáromy, however, points out that one should not overlook the fact that Kames introduces the term in connection with the ideas of memory, which suggests that the “vivacity of ideas [of representation] is, so to say, a memory effect the imagination can achieve”. Komáromy, aiming at exploring the fusion of imagination and memory, writes “In arguing that fictions are most effective (credible, moving) when striking us as memories do, Kames not only sustains but actually makes use of the largely unresolved problem of the distinction between memory and imagination through vivacity.” Komáromy traces back Kames’s argument to the rhetorical tradition in which vivacity (and the engagement of our passions and belief that accompanied it) was seen as a product of remembrance, not of imagination. His notion of ideal presence reveals Kames’s “reliance on inherited rhetorical principles according to which the kind of visualization that serves to move and convince the audience, and the kind that does so especially by making the impression that the speaker was an eyewitness to what he recites, is a mnemonic procedure.” On the other hand, the heritage of the rhetorical tradition is supported “by the premises of empiricist psychology, according to which memories are closer than imaginings to the eyewitness testimony of sensation. These two contexts meet in the figure of vivacity.”

The primacy of the affections is perfectly reflected in Kames’s decision to determine the place of an artform in the hierarchy of the arts according to its emotive power. Kames argues that it is “theatrical representation” that is the most successful in creating ideal presence and, therefore, raising emotions and passions. It is followed by written literature and, lastly, (historical) painting. One of the reasons behind Kames’s

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778 See Kames, “External Senses”, 158.
779 Dadlez, “Ideal Presence”, 120.
780 Komáromy, Figures of Memory, 198.
781 Komáromy, Figures of Memory, 197.
782 Komáromy, Figures of Memory, 199.
ranking is his claim that we are naturally more powerfully affected by human actions, and since human actions and intentions can be best expressed through speech, verbal representation will raise the strongest sympathetic engagement. The other reason is that while “a picture is confined a single instant of time”, the sympathetic engagement with an artwork requires a succession of perceptions and ideas only theatrical and verbal representations can produce. The normative idea of the orderly natural succession of perceptions is also utilized here by Kames: one the one hand, to argue for the superiority of drama and literature, and, on the other, to support the superiority of realistic imitation – i.e. imitation that produces the same flow of ideas as the primary perception of nature. An imitation that reproduces the natural train of ideas can lead to the suspension of disbelief and, therefore, it can produce sympathetic engagement: “A chain of imagined incidents linked together according to the order of nature, finds easy admittance into the mind; and a lively narrative of such incidents, occasions complete images, or in other words ideal presence.”

The latter considerations lead Kames to formulate of what I would call the principle of dramatisation as the general criteria of vivacity for all the arts operating through verbal representation. Deducing the principle of dramatisation from the principles of sensibility, namely our capacity to engage sympathetically with works of fiction through ideal presence and that visual perceptions have the strongest impressions, Kames sums up his view in the chapter on “Narration and Description” as follows:

Writers of genius, sensible that the eye is the best avenue to the heart, represent everything as passing in our sight; and, from readers or hearers, transform us as it were into spectators: a skilful writer conceals himself, and presents his personages: in a word, every thing becomes dramatic as much as possible.

4.3.3. Teleologizing the Paradox of Negative Emotions
In the same chapter, Kames discusses the paradox of tragedy. As we will see, just like Burke, Kames goes further and investigates the paradox of negative emotions outside

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784 See Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 34–35. Kames’s argument is probably indebted to Hutcheson’s idea that due to the involvement of the moral sense, the epic and dramatic representations of moral subject have the strongest aesthetic impact. See Hutcheson, “Treatise II”, II.VI.VII, 173.
785 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 72.
786 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 76.
art experiences in the course of our everyday lives. In the case of visual representations of ugly objects, Kames – repeating Addison’s Imitation Argument – simply argues that the pleasure caused by proper imitation “overbalances” the disagreeableness of the object. In the case of the verbal representation of disagreeable objects, Kames’s argument is different and deviates from the route set by Addison. In these cases, Kames maintains, it is the (intrinsic) beauty of language (independent of the appreciation of imitation) that transforms the overall character of the experience: “the pleasure of language is so great, as in a lively description to overbalance the disagreeableness of the image raised by it.”

