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"To Put the Soul in Motion": Connoisseurship as a Religious Discourse in the Writings of Jonathan Richardson

Clare Haynes

It is only relatively recently that the significance of Jonathan Richardson's writings has been properly recognized. Carol Gibson-Wood, in a number of articles and a book, identified two main keys to Richardson's importance: first, Richardson adapted European art theory and "Englished" it for a British audience using a methodology heavily dependent on Locke. In doing so, he developed an approach to art that was distinctive in the European tradition. Second, Richardson, as both a writer and connoisseur, was more influential at home and abroad than was previously recognized. Indeed, Richardson was rightly acclaimed by Gibson-Wood as the "art theorist of the English Enlightenment" (plate 1). However, although Gibson-Wood recognized and attended to Richardson's religious


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Plate 1: Jonathan Richardson, Self-Portrait, chalk on blue paper, 1728. © Trustees of the British Museum
beliefs, her arguments underplayed the directing influence of religious concerns on the formation of his writings and the field more generally. Richardson's position was not idiosyncratic: religious questions played a role in all English writing about art after the Reformation. This article does not challenge but rather underscores Gibson-Wood's assessment of Richardson by demonstrating how his writings display the concern for religion that has been recognized as characteristic of the English Enlightenment. In addition, through a new reading of Richardson's theoretical writings, this article reveals how fundamental to Richardson's thinking was the conviction that art could bring man to a closer knowledge of God. Recognition of this principle not only gives us a fuller understanding of these influential works but also shows some of the ways in which, in the early English Enlightenment, art, like science, addressed, and was policed by, religion.

Jonathan Richardson was a sought-after portraitist whose sitters included many of the leading figures of his day: Alexander Pope, John Gay, Robert Walpole, Richard Mead, William Cheselden, Hans Sloane, and Richard Steele (plate 2), as well as Isaac Watts, William Fleetwood (Bishop of Ely), and the theologian William Nicholls. Richardson's success as a portraitist was matched by his work as a writer, which focused both on art and on Milton, for whom he had a passionate enthusiasm. He was also a poet, encouraged by his friends Pope and Matthew Prior. Although he did not publish his poetry separately in his lifetime, he included some of it in his essays on art, often alongside excerpts from Milton. Before Richardson, writings about art in England had been the province of virtuosi, men who were not

7. Richardson also wrote an essay based on his son's grand tour: An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy, Etc., with Remarks (London: J. Knapton, 1722), for which there is not space to consider here. It is consistent with the works examined in respect of the issues under discussion.
"Connoisseurship as a Religious Discourse"

Plate 2: John Smith after Jonathan Richardson, Portrait of Mr. Richard Steele, mezzotint, ca.1713. © Trustees of the British Museum
professional artists but were either gentlemanly collectors or scholars, such as William Aglionby, John Evelyn, Franciscus Junius, William Salmon, and Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Although all writers on art in this period recognized that British art lagged far behind that of its European rivals, particularly Italy and France, in both its quality and its quantity, Richardson's stance was rather different from theirs as it was explicitly that of a professional writing in defense of his own profession. Thus, at the beginning of the first essay he published, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, Richardson observed that

> because pictures are universally delightful, and accordingly made one part of our Ornamental Furniture, many, I believe, consider the art of Painting but as a pleasing Superfluity; at best, that it holds but a low Rank with respect to its Usefulness to Mankind.

Richardson understood that because art's moral status was so insecure in Britain, it was necessary to offer a justification for it. Only once its "usefulness" had been established could art thrive. In the *Theory of Painting* and the *Two Discourses*, which followed, Richardson aimed to give the British a "just Idea of the Art" in order to encourage them to take painting more seriously and thus become greater patrons. Richardson understood that only by improving painting's reputation could it begin to flourish as it had on the Continent. To do this, he attempted to prove two interrelated propositions: first, that painting was religiously sound and second, that connoisseurship was a rational science.

In a markedly distinctive maneuver, Richardson began his endeavor with the first cause: art was a gift from God and thus ought "to hold a place in our esteem accordingly." Art was "judged necessary" by God

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for man, and even if it was just a "pleasant, innocent Amusement," it ought to be valued more than it had been.\textsuperscript{12} However, because it was emphatically more than that, the gift did not just entail an obligation or gratitude but gave art its main purpose: just as with nature, the best art, if looked at properly, would bring the viewer closer to God. This was the foundation of Richardson's proposal to the British public, and the word \textit{innocent} was critical to it.

