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A Treatise Of Human Nature

Being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning Into
Moral Subjects

Of The Passions

Hume, David

London, 1739

Sect. VI. Of the influence of the imagination on the passions.

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PART rendering the motion of the spirits faint
 III. and languid. But as in the active, the spi-
 rit^s are sufficiently supported of themselves,
 the tendency of the mind gives them new
 force, and bends them more strongly to the
 action.

*Of the
 will and
 direct pas-
 sions.*

S E C T. VI.

*Of the influence of the imagination
 on the passions.*

S E C T. VI. **T**IS remarkable, that the imagination
 and affections have a close union to-
 gether, and that nothing, which affects the
 former, can be entirely indifferent to the lat-
 ter. Wherever our ideas of good or evil
 acquire a new vivacity, the passions become
 more violent; and keep pace with the ima-
 gination in all its variations. Whether this
 proceeds from the principle above-mention'd,
*that any attendant emotion is easily converted
 into the predominant,* I shall not determine.
 'Tis sufficient for my present purpose, that
 we have many instances to confirm this in-
 fluence of the imagination upon the pas-
 sions.

A N Y

ANY pleasure, with which we are acquainted, affects us more than any other, which we own to be superior, but of whose nature we are wholly ignorant. Of the one we can form a particular and determinate

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idea: The other we conceive under the general notion of pleasure; and 'tis certain, that the more general and universal any of our ideas are, the less influence they have upon the imagination. A general idea, tho' it be nothing but a particular one consider'd in a certain view, is commonly more obscure; and that because no particular idea, by which we represent a general one, is ever fix'd or determinate, but may easily be chang'd for other particular ones, which will serve equally in the representation.

THERE is a noted passage in the history of *Greece*, which may serve for our present purpose. *Themistocles* told the *Athenians*, that he had form'd a design, which wou'd be highly useful to the public, but which 'twas impossible for him to communicate to them without ruining the execution, since its success depended entirely on the secrecy with which it shou'd be conducted. The *Athenians*, instead of granting him full power to act as he thought fitting, order'd
him

PART III. him to communicate his design to *Aristides*, in whose prudence they had an entire confidence, and whose opinion they were resolv'd blindly to submit to. The design of *Themistocles* was secretly to set fire to the fleet of all the *Grecian* commonwealths, which was assembled in a neighbouring port, and which being once destroy'd, wou'd give the *Athenians* the empire of the sea without any rival. *Aristides* return'd to the assembly, and told them, that nothing cou'd be more advantageous than the design of *Themistocles*; but at the same time that nothing cou'd be more unjust: Upon which the people unanimously rejected the project.

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Of the
will and
direct pas-
sions.

A LATE celebrated * historian admires this passage of antient history, as one of the most singular that is any where to be met with. Here, says he, they are not philosophers, to whom 'tis easy in their schools to establish the finest maxims and most sublime rules of morality, who decide that interest ought never to prevail above justice. 'Tis a whole people interested in the proposal, which is made to them, who consider it as of importance to the public good, and who notwithstanding reject it unanimously, and without hesitation, mere-

* Monf. Rollin.



ly because it is contrary to justice. For my part I see nothing so extraordinary in this proceeding of the *Athenians*. The same reasons, which render it so easy for philosophers to establish these sublime maxims, tend, in part, to diminish the merit of such a conduct in that people. Philosophers never ballance betwixt profit and honesty, because their decisions are general, and neither their passions nor imaginations are interested in the objects. And tho' in the present case the advantage was immediate to the *Athenians*, yet as it was known only under the general notion of advantage, without being conceiv'd by any particular idea, it must have had a less considerable influence on their imaginations, and have been a less violent temptation, than if they had been acquainted with all its circumstances: Otherwise 'tis difficult to conceive, that a whole people, unjust and violent as men commonly are, shou'd so unanimously have adher'd to justice, and rejected any considerable advantage.

ANY satisfaction, which we lately enjoy'd, and of which the memory is fresh and recent, operates on the will with more violence, than another of which the traces

are

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PART are decay'd, and almost obliterated. From

III. whence does this proceed, but that the me-
 Of the memory in the first case assists the fancy, and
 will and gives an additional force and vigour to its
 direct pas- conceptions? The image of the past plea-
 sions. sure being strong and violent, bestows these
 qualities on the idea of the future pleasure,
 which is connected with it by the relation
 of resemblance.

A PLEASURE, which is suitable to the
 way of life, in which we are engag'd, ex-
 cites more our desires and appetites than
 another, which is foreign to it. This pha-
 nomenon may be explain'd from the same
 principle.

NOTHING is more capable of infusing
 any passion into the mind, than eloquence,
 by which objects are represented in their
 strongest and most lively colours. We
 may of ourselves acknowledge, that such
 an object is valuable, and such another odi-
 ous; but 'till an orator excites the imagina-
 tion, and gives force to these ideas, they
 may have but a feeble influence either on
 the will or the affections.

BUT eloquence is not always necessary.
 The bare opinion of another, especially when
 inforc'd with passion, will cause an idea of
 good

good or evil to have an influence upon us, which wou'd otherwise have been entirely neglected. This proceeds from the principle of sympathy or communication; and sympathy, as I have already observ'd, is nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impressiion by the force of imagination.

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'TIS remarkable, that lively passions commonly attend a lively imagination. In this respect, as well as others, the force of the passion depends as much on the temper of the person, as the nature or situation of the object.

I HAVE already observ'd, that belief is nothing but a lively idea related to a present impressiion. This vivacity is a requisite circumstance to the exciting all our passions, the calm as well as the violent; nor has a mere fiction of the imagination any considerable influence upon either of them. 'Tis too weak to take any hold of the mind, or be attended with emotion.

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