Kames’s solution resembles the one proposed by Hume in 1757. He not only adapts the Conversion Argument of Hume as the explanation of the efficient cause of the pleasure of tragedy but he, contrary to Hume, also offers an explanation to our attraction to suffering in terms of final causes in his 1751 essay entitled “Our Attachment to Objects of Distress”. In this essay, Kames, similarly to Hume, rejects Du Bos’s solution, which some years later proved to be so crucial for Burke’s physiological aesthetics. Kames, on the one hand, rejects Du Bos’s Exercise Argument because it is based on the Lockean idea that the only stimulants to action are pleasure and pain, which idea is rejected by Kames. On the other hand, he keeps the providential framework to propose an explanation in terms of finality. There are certain social passions that are painful but still produce affection in us instinctively, which cannot be explained in terms of a theory that regards pleasure and pain and, therefore, self-love the only stimulants to action. Kames mentions grief and compassion: “Objects of distress raise no aversion in us, though they give us pain. On the contrary, they draw us to them, and inspire us with a desire to afford relief.” Kames infers that there is “a singular phaenomenon in human nature; an appetite after pain”. And as we have already seen, “singular phenomena” in nature do not exist without a reason: they function to promote the goals of the providential design. Next, Kames proposes an explanation of our attraction to pain in terms of final causes, which might well be the original source of Burke’s teleological account of the sublime:

789 Kames, “Our Attachment”, 15.
790 Kames, “Our Attachment”, 16.
nature, which designed us for society, has linked us together in an intimate manner, by
the sympathetic principle, which communicates the joy and sorrow of one to many. We
partake the afflictions of our fellows: we grieve with them and for them; and, in many
instances, their misfortunes affect us equally with our own. Let it not therefore appear
surprising, that, instead of shunning objects of misery, we choose to dwell upon them; for
this is truly as natural as indulging grief for our own misfortunes. And it must be
observed at the same time, that this is wisely ordered by providence: were the social
affections mixed with any degree of aversion, even when we suffer under them, we
should be inclined, upon the first notice of an object in distress, to drive it from our
sight and mind, instead of affording relief. 791

As we have seen, similarly to Kames’s “sympathetic principle” ordained by providence,
Burke also argued that our attraction to the terrible is programmed into the very fibres
of the human body by providence to ensure social cohesion (besides the salutary effects
of the sublime “exercises” on bodily and mental health). Unlike Kames, Burke proposed
a physiological explanation of how the mixed delights of the sublime can motivate us to
“afford relief” to the suffering. The Burkean account, however, would have been
rejected by Kames as an essentially egoistic theory based on the instinct of self-
preservation.

We have thus seen that Kames maintains that in order to promote the purposes
of providence “self-love does not always operate to avoid pain and distress”. 792 On the
contrary, the “social principle” makes us voluntarily partake in the suffering of others,
which explains the reason why “tragedy is allowed to seize the mind with all the
different charms which arise from the exercise of the social passions, without the least
obstacle from self-love.” 793 Interestingly, however, as Rachel Zuckert has pointed out,
Kames’s argument “dissolves” the very paradox of negative emotions, because it rejects
the very principle it is based on. The paradox of tragedy is based on the Lockean
presumption that the sole motives behind human action are the avoidance of pain (such
as pity or fear) and the attainment of pleasure. This presumption also implies that

