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HUME, DAVID. [To analyze Hume's contribution to aesthetics, this entry comprises two essays:

Survey of Thought

"Of the Standard of Taste"

The first is a survey of Hume's philosophy and the place of aesthetics in it. The second essay is an in-depth analysis of his major essay "Of the Standard of Taste." For Hume's views on tragedy, see Tragedy. For related discussion, see "Taste."

Survey of Thought

The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) was born and died in Edinburgh. He entered the university there at the age of twelve, but left after three, or possibly four, years without graduating, as was usual for the time. He then embarked on a long and private study of philosophy. Between 1734 and 1737 he lived in France, where he wrote *A Treatise of Human Nature*, which was published anonymously in 1739–1740. To boost disappointing sales of the work, he then published an anonymous summary of its main theses. This pamphlet, now known as the *Abstract*, singled out precisely the tenets he selected for discussion in rewriting the original three volumes for publication as three separate works between 1748 and 1752. These are now known as the *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, (1748), *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), and *A Dissertation on the Passions* (1757).

Hume did not obtain full-time employment until he was over forty. He twice failed to become a professor of philosophy, first in Edinburgh in 1745, and then in Glasgow in 1752; on both occasions, hostility toward his overtly skeptical and antireligious views combined with local political ambitions to prevent his appointment. In 1752, however, he became Keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, which later became the National Library of Scotland. Using the magnificent collection, Hume was able to publish between 1754 and 1762 the six volumes of his *History of England*. This work was immensely successful during Hume's lifetime and into the following century. Earlier, in 1741–1742, Hume had published anonymously two volumes of *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, and in his own name another set of essays on political and economic topics, in 1752, titled *Political Discourses*.

Hume served in Paris from 1763 to 1766 as secretary and then chargé d'affaires at the British embassy. He became

friendly with most of the great writers and philosophers of the day, such as Denis Diderot, Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but to their mutual regret he never met Voltaire. Hume returned to London, and in 1767 became undersecretary of state, handling diplomacy with foreign powers to the north of France, including the Russia of Catherine the Great. Hume retired to Edinburgh in 1769 and played host to all the important visitors to town, including Benjamin Franklin. His closest friend was Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* appeared in 1776, shortly before Hume died. Smith adopted a great deal from Hume's philosophical work, including emphasis in moral philosophy on imagination and sympathy. Moreover, like Hume, Smith embedded his economic theory in his account of moral philosophy and the nature of society.

The scientific, political, and social contexts in which Hume was writing were quite different from today, and the full force of many of his claims and concepts cannot easily be translated into twentieth-century forms. Hume himself was most influenced by the writings of the Roman politician Marcus Tullius Cicero, and the seventeenth-century French philosopher Nicolas de Malebranche. He read widely, however, and expected his equally learned audience to recognize his other allusions and debts. Hume's letters reveal how much his public life, which began *after* publication of almost all his works, influenced his views about what mattered most—moral conduct in civil society; his published writings must therefore be carefully anchored in the contexts in which they were conceived and produced. The only works he revised after his government service were new editions of his *History* and his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.

Hume accepted the traditional view that the only way to plan for the future is to understand how and why things change; only a knowledge of causes can help us dispel our fears, explain the past, and influence what happens. But he held that many philosophers had misunderstood the nature of causal knowledge and had thus failed to benefit from it. To start with, an examination of the natural world must be grounded on a study of the investigator himself; a study of the nature of man should reveal the nature and extent of his knowledge, and enable us all better to conduct our lives. Hume argues that we are all governed less by reason than philosophers have typically claimed, and that we are motivated essentially by our passions; moreover, our capacities for interpreting experience, from which all our ideas ultimately derive, are extremely varied. This means both that we should not overintellectualize human activities and that we must learn to live with probabilities rather than certainties. Such philosophical views yield intensely practical benefits, as is proper, because the goal of philosophy is to achieve understanding that enhances life.

