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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

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**London, 1739**

Sect. VIII. The same subject continu'd.

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## S E C T. VIII.

*The same subject continu'd.*

**T**HUS we have accounted for three S E C T. VIII.   
 phænomena, which seem pretty remarkable. Why distance weakens the conception and passion: Why distance in time has a greater effect than that in space: And why distance in past time has still a greater effect than that in future. We must now consider three phænomena, which seem to be, in a manner, the reverse of these: Why a very great distance encreases our esteem and admiration for an object: Why such a distance in time encreases it more than that in space: And a distance in past time more than that in future. The curiosity of the subject will, I hope, excuse my dwelling on it for some time.

To begin with the first phænomenon, why a great distance encreases our esteem and admiration for an object; 'tis evident that the mere view and contemplation of any greatness, whether successive or extended, enlarges the soul, and give it a sensible delight and pleasure. A wide plain, the

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ocean

PART ocean, eternity, a succession of several ages ;  
 III. all these are entertaining objects, and excel  
*Of the* every thing, however beautiful, which ac-  
*will and* companies not its beauty with a suitable  
*direct pas-* greatness. Now when any very distant ob-  
*sons.* ject is presented to the imagination, we na-  
 turally reflect on the interpos'd distance, and  
 by that means, conceiving something great  
 and magnificent, receive the usual satisfac-  
 tion. But as the fancy passes easily from  
 one idea to another related to it, and trans-  
 ports to the second all the passions excited  
 by the first, the admiration, which is di-  
 rected to the distance, naturally diffuses it-  
 self over the distant object. Accordingly  
 we find, that 'tis not necessary the object  
 shou'd be actually distant from us, in order  
 to cause our admiration ; but that 'tis suf-  
 ficient, if, by the natural association of ideas,  
 it conveys our view to any considerable di-  
 stance. A great traveller, tho' in the same  
 chamber, will pass for a very extraordinary  
 person ; as a *Greek* medal, even in our ca-  
 binet, is always esteem'd a valuable curio-  
 sity. Here the object, by a natural transi-  
 tion, conveys our view to the distance ; and  
 the admiration, which arises from that di-  
 stance, by another natural transition, re-  
 turns back to the object. BUT

BUT tho' every great distance produces an admiration for the distant object, a distance in time has a more considerable effect than that in space. Antient busts and inscriptions are more valu'd than *Japan* tables: And not to mention the *Greeks* and *Romans*, 'tis certain we regard with more veneration the old *Chaldeans* and *Egyptians*, than the modern *Chinese* and *Persians*, and bestow more fruitless pains to clear up the history and chronology of the former, than it wou'd cost us to make a voyage, and be certainly inform'd of the character, learning and government of the latter. I shall be oblig'd to make a digression in order to explain this phænomenon.

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'TIS a quality very observable in human nature, that any opposition, which does not entirely discourage and intimidate us, has rather a contrary effect, and inspires us with a more than ordinary grandeur and magnanimity. In collecting our force to overcome the opposition, we invigorate the soul, and give it an elevation with which otherwise it wou'd never have been acquainted. Compliance, by rendering our strength useless, makes us insensible of it; but opposition awakens and employs it.

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sions.*

THIS is also true in the inverse. Opposition not only enlarges the soul; but the soul, when full of courage and magnanimity, in a manner seeks opposition,

*Spumantemque dari pecora inter inertia  
votis*

*Optat aprum, aut fulvum descendere monte  
leonem.*

WHATEVER supports and fills the passions is agreeable to us; as on the contrary, what weakens and infeebls them is uneasy. As opposition has the first effect, and facility the second, no wonder the mind, in certain dispositions, desires the former, and is averse to the latter.

THESE principles have an effect on the imagination as well as on the passions. To be convinc'd of this we need only consider the influence of *heights* and *depths* on that faculty. Any great elevation of place communicates a kind of pride or sublimity of imagination, and gives a fancy'd superiority over those that lie below; and, *vice versa*, a sublime and strong imagination conveys the idea of ascent and elevation. Hence it proceeds, that we associate, in a manner, the

the idea of whatever is good with that of SECT. height, and evil with lowness. Heaven is VIII. suppos'd to be above, and hell below. A noble genius is call'd an elevate and sublime one. *Atque udam spernit humum fugiente penna.* On the contrary, a vulgar and trivial conception is stil'd indifferently low or mean. Prosperity is denominated ascent, and adversity descent. Kings and princes are suppos'd to be plac'd at the top of human affairs; as peafants and day-labourers are said to be in the lowest stations. These methods of thinking, and of expressing ourselves, are not of so little consequence as they may appear at first sight.

*The same subject continu'd.*

'TIS evident to common sense, as well as philosophy, that there is no natural nor essential difference betwixt high and low, and that this distinction arises only from the gravitation of matter, which produces a motion from the one to the other. The very same direction, which in this part of the globe is call'd *ascent*, is denominated *descent* in our antipodes; which can proceed from nothing but the contrary tendency of bodies. Now 'tis certain, that the tendency of bodies, continually operating upon our senses, must produce, from custom, a like tendency

PART tendency in the fancy, and that when we  
 III. consider any object situated in an ascent,  
 Of the will and direct pas- sions.  
 the idea of its weight gives us a propensity  
 to transport it from the place, in which it  
 is situated, to the place immediately below  
 it, and so on, 'till we come to the ground,  
 which equally stops the body and our ima-  
 gination. For a like reason we feel a diffi-  
 culty in mounting, and pass not without a  
 kind of reluctance from the inferior to that  
 which is situated above it; as if our ideas  
 acquir'd a kind of gravity from their objects.  
 As a proof of this, do we not find, that  
 the facility, which is so much study'd in  
 music and poetry, is call'd the fall or ca-  
 dency of the harmony or period; the idea  
 of facility communicating to us that of de-  
 scent, in the same manner as descent pro-  
 duces a facility?