791 Kames, “Our Attachment”, 16–17. Kames repeats this argument concerning “the curious mechanism”
of sympathy in the Elements as well: “The whole mystery is explained by a single observation, That
sympathy, tho’ painful, is attractive, and attaches us to an object in distress, the opposition of self-love
notwithstanding, which would prompt us to fly from it. And by this curious mechanism it is that persons
of any degree of sensibility are attracted by affliction still more than by joy.” Kames, Elements, vol. 1,
309.
792 Kames, “Our Attachment”, 19.
disagreeable objects necessarily evoke painful emotions, and, therefore, aversion. Kames, however, by differentiating between qualities of objects (e.g. disagreeableness) and natural propensities (e.g. aversion) is able to reject this presumption: some of our natural propensities such as sympathy do guide us towards pain, or, to put it in Kamesian terms, some painful emotions turn out to be agreeable. Characteristically, Kames argues that these propensities attract us towards the suffering of others because of their function in the providential design.\footnote{See Zuckert, “Kames’s Naturalist Aesthetics”, 152–53. Zuckert adds a further point, which is consistent with the Kamesian view: “though he does not do so, Kames might have argued not only that the problem of tragedy (as problem) presupposes the Lockean principle, but also that it presupposes (implicitly) the falsity of this principle. For without spectatorial sympathy (i.e., without other-regarding tendencies), there would be no pain to be explained.” Ibid., 154.}

Our natural attraction to painful social passions not only serves as “the great cement of human society” but it also pleases us reflectively. Proposing quite an interesting argument, Kames adds that the reflexive pleasure of moral self-approbation is also involved in our engagement with tragedy. What we approve of, Kames says, is our emotional response to tragedy, i.e. the exercise of social passions when faced with the suffering of others: “When we consider our own character and actions in a reflex view, we cannot help approving this tenderness and sympathy in our nature. We are pleased with ourselves for being so constituted: we are conscious of inward merit; and this is a continual source of satisfaction.”\footnote{Kames, “Our Attachment”, 17. (my italics)} First, note that Kames here talks about how we approve our emotive response after the actual experience, i.e. it does not explain the problem of tragedy itself, it is rather an additional, subsequent pleasure that follows such experiences. This also makes it clear that Kames do not advert to a self-congratulatory gesture to explain tragic pleasure: “Kames’ moral reflective pleasure is intrinsically dependent upon the emotional – painful – engagement with characters’ fates”.\footnote{Zuckert, “Kames’s Naturalist Aesthetics”, 156.} Second, note that Kames uses here the term “approbation”, which, as we have seen in his treatment of beauty, “imports a peculiar beauty, which is perceived, upon considering the object as fitted to the use intended.”\footnote{Kames, “Foundation and Principles of Morality”, 27. (my italics added)} In short, we approve our sympathetic engagement with the distress of others in subsequent reflection because we consider our passions to be working properly – “fitted to the use intended” – during the (affective) exercise of virtue occasioned by engaging with an artwork.

Interestingly, Kames not only formulates his teleological account concerning the “sympathetic principle” in this early essay of 1751 but he also proposes his teleological
explanation of why human sensibility is designed such a way that it can be affectively engaged by fiction.\textsuperscript{798} The same final cause argument is, then, further refined in the \textit{Elements}. Clearly, Kames cannot account for the mechanism behind this phenomenon (ideal presence) as early as 1751: characteristically, he first explains the problem of tragedy in terms of finality and only then in terms of efficiency, i.e. in terms of ideal presence.\textsuperscript{799} In other words, it is the teleological considerations that force Kames to work out the concept of ideal presence and offer an account in terms of efficiency. Finally, I would like to focus on Kames’s final cause argument concerning our ability to respond affectively to ideas presented by works of fiction.