Only after Hume's death did aesthetics achieve recognizably modern form, as a result of many intellectual and social factors, such as the spread of wealth, which hastened the

emergence of an informed, but nonpracticing, "public" for the arts with the leisure to travel, buy, and comment. Hume's own scattered reflections on art are firmly anchored in his conception of social life, which is why he embeds his account of both making and responding to art within his general analysis of other human actions. Almost all his claims are based on literature, in which his entirely orthodox tastes are anchored in classical, and modern neoclassical, works. Even so, his interest in drama and poetry is markedly less than his interest in history and philosophy, and he shows almost no knowledge of the other arts.

Hume derived his views about the arts from a single book, and he saw his own task as that of underpinning those claims by reference to his own theory of human nature. The Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos was secretary of the French Academy from 1723 until his death in 1742; he had been a friend of the Huguenot scholar Pierre Bayle, whose encyclopedic and skeptical works had inspired Hume. In 1719, Du Bos published *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, and the book dominated European thinking about the arts for the next fifty years. Hume frequently referred to the work from the 1730s onward, drawing from it extensively in his essay "Of the Standard of Taste." Unlike Du Bos, however, who signaled his awareness of important differences between the arts, deriving in part from their various mediums, Hume usually ignored such differences and generalized his remarks on the basis of literature alone. [See Du Bos.]

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume discusses the nature of judgment and disinterested evaluation on which he grounds his later views about literary criticism. His passing remarks on beauty are also of interest, however. He holds that beauty is an indefinable "power" in objects that causes a pleasurable sentiment. Beauty is not a sentiment, nor even a property discernible by the five senses, but rather a property whose presence is *felt* (by a sixth or seventh sense, as Du Bos and Francis Hutcheson, respectively, said) only when objects with certain detectable properties causally interact, under specifiable conditions, with minds having certain properties (1978, p. 299; 1987, pp. 164–166; 1975, p. 292). Discussion of something in which a person takes delight can alter his perception of it, and thereby set off a new causal chain that results in a new sentiment.

Hume argues that two important principles operate when we make judgments about beauty: comparison functions in our classification of objects, and sympathy operates whenever we think of things in association with people. Beauty is species-relative and culture-relative, and we can justify our judgments only by reference to the species and nature of the object claimed to be beautiful. We must know precisely what kind of thing we are talking about before we can decide whether it is beautiful. Although beauty is detected by a sentiment, it is as "real" as color and other supposedly secondary qualities. Three factors secure the objectivity of judgments in such contexts: the conventions of language,

the universal psychological makeup of human beings, and the possibility of publicly shareable viewpoints. It is crucial to recognize, Hume argues, that human beings cannot agree in the absence of either a literal or metaphorical point of view: that alone can ground the general standards that are necessary for general evaluations. Strictly speaking, a general point of view should be understood as a cognitive attitude in which we think of things in certain ways, whatever we may privately feel to the contrary; and although the standards formulated in this frame of mind are general, they are also revisable, because they serve the needs of the community and those needs may change. It is thus contingent which standards are accepted within a particular context, but it is necessary that there be some standards, in the sense that agreed anchors and conventions are the only guarantees of mutual understanding and communication.

Such views demonstrate that Hume understood the central importance of context to critical judgments, and that he was one of the first British writers to do so. In the finer arts, he insists, "it is requisite to employ much reasoning" (1975, p. 173). Here Hume followed Du Bos closely, agreeing with him both that we can derive sustained pleasure from a work only if we understand it in some way, and that the role of reason is to justify the verdict of sentiment by picking out those features of a work that have affected us.

Hume's most influential essay on aesthetics, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1987, pp. 226–249), was published in 1757, in a context of intense debate by his friends in Edinburgh and further afield. Hume seeks to find in human nature as well as in social practices a resolution for a problem that Allan Ramsay, the painter, and to some extent Adam Smith, located only in social practices. Hume holds that some so-called judgments of taste are palpably foolish and indefensible. Accordingly, he tries to show that criticism can be a factually based, rational, and social activity, capable of integration within the rest of intelligible discourse.

