

**The Notion of Sufficient Remembrance in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful***

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**要約**

本稿は、18世紀イギリスの政治家 Edmund Burke がその後の美の哲学に多大な影響を及ぼした著作である、「*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*」(1757)についての研究論文で、将来、美学比較研究に関する単著書を刊行する際に、その一章にする予定としているものである。本稿は、現在有力な Burke を感覚論者とする見方に調整策を提供する。

Burke の著述からは、彼が実際に述べているかは別として、趣味とは、一般的に主張されているように、感覚だけに基づいて定義されるのではなく、むしろ記憶様式によって維持されるものであるといえる。つまり Burke が著作「*Enquiry*」で発展させる情念の理論は、「感覚論(sensationist)というよりも「記憶論(remembrative) に基づいた理論なのである。

キーワード・ エドマンド・バーク、記憶、能力、趣味、感覚論

**Summary**

This essay investigates the highly influential work of aesthetics by the eighteenth-century British statesman Edmund Burke entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). It seeks to provide a corrective to the dominant view of Burke as a “sensationist” philosopher.

Taste, in Burke, is not, as is commonly asserted, defined on the sole basis of sensations but, rather, is supported by a modality of memory. The theory of the passions Burke develops in the *Enquiry* is therefore less sensationist than it is ‘remembrative.’

**Keywords: Burke, aesthetics, remembrance, faculties, taste, sensationism.**

*There is in all men a sufficient remembrance of the original natural causes of pleasure, to enable them to bring all things offered to their senses to that standard, and to regulate their feelings and opinions by it.*

—Edmund Burke

### **TASTE: WHATEVER IT IS**

Before the publication of Edmund Burke's Introduction on Taste in the second edition of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*,<sup>1</sup> Hutcheson, Addison, and Hume had developed universalist, associationist, or subjective conceptions of taste.<sup>2</sup> Burke's contribution to this discussion is a complex matter for reasons other than historical. Perhaps because the influential first critical edition, published over forty years ago, concludes that Burke brought no original ideas or treatment to the notion of taste,<sup>3</sup> the philosophical import of the notion and its significance to the *Enquiry* has been overlooked. To evoke some of Burke's assertions concerning taste, taste is both a faculty, or faculties, *and* not a faculty; indefinable *and* definable; natural and common to all, but also lacking in some and always in need of constant exercise; a fixed standard *and* a method that one tests and develops through experience. In commenting on Burke's definition of taste, Tom Furniss writes that Burke's "oscillation [between reliance on and distrust of fixed laws] can be seen as a micro-drama of the aesthetic and political problems the *Enquiry* is grappling with: how is it possible to write a clear, rational enquiry about an aesthetic experience which, by definition, escapes from or exceeds definition?"<sup>4</sup> It seems that the complex and paradoxical character of taste is what leads Burke to conclude the Introduction on Taste by asserting that, "whatever it is," contrary to the commonly held opinion of the day, taste is not a separate faculty of the mind (26). If, for Burke, taste is not a faculty, this is because by 'faculty,' Burke understands a simple or single operation of the mind that relates to exterior sources of pain or pleasure. Taste is essentially 'mixed.' It exhibits both the ease and naturalness of imagination and the arduousness of experienced-formed judgment. Moreover, it exhibits no direct relation to exterior sources of pleasure or pain. Consequently, taste must not be deemed a faculty (23).

If taste is not a faculty, its importance for Burke's theory of the passions raises the question of its precise relation to the faculties that Burke does recognize; namely, sensibility—which refers to sensations and imagination jointly—and judgment. A widespread assumption relative to this question is found in a concise form in Giuseppe Sertoli's summary of Burke's conception of taste (with my emphasis):

Burke draws conclusions developed over the course of the whole *Enquiry* in order to demonstrate the universality of taste, which he characterizes, not at the level of judgment as David Hume had done (“Of the Standard of Taste,” 1757), but *at the level of sensibility*.<sup>5</sup>