SINCE the imagination, therefore, in  
 running from low to high, finds an oppo-  
 sition in its internal qualities and principles,  
 and since the soul, when elevated with joy  
 and courage, in a manner seeks opposition,  
 and throws itself with alacrity into any  
 scene of thought or action, where its cou-  
 rage meets with matter to nourish and em-  
 ploy it; it follows, that every thing, which  
 invi-

invigorates and inlivens the soul, whether by touching the passions or imagination, naturally conveys to the fancy this inclination for ascent, and determines it to run against the natural stream of its thoughts and conceptions. This aspiring progress of the imagination suits the present disposition of the mind; and the difficulty, instead of extinguishing its vigour and alacrity, has the contrary effect, of sustaining and encreasing it. Virtue, genius, power, and riches are for this reason associated with height and sublimity; as poverty, slavery, and folly are conjoin'd with descent and lowness. Were the case the same with us as *Milton* represents it to be with the angels, to whom *descent is adverse*, and who *cannot sink without labour and compulsion*, this order of things wou'd be entirely inverted; as appears hence, that the very nature of ascent and descent is deriv'd from the difficulty and propensity, and consequently every one of their effects proceeds from that origin.

ALL this is easily apply'd to the present question, why a considerable distance in time produces a greater veneration for the distant objects than a like removal in space. The imagination moves with more difficulty

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PART ty in passing from one portion of time to

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sions.*

another, than in a transition thro' the parts of space; and that because space or extension appears united to our senses, while time or succession is always broken and divided.

This difficulty, when join'd with a small distance, interrupts and weakens the fancy: But has a contrary effect in a great removal. The mind, elevated by the vastness of its object, is still farther elevated by the difficulty of the conception; and being oblig'd every moment to renew its efforts in the transition from one part of time to another, feels a more vigorous and sublime disposition, than in a transition thro' the parts of space, where the ideas flow along with easiness and facility. In this disposition, the imagination, passing, as is usual, from the consideration of the distance to the view of the distant objects, gives us a proportionable veneration for it; and this is the reason why all the reliëts of antiquity are so precious in our eyes, and appear more valuable than what is brought even from the remotest parts of the world.

THE third phænomenon I have remark'd will be a full confirmation of this. 'Tis not every removal in time, which has the effect

effect of producing veneration and esteem. SECT.  
 We are not apt to imagine our posterity will VIII.  
 excel us, or equal our ancestors. This phæ-  
 nomenon is the more remarkable, because The same  
 subject con-  
 tinu'd.  
 any distance in futurity weakens not our  
 ideas so much as an equal removal in the  
 past. Tho' a removal in the past, when  
 very great, encreases our passions beyond a  
 like removal in the future, yet a small re-  
 moval has a greater influence in diminishing  
 them.

IN our common way of thinking we  
 are plac'd in a kind of middle station be-  
 twixt the past and future; and as our ima-  
 gination finds a kind of difficulty in running  
 along the former, and a facility in follow-  
 ing the course of the latter, the difficulty  
 conveys the notion of ascent, and the faci-  
 lity of the contrary. Hence we imagine  
 our ancestors to be, in a manner, mounted  
 above us, and our posterity to lie below us.  
 Our fancy arrives not at the one without  
 effort, but easily reaches the other: Which  
 effort weakens the conception, where the  
 distance is small; but enlarges and elevates  
 the imagination, when attended with a sui-  
 table object. As on the other hand, the fa-  
 cility assists the fancy in a small removal,  
 but

PART but takes off from its force when it con-  
 III. templates any considerable distance.

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 sions.

IT may not be improper, before we leave this subject of the will, to resume, in a few words, all that has been said concerning it, in order to set the whole more distinctly before the eyes of the reader. What we commonly understand by *passion* is a violent and sensible emotion of mind, when any good or evil is presented, or any object, which, by the original formation of our faculties, is fitted to excite an appetite. By *reason* we mean affections of the very same kind with the former; but such as operate more calmly, and cause no disorder in the temper: Which tranquillity leads us into a mistake concerning them, and causes us to regard them as conclusions only of our intellectual faculties. Both the *causes* and *effects* of these violent and calm passions are pretty variable, and depend, in a great measure, on the peculiar temper and disposition of every individual. Generally speaking, the violent passions have a more powerful influence on the will; tho' 'tis often found, that the calm ones, when corroborated by reflection, and seconded by resolution, are able to controul them in their most fu-  
 rious

rious movements. What makes this whole SECT.  
 affair more uncertain, is, that a calm pas- VIII.  
 sion may easily be chang'd into a violent The same  
 one, either by a change of temper, or of subject con-  
 the circumstances and situation of the ob- tinu'd.  
 ject, as by the borrowing of force from any  
 attendant passion, by custom, or by excit-  
 ing the imagination. Upon the whole, this  
 struggle of passion and of reason, as it is  
 call'd, diversifies human life, and makes men  
 so different not only from each other, but  
 also from themselves in different times. Phi-  
 losophy can only account for a few of the  
 greater and more sensible events of this  
 war; but must leave all the smaller and  
 more delicate revolutions, as dependent on  
 principles too fine and minute for her com-  
 prehension.