A purely passive attitude toward things is inadequate for detecting their most subtle properties: an observer must self-consciously attend to the object in question, and be in a proper state of mind when doing so. A merely causal reaction will be replaced by an appropriate causal interaction, to which the observer crucially contributes. Hume adopts Du Bos's list of the "causes" why people fail to respond appropriately to works of art: they are all technical notions from seventeenth-century French debates. A person may lack "delicacy," or sensory discrimination; may lack "good sense," or the capacity to make true sensory rather than true intellectual judgments; and may be "prejudiced." The point about prejudice is that, having made up one's mind in advance, one does not fully attend to the matter at hand, and may even fail to perceive that one's prior judgment was verified. Two steps are necessary for proper judgment: practice and comparison. Practice is necessary in order to overcome any superficial or incomplete first impressions, and to ensure that all relevant

aspects of a complex work have been discerned. Comparison is necessary in order to determine not only the boundaries of a work, but the similarities and differences between it and anything else, as well as its relations with other things.

Hume's discussion trades on a deep ambiguity in the French and English term *sentiment*, which covers both physical feelings or sensations, and mental thoughts, opinions, and judgments, but his general model of aesthetic response and judgment emerges clearly. Someone becomes conscious of pleasure in a certain object, and this induces him to pay closer perceptual and intellectual attention to it, with the aim of sustaining the pleasure. If the spectator can make sense, in some way, of what he perceives, he will experience new sentiments that may loosely be described as enhancing the original ones. In the broadest sense, works of art are pleasurable means of communication between human beings, and so the preconditions of effective communication apply to art as much as to other means of communication. Works please because of the particular properties they possess, and one of our tasks is to identify these causes in order to enable others to share in our enjoyment. We cannot comprehend a work, however, merely by being in its presence. Two properties that belong to human actions, and that are goals of our comprehension, are meaning and value: neither is discernible by the five ordinary senses alone. The mind must be actively involved. Just as inference beyond present data is necessary for all factual reasoning, so interpretation is necessary to establish the meaning of what another has done, and for that an understanding of context is essential. The cognitive engagement of an artist requires a reciprocal engagement by the audience.

The importance of Hume's essay "Of the Standard of Taste" has been fully grasped only in the late twentieth century. It is the first sustained attempt to give an experientially grounded account of critical judgment that escapes the accusation of being merely causal and recognizes the ineliminable role of the mind in interpretation of the selected data.

[See also Beauty, conceptual and historical overview article.]

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PETER JONES

"Of the Standard of Taste"

In his Introduction to the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) David Hume announces his intention to deal systematically with "Logic, Morals, Criticism and Politics." "In these four

sciences," he wrote, "is comprehended almost every thing, which it can in any way import us to be acquainted with, or which can tend either to the improvement or ornament of the human mind." As it turned out, criticism was the one science that he did not get around to, either in the *Treatise* or in his subsequent publications. It was not that Hume lost interest: observations about the arts and about critical judgment occur in all his principal works as well as in his essays and in his letters, but his one and only formal statement is the essay "Of the Standard of Taste," which was published in 1757 when Hume was forty-six years old. Frequently reprinted, respectfully anthologized, the essay has not been exactly neglected, but until fairly recently, it was regarded as being of greater interest to the historian of ideas than to the philosopher. It does precede the recognition of aesthetics as an autonomous field (or "subject")—the Germans get credit for that—and it does endorse a number of commonplaces (some would say clichés) of neoclassical criticism. Peter Jones, one of the most learned and most sympathetic of Hume scholars has remarked: "It is unfortunate, perhaps, that in the absence of alternative texts, a single, condensed, derivative essay of under twenty pages should be taken as representative of Hume's considered views on art and criticism" (Jones, 1982). It is true, as has been demonstrated by Jones and others, that taken individually, not one of Hume's main points in the essay is original with him. In addition to his British sources—Joseph Addison, Francis Hutcheson, Anthony Ashley Cooper, earl of Shaftesbury—Hume borrowed copiously, sometimes word for word, from the French author Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos (*Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 1719): (Philosophers in those days did not go in for acknowledgments or citing their sources; think of René Descartes or Baruch Spinoza. It was not plagiarism, we are told, because the assumption was that educated readers would recognize borrowings and did not need footnotes.) To identify and trace the history of Hume's ingredients is interesting and helpful but should not keep us from appreciating the brilliant and innovative way that he organizes these familiar materials.