This gesture, whose soundness I would like to contest, is made by Burke's erudite and influential early modern readers, Samuel H. Monk, James T. Boulton, and Neal Wood.<sup>6</sup> It is repeated, in different ways and with different consequences, by philosophers, historians, and literary critics, including—to cite some of the names of those whose readings I refer to—Jerome Stolnitz, Terry Eagleton, and Frances Ferguson. What I wish to demonstrate is that taste, in Burke's conception, cannot be dependent solely on sensation, sensibility, or even judgment, since no faculty can act or be acted upon autonomously when human passions are engaged. No one faculty is a sufficient condition for “aesthetic experience” or for human experience in general and sensibility and judgment would each be impracticable if deprived of its adversary (the other faculty). Moreover, the faculties' conflict, to be possible, requires the existence of a mediating element. When mediated in a specific way, the faculties as a whole—and not sensations, sensibility, or judgment alone—constitute what Burke understands by “taste.” “Taste” names the mediated relations of the faculties. Despite the fact that Burke names sufficient remembrance only once, as quoted in the epigraph to the present study, the proper modality of taste can only be that of memory. My purpose will thus be to draw out the importance of this notion to Burke's conception of taste as a whole.

In accounting for the mediated relation of the faculties, we can appreciate a degree of complexity in the *Enquiry* that complicates the widespread and unyielding identification of Burke as a “sensationist.”<sup>7</sup> The prevalent view is that because “sense experience,” for Burke, is an “obvious starting-point” and the “groundwork” of all the faculties, it reigns sovereign over all human emotions and restricts the faculty of judgment to a subordinate, tributary, or mechanical role. Against this, I argue that

sensations, while certainly privileged when deemed “original” or “natural,” are nonetheless dependent on what Burke calls ‘remembrance.’ In mediating the faculties from without (since it is not itself a faculty), taste marks the faculties’ *remembrative* relations. These are relations of interdependence within which, to be able to ground judgment, sensations depend on an aspect of judgment itself, with the consequence that the idea of ‘grounding’ or ‘being based on’ has to be understood in an unconventional sense as an interaction or trade-off among the faculties. This is not to say that sensations are not primary in an important sense with respect to the faculties of imagination and judgment, but rather that Burke’s treatment of sensations is not simply “bold” or “uncompromising.”<sup>8</sup>

To characterize Burke’s method in the *Enquiry* without qualification as “sensationist” is to ignore the function of a remembrance that, when sufficient, preserves the common grounds of sense experience and assures their relevance to, among other things, discussions of what Burke calls ‘critical taste’ (i.e., discussions of the fine arts) and, more generally, inquiry into the cause of human passions.<sup>9</sup> Without a remembrance that is deemed sufficient, the faculties would be abandoned to a mutually debilitating conflict and, consequently, Burke’s inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful would amount to no more than a vivid illustration of tastes common to a certain class of educated males of the eighteenth century (although the *Enquiry* does offer such an illustration and is criticized at this level).<sup>10</sup> The common, rational grounds for taste would vanish, and this at an age when the quest for a universal “Standard of Taste” was thought to be not only worthwhile, but natural (even by David Hume who, unlike Burke, concludes his own quest for such a standard in skepticism).<sup>11</sup> Finally, Burke’s *Enquiry* would be exposed to all manner of criticism concerning its presumably simplistic conjunction of empiricism and psychologism, and behind its characterization as a work of “aesthetics” would crouch the specter of “sensationism,” that is, a thought reduced to solipsism (as on Frances Ferguson’s reading)<sup>12</sup> or, for better or for worse, to mechanical, bodily operations (as it is depicted by Terry Eagleton).<sup>13</sup> To save Burke from these types of readings, I propose to analyze what Burke calls a ‘sufficient remembrance’ and explore how taste and sufficient remembrance relate to the faculties.