In a period when extensive iconoclasm was a matter of living memory and when religious art was still substantially associated with Roman Catholicism, or popery, as it was derogatively called, Richardson's insistence on art's innocence demonstrates how estranged he believed the public was from understanding and valuing the power of art to effect moral good.\textsuperscript{13} He acknowledged, both in the \textit{Theory} and the \textit{Two Discourses}, that in the past, painting had been made "subservient to Impiety, and Immorality." However, he noted that in the same way other "excellent things . . . Poetry, Music, Learning, Religion, &c" had been abused too.\textsuperscript{14} In a passage of high drama, quoting and adapting Job 31: 26–28, Richardson declared,

\begin{quote}
I plead for the art not its abuses. . . . If when I see a \textit{Madonna} tho' painted by Rafaelle I be drawn away to Idolatry; Or if the Subject of a Picture, tho' painted by Annibale Carracci pollutes my Mind with impure Images, and transforms me into a Brute . . . \emph{May my Tongue cleave to the Roof of my Mouth, and my Right hand forget its Cunning} If I am its Advocate as 'tis Instrumental to such Detested Purposes.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Thus Richardson sought to separate art from its popish associations and to reclaim art for Protestantism. Art's innocence is essential to its power, which he expressed most clearly in an important passage in the second of the \textit{Two Discourses}:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} Richardson, \textit{Theory of Painting}, 4; emphasis added.  
\textsuperscript{14} Richardson, \textit{Theory of Painting}, 18–19.  
\end{flushright}
Not only such Ideas are convey’d to us by the help of This Art as merely give us Pleasure, but such as Enlighten the Understanding, and put the Soul in Motion. From hence are learn’d the Forms, and Properties of Things, and Persons, we are Thus inform’d of Past Events; by This means Joy, Grief, Hope, Fear, Love, Aversion, and the other Passions, and Affections of the Soul are excited, and above all, we are not only Thus Instructed in what we are to Believe, and Practise; but our Devotion is inflamed, and whatever may have happened to the contrary, it may Thus also be Rectify’d.  

Here, Richardson offered his readers a new perspective on looking at art, which was a counterbalance to idolatry and almost certainly the most widely discussed idea about art in early modern Britain. He did not deny art’s power, as some would, as a strategy for deflecting the charge of its potential for idolatry. Instead, Richardson argued that art can be wholly effective in furthering true devotion. Looked at properly, art was a way of knowing the world and could lead one to God. Furthermore, Richardson believed that painting could achieve these ends more effectively than sculpture or even poetry. Indeed, painting could be so effective in this regard that it could rival the Bible, as in the work of Richardson’s hero Raphael:

I conceive as highly of St. Paul by once walking through the Gallery of Rafaelle at Hampton Court, as by reading the whole Book of the Acts of the Apostles tho’ written by Divine Inspiration [plate 3].

In art of the highest ambition, such as Raphael’s, which dealt in ideal forms, painting “perfects all that Humane Nature is capable of in the communication of Ideas ’til we arrive to a more Angelical, and Spiritual

18. Horace Walpole, for example, describes religious art as merely “scenery for devotion” in Horace Walpole, ed., Anecdotes of Painting in England (1765), xii.
20. Ibid., 20.
However, for painting to fulfill its potential in the role in the Enlightenment for which God had instituted it, two conditions were necessary. First, painters of the right characters were needed, men such as Raphael who were a “little lower than the angels” and who could discern and express the highest truths. Not only must they educate themselves in the knowledge necessary to perform their art, including anatomy and mathematics, but they also must ennoble their minds by reading the Bible and the most highly esteemed literature. They were certainly practitioners of a liberal art. In fact, the painter had to be master of more than one art—he had to be

21. Ibid., 25.
philosopher, historian, poet, and painter—so that "a Rafaelle ... [was] not only Equal, but Superior to a Virgil, or a Livy, a Thucydides, or a Homer."23