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) is the first modern work in philosophical aesthetics and Kant in our own day seems to be overshadowed by G. W. F. Hegel. Aesthetics, as it is taught, is linked to the history of art, to the social sciences, to culture criticism and an interest in the spirit of the age. Such questions as whether the judgment of taste stands in need of a transcendental deduction are not in the forefront. Hume's ideas, in particular those that inspire the essay "Of the Standard of Taste," foreshadow Kantian doctrine on a number of central points. Although Kant scholars might protest the claim, it can be argued that it was Hume, in this "condensed, derivative essay of under twenty pages," who set the stage for discussion of the central issue for philosophical aesthetics. The present essay summarizes Hume's arguments and adds some brief comments.

Hume begins by observing that it is obvious even to "men of the most confined knowledge" that tastes differ within "the narrow circle of their acquaintance" and as, through travel and education, they become less provincial, they are increasingly struck by the "inconsistency and contrariety" of tastes. Initially, we tend to dismiss as "barbarous" the preferences of "distant nations and remote ages," but when we find that they return the compliment, we become less dogmatic and more tolerant.

The opening paragraph is an epitome. It sums up the conflict that the essay is designed to resolve. In the sort of situation that Hume is imagining, one's first thought might be, "If you think *that's* beautiful, you're out of your mind!" But people differ from one another in many ways and one person can admire what another finds boring. Tastes differ; that is a fact of life.

Actually, Hume continues, there are greater differences both in taste and in morals than appear on the surface. "There are certain terms in every language which import blame and others praise." Everyone agrees that elegance, propriety, and simplicity are what one looks for in a writer, just as heroism and prudence are virtues in a man of action; conflicts arise when it comes to deciding who is entitled to claim such merits. (Homer's heroes might not strike us as good role models.)

True enough, although Hume goes on to draw a contrast with "matters of opinion and science," which is very unclear.

Hume continues: "It is natural for us to seek a *Standard of Taste*; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another."

If one begins by consulting our everyday intuitions, one finds an inconsistency between what Hume calls "two species of common sense." The first species, as it happens, echoes the "skeptical" views of philosophers "in holding that there is a big difference between "judgment and sentiment." Judgments "have reference to something beyond themselves" and are either true or false, but

a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being. . . . To seek the real beauty or real deformity is as fruitless an inquiry as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter; According to the disposition of the organs, the same object may be both sweet and bitter; and the proverb has justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes.

The second species of common sense points in the opposite direction:

Whoever would assert an equality of genius between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no

less an extravagance than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as Tenerife or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there be found persons who give preference to the former authors, no one pays attention to such a taste and we pronounce without scruple, the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous.

Hume's task will be to tell a story that allows a place for both species of common sense, which are (although he does not quite admit it) flatly inconsistent. Something has to go. What will it be? Hume can hardly jettison the distinction between sentiment and judgment because from the time of the *Treatise* it has been central to his whole system. (It has, however, been noted that for Hume, as for his French forbears, the term *sentiment* encourages ambiguities because it can mean not only feeling or affect but also opinion.) The real sticking point is the first species' claim that "a thousand sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right." That cannot be if the person who prefers Ogilby to John Milton is not merely mistaken but "absurd and ridiculous." The trick will be to show that the sentiment-judgment distinction does not entail commitment to what Hume calls "the natural equality of tastes." Does Hume in the end pull it off? Opinions differ. Some think that a causal theory in which a judgment of taste articulates a response to a candidate work of art precludes the possibility of a judgment's being mistaken, or "absurd and ridiculous." That thesis, however, requires supporting argument; otherwise, it is mere dogma and has little to recommend it. An aesthetic judgment—what Hume calls a "pronouncement"—is an event and hence may be presumed to have causes. But it is also an assertion—a speech act—and to ask whether or not it is true is to raise a completely different question.