## SUFFICIENT REMEMBRANCE

To ask what Burke calls a sufficient remembrance is, in the first place, to ask what it is a remembrance of. It is significant for this question that, in the Introduction on Taste, Burke sets the limits of his *Enquiry* by drawing a distinction between natural and acquired pleasures. Stating that this distinction, and not another, traces the contours of the *Enquiry* emphasizes what makes possible and worthy of inquiry the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful or the relative distinction between pain and pleasure (the latter of which is primary in the order of exposition, but not of logic).<sup>1 4</sup> An origin needs to be remembered, and the *Enquiry* takes as its task, as much as its condition of possibility, this remembrance. This fact underscores the significance of the undeveloped notion of sufficient remembrance. To meet the stated purpose of unveiling uniform principles of taste, Burke not only distinguishes peculiar and acquired pleasures from those that please naturally, but also holds that there is a universal capacity to draw this distinction consistently. As Burke says, the capacity to single out natural pleasures, or those aspects of pleasure that have natural causes or origins, so as to distinguish them from associated pleasures, is a “sufficient remembrance” (16). Confronted with the same objects, the senses of all, whether engaged simply and directly or remembered sufficiently in their simple and uncorrupted operations, produce the same images and result in the same feelings. On this distinction-drawing capacity depend Burke’s methodology and the *Enquiry*’s entire set of distinctions. The standard makes possible Burke’s investigation into the perceptual qualities that result in feelings of, for instance, beauty and sublimity. The conclusions that can be drawn with sufficient clearness with respect to naturally pleasing or agreeable sensations can be drawn with equally sufficient clarity with respect to peculiar and acquired relishes as long as one demarcates from acquired relishes all that is unnatural, including habits, prejudices and/or distempers—elements that Burke gathers together with the term “associations.” Unlike the modern, and in particular, psychological or psychoanalytical senses of this word, associations, in Burke, are defined as pleasures or displeasures that depart from natural and originally experienced pleasures or displeasures so as to differ in degree or, relatively speaking, in kind. They are often but not necessarily acquired through habits. As derived, secondary, or corrupted associations, they lie outside the inquiry and their successful exclusion is a pre-condition for the viability of the inquiry into the origin of

our ideas of certain natural passions. Burke begins his discussion of taste by identifying three conditions for the manner in which pleasures and pains are to be excited by an object. If satisfied, these conditions—naturalness, simplicity, and autonomy—substantiate both the reliability of the fixed principles that it is the duty of sufficient remembrance to uncover and the ‘natural origin’ of the pains and pleasures at question.

[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 power only*; for if we deny this, we must imagine, that the same cause operating in the same manner, and on subjects of the same kind, will produce different effects, which would be highly absurd. (13-14, my emphasis)

Burke’s argument here is that, where all other things are equal, the simple and the natural, operating naturally, autonomously, in the same way, on the “subjects of the same kind,” must lead to the simple and the natural. The argument thus appeals, in a hypothetical mode, to a highly controlled experience of near absolute sensory deprivation. The capacity to single out what is original and natural confirms the existence of grounds for a shared aesthetic experience. Without it, Burke would forfeit the vehicle for inquiry into human passions.

Perhaps it is because the conditions for distinguishing between naturally pleasing satisfactions and all other pleasing satisfactions may appear overly subtle and difficult to establish that in two separate instances Burke describes sufficient remembrance as a resilient and unfailing *power* (which is another word Burke gives the faculties, with the implication that sufficient remembrance assumes the importance of a faculty while—with one exception—being denied the name): “the power of distinguishing between the natural and the acquired relish remains to the very last” (14). As a power, sufficient remembrance would thus be co-extensive with life itself. A capacity at once innate and resilient, it would empower one not only to discern to the very last all causes of pleasures that are in their essence natural, but to keep these causes distinct from all “habits and associations,” however pleasing or beguiling the latter may be (15). This implies that, although it discriminates incisively in the manner of judgment, sufficient remembrance cannot, like judgment, be the sole fruit of experience, a faculty fully developed among only a rare breed of discriminating men, but must, like imagination,

be shared out in largely equal proportions to all. Thus, Burke evokes the versatility, subtlety, and unfaltering reliability of sufficient remembrance by commenting that, “in judging of any new thing, even of a Taste similar to that which he has been formed by habit to like, he [man] finds his palate effected in the natural manner, and on the common principles” (16, my emphasis). Burke here describes an act of judgment, or at least a judgment-like act, since even habit-bound pleasures that are *similar* to naturally-caused pleasures do not escape the sufficient discrimination of sufficient remembrance. One is thus warranted to ask what the nature of this judgment is and on what basis it can be said that these principles are common. Is it not specious, if not tautological, to assert that taste is common by virtue of its being formed in accordance with principles that are common? The requirements of Burke’s arguments are such that this standard or capacity must operate in a reliable, if not infallible, manner. The standard should be more a universal power and less a faculty, if such a distinction is permissible, since, as we have seen, the faculties in some are deficient. The universality of “in all men” that Burke applies to sufficient remembrance, insofar as this means in all men and women, contrasts with the more qualified claims concerning the faculties of sensibility and judgment, for which Burke recognizes different types of exceptions and aberrations. Burke views sensibility as varying widely in degree; and judgment, depending on one’s experience or the attention one pays to a given object, in strength (14, 23-24). If sufficient remembrance were also insensitive or capricious, if it excelled in some but fell short in others, the grounds for universal assent in questions of taste would vanish. Burke gives further evidence for the role of sufficient remembrance when he describes what he understands by the effect of an association: “[opium, tobacco, and fermented spirits] were taken for health long before they were thought of for pleasure. The effect of the drug has made us use it frequently; and frequent use, combined with the agreeable effect, has made Taste itself at last agreeable” (16). Certain effects of the drugs make the naturally unpleasant sensations they produce appear pleasurable. Through frequent use, the unnatural pleasures impose themselves by association and thus risk becoming indistinguishable from the natural qualities. However, on this point, Burke insists, as he does elsewhere, that “this does not to the least perplex our reasoning; because we distinguish to the last the acquired from the natural relish” (16). Indeed, Burke twice asserts without justification that we can make such distinctions “to