Second, people must be educated in looking at art in order to exploit its extraordinary resources so that their "Devotion . . . [could be] inflamed."24 Richardson envisaged the spectatorship of art as a science, which he called connoissance.25 He established its scientific credentials in three stages. In The Theory of Painting he described the constituent elements of a painting, on which it should be separately judged: invention, expression, composition, coloring, and so on. This provided the foundation for his later works. For example, in the first of the Two Discourses published in 1719, called On the Art of Criticism, Richardson laid out his method for judging pictures. This included the "Scale of Perfection," adapted from the work of the French theorist Roger de Piles, which involved giving a numerical score to the parts of painting that had been described in Theory of Painting.26 In the final essay and the second of the Two Discourses, Of the Science of a Connoisseur, he returned to the justification of painting's claims on the attention of the British that he had addressed first in Theory of Painting. He offered further arguments for the rational basis of connoisseurship and the benefits that would accrue to British society from its wider practice, which were far-reaching for economics, morality, and religion as well.27

While Richardson's procedures were heavily influenced by his reading of Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), his argument was more explicitly religious in its use of biblical quotations and in its ambition. For example, in teaching his audience how to approach and judge a picture in On the Art of Criticism, Richardson

23. Richardson, Theory of Painting, 35–36.
25. This was, as Richardson told his audience, the suggestion of his friend, the poet Matthew Prior. Richardson, Science of a Connoisseur, 63–64.
27. For the social and economic benefits, see Richardson, Science of a Connoisseur, 41–62.
began his discussion with a meditation on Matthew 19:17: *Wherefore callest thou me good? There is none Good but One, that is God,*

Said the Son of God to the young Man who prefac’d a Noble Question with that Complement [sic]. This is that Goodness that is Perfect, Simple, and Properly so call’d, 'tis what is Peculiar to the Deity, and so to be found no where else. But there is another Improper, Imperfect, comparative Goodness, and no other than this is to be had in the Works of Men, and this admits of various Degrees.  

Painting was established immediately as man's work. It had no claim to divinity; therefore, however good a painting was, it was bound to have faults. This was an iconoclastic gesture, placing limits on art, which confirmed “there never was a Picture in the World without some Faults.”  

Even Raphael was not exempt, however close he had come to perfection. Here, we see the full impetus of Richardson's faith in action. Such a rhetorical gesture might, in the scope of the larger project, be seen as unnecessary, and even undermining, but it was essential to the enterprise that Richardson was undertaking: the demonstration that painting was Godly work.  

Richardson exemplified the systematic procedure of looking at a painting, which he described in *On the Art of Criticism,* by giving a complete account of Van Dyck's *Countess Dowager of Exeter,* which he owned. He also gave shorter accounts of two paintings owned by his friend Sir James Thornhill, the most prominent painter of the day, one of *Tancred and Erminia* by Nicolas Poussin and the other of *The Virgin and Child in the Clouds* by Annibale Carracci (plate 4). Richardson assessed each painting according to the system and discussed the pleasures they delivered, the noble ideas they communicated, and the further thoughts that flowed from their study. Utilizing this system to analyze Carracci's *Virgin and Child* led Richardson to muse:

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30. For criticism of Raphael's works, see Richardson, *Theory of Painting,* 61; and Richardson, *Art of Criticism,* 112–14.
As every thing else in the Picture is Address'd towards her, She in the humblest, and most Devout Manner lifts up her Eyes towards the Invisible Supreme Being, Directing our Thought thither also, with like Humble, Pious and Devout sentiments. If she to whom the Angels appear so vastly Inferiour is in His Presence but a poor Suppliant, What an Exalted Idea must this give us of him!31

Furthermore, it led to an expression of the sublime idea of God's unknowable perfection in a stanza of his own poetry:

Angelick minds the nearest to thy Self,
Those who conceive of Thee as far beyond
Our low conceptions as the Eagles flight,
Transcends our utmost Stretch, These See Thee not,
Nor canst Thou be discern'd but by Thy Self:
What art Thou then as by Thy Self beheld?
Just as Thou art! Unclouded! Undiminished!
In full Perfection! O the Joy Divine!
Ineffable! Of that Enlightened Mind
Where this Idea shines Eternally!
The Noblest, Loveliest, and most Excellent,
Thy Mind Divine can possibly conceive!32

In this, Richardson ended his exposition of art criticism as he began it—with the infinite goodness of God.

