

**A PHILOSOPHICAL  
ENQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN  
OF OUR IDEAS OF THE  
SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL**

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A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful by Edmund Burke

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**EDMUND BURKE**

**A PHILOSOPHICAL  
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OF OUR IDEAS OF THE  
SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL**



A  
Philosophical Enquiry  
INTO THE  
ORIGIN of our IDEAS  
OF THE  
S U B L I M E  
AND  
B E A U T I F U L .



L O N D O N :

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M D C C L V I I .

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T H E  
P R E F A C E.

*T*HE author hopes it will not be thought impertinent to say something of the motives which induced him to enter into the following enquiry. The matters which make the subject of it had formerly engaged a great deal of his attention. But he often found himself greatly at a loss; he found that he was far from having any thing like an exact theory of our passions, or a knowledge of their genuine sources; he found that he could not reduce his notions to any

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vi      The P R E F A C E.

*fixed or consistent principles; and he had remarked, that others lay under the same difficulties.*

*He observed that the ideas of the sublime and beautiful were frequently confounded; and that both were indiscriminately applied to things greatly differing, and sometimes of natures directly opposite. Even Longinus, in his incomparable discourse upon a part of this subject, has comprehended things extremely repugnant to each other, under one common name of the Sublime. The abuse of the word Beauty, has been still more general, and attended with still worse consequences.*

*Such a confusion of ideas must certainly render all our reasonings upon subjects of this kind extremely inaccurate and inconclusive. Could this ad-*  
*mit*

The P R E F A C E.      vii

*mit of any remedy, I imagined it could only be from a diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts; from a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions; and from 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. If this could be done, it was imagined that the rules deducible from such an enquiry might be applied to the imitative arts, and to whatever else they concerned, without much difficulty.*

*It is four years now since this enquiry was finished; during which time the author found no cause to make any material alteration in his theory.*



viii    The P R E F A C E.

*He has shewn it to some of his friends, men of learning and candour, who do not think it wholly unreasonable; and he now ventures to lay it before the public, proposing his notions as probable conjectures, not as things certain and indisputable; and if he has any where expressed himself more positively, it was owing to inattention.*

The

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THE  
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