the last.” It is after the second of these assertions that Burke introduces the notion of a sufficient remembrance. Discovering that it is sufficient remembrance alone that can untangle the natural and the artificial qualities to the last, we see in this formulation that our reasoning is concerned; and, as Burke connects reasoning and its ability to make distinctions with the power of judgment, it must be judgment that aids or is aided by sufficient remembrance in drawing the line between the acquired and the natural. By ‘sufficient remembrance,’ then, we would understand a remembrance sufficiently acute in making distinctions between natural sensations and associations, as well as one which is sufficiently reliable to retain the experience of the original, natural causes of pleasure. Its sufficiency involves the manner in which it draws distinctions between natural and unnatural pleasures and pains; its remembrance, the manner in which it summons images and sensations stockpiled in imagination.

In being ‘sufficient,’ such remembrance profits from judgment’s unique capacity to respond to so-called “nice cases” where differences of taste are thus reduced to an issue of degree (22); in being a ‘remembrance,’ it exhibits what is foreign to judgment and what in imagination alone would remain puerile and even crass and animalistic, namely, the pleasure of reproducing over and again the *same* and of indiscriminately recombining it with the similar. This is so because the similar implies a degree, however small, of difference, and it is judgment that responds to differences in degree: “For in judging of any new thing, *even of a Taste similar to that which he has been formed by habit to like*, he finds his palate affected in the natural manner, and on the common principles” (16, my emphasis).

We can thus conceive that sufficient remembrance aids ever-evolving judgment by mimicking or co-opting its distinctive capacity, namely, drawing distinctions by degree. Burke’s “sensationism” thus depends upon a non-faculty, a sort of supplement to the faculties that, by its very name, suggests the possibility of adequacy between a sensation and its more or less distant, but no less absolute or spectacular, retention. The fact that it is a *remembrance* of an original or natural sensation rather than the immediate sensation, or sensations per se, introduces a structural element of intermediateness or deferral into the faculties. Identifying this element not only extinguishes the flare of the hypothetical gambit whereby Burke envisions sensations isolated in a laboratory-like dimension of simplicity, naturalness, and autonomy, it also shows that the original and natural are

registered and preserved as such only through a structure of remembrance or in accordance with a standard that is by nature *remembrative*, a point whose implications I will return to.

Given this depiction of sufficient remembrance, the question arises: Is the 'remembrance' only another name for memory? It appears that whereas memory, as this word is conventionally understood, can be exercised by each of the faculties, since imagination remembers in order to recombine; and judgment, to draw distinctions. The implication is clear that *memory is exercised by the faculties*. In the case of imagination, it is a memory of the same; in that of judgment, of the distinct. Recall that Burke refuses to recognize the faculties as being two types of the single operation of comparing. Thus, in their radical difference, the faculties are incapable of 'remembering' one another. The relation they would lack to one another, if they were left to their essential incomparability, would thus be provided by sufficient remembrance. This returns us to the meditative nature of the so-called power. Remembrance, rather than be exercised by any one of the faculties, characterizes the faculties' mutual relations. This would be another way of understanding its sufficiency. In a way that does not resonate with any traditional definitions of *sensationism*, Burke's 'taste,' rather than result wholly from a sensory experience stimulated by a sublime or beautiful object, is a standard that principally engages the antagonistically interdependent relations among the faculties. That sufficient remembrance is a standard implies that it is not a store of memories as any other and, in particular, not that of imagination. Sufficient remembrance thus profits from its dual ability to retain and to distinguish on separate, inharmonious grounds. At the same time that it preserves to the very last, in its originality and purity, a remembrance of sensibility, it assists judgment in assailing sensibility, dampening its enthusiasms, weakening its élan and corrupting its purity with an increasing store of distinctions.