The security of connoisseurship as a system of knowledge was fundamental to its usefulness to British Protestants. Therefore, Richardson returned to the topic in On the Dignity of the Science of the Connoisseur, where, in a long digression on the nature of human understanding, he discussed connoisseurship in relation to a universal model of knowledge. The degree to which Richardson's arguments were precisely dependent on Locke's is beyond the compass of this essay, but Richardson seems to have been conscious of the distinctive, strikingly religious tone of his arguments, remarking, "I ask Pardon of the Divines that I so

32. Ibid., 97.
often set my foot upon Holy Ground; They will have the Goodness to consider we Painters are a sort of Lay-Brothers by Profession, as well as Historians, Poets, and Philosophers; And besides They may make reprisals upon Us, and talk of Painting as much as They please."

While clergy did not take up Richardson's offer until later in the eighteenth century, painting, particularly portraiture, was used quite frequently as an analogy in works of theology and devotion, for example, by John Scott in *The Christian Life.* Richardson was certain that "we are upon an Equality (at least) with Most Other Sciences, if we have not the Advantage of them" in regard to the possibility of determining divine truth and probability.

Although he was confident that he had demonstrated that connoisseurship and, by extension, painting were secure forms of knowledge, Richardson did acknowledge, with more than a little irritation, that there were nevertheless differences in opinion about art, especially over quality and attribution, but he argued that these conflicts were caused solely by differences between men, not by the security of the rules he had discussed. Richardson repeatedly stressed the necessity of an unbiased judgment to the sciences: as with all the sciences, the connoisseur's judgment "avoids prejudices, and false reasoning" and works from first principles. Anything else, he argued, would be "offering Violence to that Light which we receiv'd from Above, and wherein our Resemblance with the Father of Light consists." For painting to be

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34. See, for example, John Scott, *The Christian Life*, 6th ed. (n.p., 1712), 247–49, in which the presence of a portrait of a stern father that polices the behavior of a son is engaged to discuss the proper effect of remembering the invisible presence of God, who might be vividly imagined. For a different discussion of portraiture, see the introduction to Simon Patrick's influential book on the Eucharist, *Mensa Mystica*, 7th ed. (n.p., 1717), ii–iii, where he discusses the power of images and God's substitution of bread and wine, as symbols, for an image of Christ, which would be unsafe. Patrick quoted the "Tragical and Theatrical Representations which are made by some Papists of Christ's Sufferings" as exemplifying the danger. It was precisely this view of the inevitable connection between art and popery that Richardson was endeavoring to overturn.


36. Ibid., 130.

understood correctly and for it to yield its potential for pleasure and improvement, the individual had to approach it with a mind free of prejudice. Therefore, in the short essays “Of the Knowledge of Hands” and “Of Originals and Copies,” where he dealt with the questions of attribution and quality, over which there was the most dispute, Richardson reiterated that “tis as necessary to a Connoisseur as to a Philosopher, or Divine to be a good Logician; The Same Faculties are employ’d, and in the Same manner, the Difference is only in the Subject.”

As John Barrell and David Solkin have demonstrated, the idea of an unprejudiced judgment, derived from civic humanism, was very significant in art discourse, particularly in the writings of Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. However, as Gibson-Wood recognized, Richardson's conceptualization was different from the aristocratic model Shaftesbury used. Richardson had been intimate with Shaftesbury's friend, the former Lord Chancellor John Somers (plate 5), whose very substantial collection of prints and drawings Richardson had arranged. There are some overlaps in Richardson's and Shaftesbury's arguments, but their positions were essentially different, as Gibson-Wood observed, with regard to the status of the artist. Although Shaftesbury recognized the possibility of a more enlightened practitioner, his view of the artist was largely that of a mechanic, merely performing what someone else had invented before. Richardson's ideal painter was, on the other hand, a man of moral action, a true liberal artist.

A further substantial difference between Shaftesbury and Richardson, more relevant here, is the latter's understanding of the religious foundation of connoisseurship. While Richardson acknowledged that being a faithful Christian was not a precondition for connoisseurship, he did believe that such a person "has a mind at

38. Ibid., 203.
40. For a discussion of Richardson and civic humanism, see Gibson-Wood, Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist, esp. 7–9.
Plate 5: John Smith after Jonathan Richardson, Portrait of Rt. Hon. Lord Somers, mezzotint, ca.1713. © Trustees of the British Museum
ease, and most apt to receive virtuous pleasure,” which was the key to deriving connoisseurship’s most important benefits, as will be discussed shortly. Furthermore, he believed that if art was to flourish in Britain, it had to be reconciled with Protestantism. Shaftesbury expressed the common perception about art and religion that Richardson was fighting in his essay *Plastics*:

Sad to consider that the . . . rise of painting, being chiefly from the popish priesthood, the improvement and culture of it (except for the vicious part for the cabinets of the grandees, etc.) has turned wholly on the nourishment and support of superstition . . . and exaltation of that vile shrivelling passion of beggarly modern devotion.