As we have seen, Kames offers a solution to the problem of fiction by arguing that through the vivid sensory imagery of ideal presence, works of art can raise genuine emotions and even passions with motivational force. We have also seen, that “the sympathetic emotion of virtue” is crucial for Kames’s conception of moral culture as it makes us strive to imitate the virtuous characters or actions we admire or love. Our moral culture consists of “exercising” our social emotions and passions until they become “habitual”, inscribed into our very aesthetic apparatus. Sadly, Kames points out, our everyday life does not abound in such “exercises”. Art, on the contrary, is a great catalogue of human virtues and vices, tragedy, especially, is “an admirable resource”, “supplying feigned objects of pity, which have nearly the same effect to exercise the passion that real objects have.”\textsuperscript{800} Characteristically, Kames sees the hands of providence in designing human sensibility in such a way that art can sympathetically engage it, contributing to “making virtue habitual”. In short, one of the final causes of our ability to be moved by fictional works of art is the cultivation of virtue, \textit{the promotion of moral culture}:

\begin{quote}
it is observed, that examples both of virtue and of vice raise virtuous emotions; which becoming stronger by exercise, tend to make us virtuous by habit as well as by principle. I now further observe, that examples confined to real events are not so frequent as without other means to produce a habit of virtue: if they be, they are not recorded by historians. \textit{It therefore shows great wisdom, to form us in such a manner, as to be susceptible of the same improvement from fable that we receive from genuine history.} By that contrivance, examples to improve us in virtue may be multiplied
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{798} See Kames, “Our Attachment”, 18.  
\textsuperscript{799} See Costelloe, \textit{The British Aesthetic Tradition}, 102.  
\textsuperscript{800} Kames, “Our Attachment”, 21.
It is also important to see that, according to Kames, the moral value of art experiences does not consist of a didactic illustration of some moral truths. Even if Kames discusses narrative and epic poetry that tends to illustrate moral truths under the label of “moral poetry”, the arguments above make it clear that for him “pathetic poetry” has a more profound significance. Instead of illustrating a moral truth, “pathetic poetry” aims “to move the [social] passions and to exhibit [vivid and distinct] pictures of virtue and vice”. 802 Paul Guyer aptly summed up Kames’s position concerning the moral value of art, when he wrote that “his view of art is as far as it can be from being didactic: Art does not work by teaching us truths, but by arousing our emotions.” 803 

But there are other reasons why Kames regards “the power of fiction to generate passion is an admirable contrivance, subservient to excellent purposes”. 804 On the one hand, Kames argues that since ideal presence makes it possible for language to sympathetically engage us, its final cause is to expand our sympathy to people distant from us in time or space. Our sympathetic engagement with art through ideal presence even “attracts individuals from their private system to perform acts of generosity and benevolence.” 805 Language itself is praised by its power to “connect individuals in the social state [...] by the power it possesses of an expeditious communication of thought, and a lively representation of transactions.” 806 Through the communication of feelings – enabled by ideal presence – language (and art) can “strengthen the bond of society”, serving as an antidote against both tribal mentality and egoism. After this version of the social cohesion argument, Kames proposes a third teleological account that merges the happiness argument and the social cohesion argument: “the power that fiction hath over the mind affords an endless variety of refined amusements, always at hand to employ a vacant hour: such amusements are a fine resource in solitude; and by chearing and sweetening the mind, contribute mightily to social happiness.” 808

801 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 77. [My italics.]
802 Kames, Elements, vol. 2, 650.
804 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 66.
805 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 74.
806 Kames, Elements, vol. 2, 641.
807 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 74.
808 Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 77.
Kames’s science of rational criticism is not only one of the most encompassing and intricate aesthetic theories of the eighteenth century, but also the prime example (maybe even an extreme example) of the aesthetic thought of the British Enlightenment predisposed to teleology. Kames’s criticism embodies the pursuit of the British Enlightenment to illuminate “upon what slight foundations nature erects some of her most solid and magnificent works.” These “slight foundations” are the foundations of the aesthetic, the design of our aesthetic apparatus, which enables a sensible engagement with the surrounding objects of nature and art in such a way as to support the “solid and magnificent” goals of the providential design. However, even Kames’s aesthetic theory with its strong theological overtones attests that the primary goal is not to present theological arguments: Kames, like his predecessors before him, strives to embed the aesthetic into the processes of individual and social life and uses the framework of “Providential Deism” to argue for the value of the aesthetic in our well-being, moral culture and social cohesion.

Kames, Elements, vol. 1, 74.
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