

Such, in brief compass and stated as strongly as we could put it, is the theory which Alison illustrated and defended at such a tedious length in his *Essays on the Beautiful*, and which Lord Jeffrey condensed and presented in a more popular form, with some additions of his own; and it does indeed seem plausible at first sight, and is likely to take a certain class of minds as by storm, and to seem to them irrefragable. Yet with all the undoubted truth it contains as to matters of fact, one cannot but feel that as a theory it is altogether unsatisfactory and superficial, and not a little dangerous to boot. For the same principles of reasoning rigorously carried out strike at the root of all morality and religion, and land us in universal scepticism. For if there is no inherent beauty in things themselves, then there is no beauty or deformity in virtue or vice as such, no loveliness in a holy character,—good and evil are the products of feeling or emotion merely, the creatures simply of association. And if there is no beauty in natural objects because men don't agree with themselves and with one another as to what is beautiful, then, for the same reason, there is no truth, and consequently no God. Nay, I cannot be sure of my own existence if I follow out these principles. For I do not seem to myself to be more certain that I have the emotion of the beautiful, than that I perceive a beauty *in things around me*. If the one be an illusion, why may not the other? Or, to turn the theory we have stated against itself more pointedly, if the beauty of nature is all an illusion, a mere appearance and fiction of the mind, why may not the thought that beauty is an illusion be itself a delusion? Thus on such principles I am led to the extreme of sceptical conclusions. I am sure of nothing; no, not even of that; for the statement contains an affirmation of a certainty, viz: that I am sure. I may henceforth say with the great philosopher whose name has been already mentioned, "I know nothing and am nothing. Images—pictures—only are pictures which wander by, without any thing existing past which they wander, without corresponding reality which they might represent, without significance and without aim. I myself am one of these images, or rather a confused image of these images. All reality is transformed into a strange dream, without a world of which the dream might be, or a mind that might dream it. Contemplation is a dream; thought, the source of all existence and of all I fancied reality, of my own existence, my own capacities, is a dream of that dream."—*Fichte's Destination of Man*, c. ix.