Shaftesbury's understanding of popery’s encouragement of the arts was widely shared and often remarked on. Shaftesbury developed what was essentially a political solution to the alienation of art in Britain, what has been called the “republic of taste.” Significantly, Richardson never directly acknowledged this commonplace connection between great art and popery. Instead, he argued that when the arts revived, they would flourish in Britain, not because of the resemblance of the modern British character to that of the ancient Greeks and Romans but, more remarkably, because of the Church of England. It was the church that guaranteed the judgment that would allow connoisseurship to thrive:

'Tis the Glory of the Protestant Church, and especially of the Church of England as being Indubitably the Head of the Reformed churches; and so upon That Account, as well as the Purity and Excellency of its Doctrines, and the Piety, and Learning of its

45. For the continuity of this idea, see Haynes, *Pictures and Popery*; and Haynes, “In the Shadow of the Idol.”
47. For the specific qualities in which the British resembled the ancient Greeks and Romans, see Richardson, *Theory of Painting*, 209–13; and Richardson, *Science of a Connoisseur*, 3–4.
Clergy (so far as I am able to judge) the Best National Church in the world: I say 'tis the Glory of the Reformation, that thereby Men are set at liberty to judge for Themselves: We are Thus a Body of Free Men; not the Major part in Subjection to the rest. Here we are all connoisseurs as we are Protestants; tho' (as it must needs happen) Some are Abler connoisseurs than Others. And we have abundantly experienced the Advantages of This, since we have Thus resum'd our Natural Rights as Rational Creatures. 48

Here, connoisseurship, and thus painting, was completely naturalized for the British Protestant in what was a bold and unprecedented stroke.

If we return to Richardson's discussion of Carracci's *Virgin and Child*, we can see how he freed British reception of European art, through the exercise of Protestant judgment, from the difficulty of having to maintain a distance from Catholic "idolatry." Britons could indeed be the best judges of all art. Richardson believed that Carracci's painting depicted the Virgin as the protectress of Bologna. This idea, alien to Protestant understandings of the saints, Richardson set aside, concentrating not on the relationship between the Virgin and the city but on the Virgin's character as the principal subject. He described the painting as showing the Virgin above a prospect of the city, where she is seated in glory on clouds, "encompass'd with Cherubims, Boy-Angels, and others as usually describ'd. But oh! the Sublimity of Expression!" He continued, "What Dignity, and Devotion appears in the Virgin! What Awful Regard! What Love! What Delight, and Complacency is in these Angelick Beings towards the Virgin Mother of the Son of God!" 49 Significant elements of both the subject and the painter's symbolism (the depiction of the city and the connection to the Virgin) were set aside, but the painting's religious potential was exploited by Richardson in a different way, leading him to think on God. Through this, Richardson demonstrated to his readers that British Protestants could take possession of the whole of the history of art and that they might derive benefit from even the most popish of paintings. Indirectly, of course, Richardson was also answering the question

49. Richardson, *Art of Criticism*, 95.
Shaftesbury had raised: Was Catholicism a better nursery for the arts than Protestantism? Richardson did not think so. If the British could deploy their natural advantages, including their religion, and provide greater encouragement for British artists, painting would flourish. It would do so because of the security of the Reformation, guaranteed by the Church of England. It was on this basis that Richardson felt confident to suggest, with a tone of deference, that paintings had a place in churches:

If... our Churches were Adorn'd with proper Histories, or Allegories well Painted, the People being now so well instructed as to be out of Danger of Superstitious Abuses, their Minds would be more Sensibly affected than they can possibly be without this Efficacious means of Improvement, and Edification. But This (as indeed every thing else advanced by me) I humbly submit to the Judgment of my Superiours.50

Painting, he argued, can lead to reformed ends. Rationalism, not enthusiasm, gives man a more secure hold on God's gift of painting.