To conclude: Burke recognizes two categories of experience to which the categories correspond: first, that of sensibility, which is characterized as being original, natural, universal, immediate, common to all; and, second, that of judgment, which is said to be secondary, unnatural, mediate, and particular. The crux of Burke's argument is that the first category of experience serves as a standard which restricts differences in critical taste to the realm of understanding at the same time that it legitimizes the

grounds on which those differences can be resolved. The role assumed by sufficient remembrance of preserving discriminately suggests, however, that, without this standard or capacity, one would lose all experience of the original and the natural (31). Even if the original and natural causes of pleasures and pains remained in residual or obscure forms, they could never be retained and recognized in their difference from associations. This is presumably why, in the closing argument of his Introduction on Taste (26-27), Burke repudiates the commonly held idea that this operation is a separate faculty of the mind.

With this analysis of sufficient remembrance in mind, it is now possible to characterize further Burke's conception of taste and its importance for the *Enquiry*. In the follow-up to the present study, the possibility of seeing Burke's notion of taste as being not merely sensationist but, rather, dependant on a function of memory, will be explored further.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and with an Introduction and Notes by James T. Boulton (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968). Self-standing page numbers within the text and notes refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. George Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> See Boulton, "Editor's Introduction," xxx.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 75.

<sup>5</sup> See Giuseppe Sertoli, "Burke, Edmund,"

[http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins\\_guide\\_to\\_literary\\_theory/edmund\\_burke.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/edmund_burke.html)

<sup>6</sup> See Boulton, "Editor's Introduction," *Enquiry*, xxxv-xxxvi; Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Modern Language Association of America: 1935; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 97-98; and Neal Wood, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke's Political Thought," *The Journal of British Studies*, Volume 4, Issue 1 (Nov., 1964), 47.

<sup>7</sup> Boulton is echoed widely in his view that the *Enquiry* exhibits "bold sensationism" and a "frankly sensationist theory" (xxxix, xxx). Boulton defines sensationism as a kind of sensory experience stimulated by objects that, as such accounts for "the whole range of human responses" (lii-liv).

<sup>8</sup> Boulton, "Editor's Introduction," xxxix, xxxvi.

<sup>9</sup> The stakes of understanding the faculties in the *Enquiry* are heightened in Jerome Stolnitz's classic study, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 20 (Winter 1961): 131-44 (141). In locating the origin of a distinct discipline of aesthetics in the eighteenth-century British "motive idea" of disinterestedness, Stolnitz maintains that Burke, like Addison and Shaftesbury before him, limited his theory of disinterested perception to "a single faculty or a specific class of objects," and then identifies this faculty, in Burke, as "sensation" ("Disinterestedness," 142). Stolnitz's reductive reading of the *Enquiry* confirms that here, as elsewhere, labeling the *Enquiry* a work of "aesthetics" means restricting it to an impoverished "sensationism."

<sup>10</sup> See Boulton's assessment, xxxiv. See, also, Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, which is sensitive to the question of class.

<sup>11</sup> Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays*, ed. and with an Introduction, by John W. Lenz (Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965). Boulton postulates that Burke may have written his Introduction on Taste to oppose Hume's *Dissertation on Taste*, published only two months before the *Enquiry*'s first edition, xxviii-xxx. This hypothesis should not minimize what Boulton himself calls the "organic" relationship between the Introduction on Taste and the *Enquiry* (cf. xxviii).

<sup>12</sup> Frances Ferguson's *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of*



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*Individuation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) takes sensibility to be a sufficient condition for aesthetic experience, for the existence of objects, for the objectivity of individual consciousness, and for the sublime, and criticizes Burke for these assumptions as if they were his.

<sup>13</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Samuel H. Monk says of the *Enquiry* that “the whole system is based on the antithesis of pain and pleasure, the one being the foundation of the sublime, the other of the beautiful” (*Sublime*, 91). Furniss follows Monk in this by stating that of all the distinctions in the *Enquiry*, “[t]he first of these, fundamental to all that follows, is the conventional distinction between pain and pleasure” (Furniss, *Aesthetic Ideology*, 18). Calling this distinction “fundamental” obscures the fact of its regulation according to “certain, natural, and uniform principles” (22)—which is to say, the faculties.

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