In his analysis of the three paintings at the end of the *Art of Criticism*, Richardson showed how the proper approach to paintings can lead to the direct effects of moral improvement and piety. However, his conception of connoisseurship is more far-reaching still, as he claimed in Section III of the *Science of a Connoisseur*, a richly discursive argument on pleasure and its relation to virtue that he called "a Plan for a Happy Life."51 This has been seen as a long digression from the overall argument about connoisseurship, but it is surely better read as a significant demonstration of Richardson's understanding of the fundamental power of art and, more importantly, as a direct response to Shaftesbury on three distinct issues. Two of these issues relate to Shaftesbury's *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*, which was published in London in 1713. Shaftesbury had dedicated the essay to his friend, and Richardson's patron, Lord Somers. The *Notion* was a remarkable intervention by a

50. Ibid., 44.
virtuoso, as a very careful analysis and thus prescription for the design of a painting on the subject of the Hercules choosing between vice and virtue derived from Prodicus. Richardson seems to have disapproved of two aspects of the essay’s argument. First, Shaftesbury severely constrained, as we have discussed, the painter’s intellectual and moral role. Indeed, he enacted this by commissioning the Italian painter Paolo Matteis to produce a painting of Hercules under his direction, which embodied the essay’s prescription (plate 6). 52 This was quite alien to Richardson’s conception of the artist.

Second, Shaftesbury’s notion of pleasure was one that he seems to have had little time for. 53 The essay bears a quotation from the

53. For their quite different models of civic virtue, see Barrell, Political Theory, 20–23.
tenth satire of Juvenal on its title page that has been translated such
that one should prefer "the sorrows and grueling labours of Hercules
to all Sardanapalus' downy cushions and women and junketings." Shaftesbury thus equated pleasure with vice and virtue with hard labor. Similarly, his painting was to have little to delight the senses. Coloring should be "reserv'd, severe, and chaste" for it to be morally effective, Shaftesbury argued in the essay. Richardson rejected Shaftesbury's interpretation, saying,

Were I to paint the Fable of Prodicus, as Annibale Caracci [sic] has done, I would not make the Way of Virtue Rough, and Stony, that of Vice should be so: He, and other Moralists have been injurious to Virtue when they have given us such Harsh Representations of her. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

Using the description of wisdom in Proverbs 3:17, Richardson's conception of virtue was different from Shaftesbury's in that he regarded pleasure as motivating all actions, virtuous as well as vicious. Thus, he claimed, "Cato is as great an Epicure as Apicius": Cato had chosen mental pleasures over physical suffering. Given Richardson's strong religious faith, his position was a logical one. Happiness, according to Richardson, rested on the knowledge of God as benevolent. As God was omnipresent, any other comprehension of him, such as one that was "Confus'd . . . and Doubtful" or one that saw him as terrible or forbidding, would disallow happiness. After suffering a period of painful doubt earlier in his life, Richardson had arrived at the conclusion that God "takes not Delight in our Miseries,

55. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules (London: A. Baldwin, 1713), 46.
57. Ibid., 162.
59. Richardson, Science of a Connoisseur, 163–64.
and Sufferings" but wants our enjoyment for which he has provided. Enjoyment "within the Bounds of Innocence, and Virtue" was therefore a religious duty. This was also a tacit rejection of Shaftesbury. In his Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit, part of Characteristicks (1711), Shaftesbury had argued that the Old Testament Jehovah was a terrible and morally suspect god and that Judaism necessarily encouraged similar traits. This was an early and authoritative statement of the deist critique of Christianity on the basis of its foundations in the Old Testament. The implications of it were obviously not lost on Richardson—section III of the Science of a Connoisseur can be read as an antideist text. In this light, the full significance of Richardson's invocation of the Church of England, quoted previously, and which, in fact, followed section III, is revealed. Richardson's essay was written in defense of both art and religion.

As discussed, Richardson began his writings on art with the assertion that painting was a providential gift. In concluding, he started to draw out the implications of this concept in relation to the ideas of virtuous pleasure that he had established. He started with art practice:

'Tis a wretched Turn many People's heads have taken; They are perpetually Depreciating every thing in this World; and seem to fancy there is a sort of Merit in so doing; As if the way to express the Esteem we had for what we hope God has provided for us in Another State was by railing at This; Or as if the Present was not also the Effect of his Goodness, and Bounty.

Richardson thus confronted an underlying tension in British responses to the art of painting in relation to its dependence on idealization,

60. Ibid., 167. For a discussion of this period of doubt, see Gibson-Wood, Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist, 39–43; and Gibson-Wood, "Hymn to God."
62. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Characteristicks (London, 1711), 2:48
64. The significance of Richardson's reaction to Shaftesbury has perhaps yet to be properly recognized and analyzed.
which was regarded as illegitimate and immodest by some early-modern Christians. This position was expressed most famously in the apocryphal story of Oliver Cromwell insisting on being painted by Peter Lely, “warts and all.” Richardson regarded this as profoundly mistaken and obstructive to painting’s primary purpose of raising the mind and spirit toward God. In contrast, he argued that art’s role was to “Exalt our Species as much as possible to what we conceive of the Angelick State . . . to impregnate our Minds with the most Sublime, and Beautiful Images of things.” According to Richardson, there was considerable pleasure to be gained from a stock of mental pictures, “which will finely employ every vacant moment of one’s time.” However, what perhaps mattered more to Richardson was to recognize God’s presence in everything visible:

A Man must have Gross Conceptions of God if he imagines he can be seen in a Future, Better state in any Corporeal Form: Incorporeally we see him Here, his Wisdom, Goodness, Power, and Providence; and this Beatific Vision brightens More, and More to Pure Minds, . . . and thus ’tis Heaven here on Earth.

Richardson turned on its head the literal interpretation of St. Paul’s famous expression of eschatology: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” Through hyperbole, he suggested that God had pulled the veil aside in ways that should do more than simply satisfy humankind’s question about God’s existence. The potential of connoisseurship to be a religious practice is expressed tacitly but most fervently here. By training the judgment, exercising the sight, and taking pleasure, the connoisseur could not fail to come closer to God. By learning to savor the parts of paintings—the subjects, the coloring, the composition, the particular manners and invention of individual artists, and so on—which were things that gave great

68. Ibid., 191.
69. Ibid., 194.
70. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
pleasure, the connoisseur learned to see the beauties of nature so that to him or her

the most Common things . . . creates great Delight in his Mind. . . . [T]he Beauties of the Works of the great Author of Nature are not seen but by Enlighten'd Eyes, and to These they appear far otherwise than before they were so; as we hope to see every thing still nearer to its true Beauty, and Perfection in a Better State, when we shall see what our Eyes have not yet seen, nor our Hearts conceiv'd. 71

The rewards of connoisseurship went far beyond the canvas. In learning to look rationally at art, an individual could learn to see the world differently. This was the most significant justification for Richardson of connoisseurship: it placed the individual in a different relationship with God.

Although the role of religion in enlightenment science in Britain is well established, its importance to art remains insecure. Further work, for example, on debates about idolatry, the use of art imagery in theological writings, and the continuity of plain-style portraiture through the eighteenth century, may yield considerable insights into the concerns expressed so vividly by Jonathan Richardson in what remain distinctive art theoretical texts. Richardson's writings emerged from a period of intense religious and political conflict during the reign of Queen Anne, and it is striking to observe that they remained the most sustained attempt to consider painting theoretically on religious terms, until Ruskin's writings in the quite different conditions of the mid-nineteenth century. Although they were formative on Joshua Reynolds, whose Discourses were widely read in the later eighteenth century, as well as other artist-writers such as James Barry and Benjamin West, the wider impact of Richardson's manifesto for English art is difficult to measure. 72 Nevertheless, the publication of new editions of his works in 1725, 1773, and 1792 suggests that they continued to be influential. 73

72. Barrell, Theory of Painting, passim.
73. Apparently persuaded by his son and his friend Ralph Palmer, Richardson removed some of the religious content from the texts for the 1728 French edition and for
By attending more closely to the shape and direction that his own faith gave his arguments, we can clearly see why Richardson expressed his ambitions as a writer in this way:

Would to God I could be Instrumental in persuading Gentlemen to exchange those trifling, Unmanly, and Criminal Pleasures to which too many are accustomed, for those of the Other, and Better kind: Would to God I could persuade them to manage life well; to get Noble Ideas of the Supreme Being; to apply themselves to the Knowledge and Improvement of Useful and Excellent arts . . . [and] to impregnate their Minds with Pure and Beautiful Images.⁷⁴

Richardson set out to secure painting as a practice suitable for English Protestants. He did this not by setting religion to the side but by demonstrating how God's gift of painting could be reclaimed to encourage moral virtue, piety, and orthodox Christianity.

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⁷⁴. Richardson, Science of a Connoisseur, 196.