Hume suddenly changes gears and lays it down as "evident" that the "rules of composition" are not established a priori but are based on observation of "what has universally been found to please in all countries and in all ages." He speaks as if everyone knew what the "rules" are; he gives no examples; to anyone inclined, following neoclassical convention, to assume, for example, a rule of verisimilitude—that art "holds the mirror up to nature" and so forth—Hume observes that "many of the beauties of poetry and even of eloquence are founded on falsehood and fiction, on hyperboles, metaphors and an abuse of perversion of terms from their natural meaning." He then goes on to what amounts to an attack on the whole idea of rules: a poem either works or it does not, and, if it does, then the fact that it breaks the rules is irrelevant. Ariosto pleases, not by his faults (e.g., his "monstrous improbable fictions") but by "the force and clearness of his expression, the readiness and variety of his inventions." (Note that these are examples of those "general terms" that "import praise.")

And however his faults may diminish our satisfaction, they are not able entirely to destroy it. Did our pleasure really arise from

those parts of his poem, which we denominate faults, this would be no objection to criticism in general; it would only be an objection to those particular rules of criticism, which would establish such circumstances to be faults, and would represent them as universally blameable. If they are found to please, they cannot be faults; let the pleasure, which they produce, be ever so unexpected and unaccountable.

The putative "rules of composition" are supposed to be grounded in laws of taste, that is, in generalizations to the effect that certain qualities are causes of pleasure to everyone in every age. Here Hume is in a bind: he is going to claim that a judgment of taste is justified or vindicated when a critic correctly identifies the features of a poem that account for the pleasure that reading the poem affords; and Hume's conception of causality is that it depends on the observation of repeated sequences. This suggests that the critic is seeking a causal law on the order of "A poem that manifests 'force and clearness of expression' has some claim to beauty." On the other hand, it would have been obvious to Hume that such a law holds only because it is definitional and based "on reasonings a priori"; and that for reasons he has indicated, a substantive law (or rule) has no teeth; a violation (or disconfirmation) does not unseat the judgment. ("If they are found to please, they cannot be faults.")

A stroke of genius on Kant's part was to recognize that if there were rules (or laws) of taste, then a judgment of taste could be supported in the one case deductively, and in the other by induction, and that either possibility is absurd. (For one thing, it would follow that one could assess the beauty of a poem without ever reading it, just by ascertaining that it had or lacked the relevant properties.) It would be nice to be able to credit Hume with having anticipated Kant, but even with special pleading, there is too much that tells against it. One can say this much for Hume: he recognized that there was something fishy about the notion of laws, principles, or rules of taste and nothing, it can be argued, in his positive theory depends on the supposition that there are any such. Hume very much wanted to be famous as a man of letters and the critical establishment of his day was committed to aesthetic generalizations, usually of a rather bland and innocuous sort. The French, whom he admired, tended to go on and on about "propriety" and why Jean Racine is more correct than William Shakespeare. It is to Hume's credit that although he did not, like Kant, flatly dismiss this talk as hot air, he did not trade on it either.

Next Hume moves to an interesting and rather tricky step in his argument. In his summary of the first species of common sense, he had said that "beauty is no quality of things in themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them, and each mind perceives a different beauty." This is (perhaps intentionally) a sloppy way of putting a point that he had made quite clearly in the *Treatise* and in subsequent works: beauty is not a perceptible property ei-

ther of works of art or of a critic's mind. We *ascribe* beauty to a poem when we find that not just once, but on repeated readings, it is a cause of pleasure for us *and* if we suppose, with or without reason, that it will be a cause of pleasure to others. Beauty, as Hume says repeatedly in the *Treatise*, is to be thought of as a "power" (what one would call a dispositional property) and, as such, it is a supervenient property. Sometimes Hume likens it to color, a so-called secondary property, and is eager to insist that being supervenient is not being somehow illusory or unreal. (Actually, in Lockean terms, beauty should be listed as a *tertiary* property because secondary properties—for example, color, at least in the visual arts—are among those on which beauty supervenes.)

We pronounce a work beautiful when our encounter with it is a cause of pleasure, but the causal relation here is not simple: it is not as if the poem were a magnet and the pleasurable response iron filings. The "power" of a poem may escape notice if the test conditions are not exactly what they should be.

Those fine emotions of the mind are of a very tender and delicate nature, and require the concurrence of many favorable circumstances to make them play with facility and exactness, according to their general and established principles. The least exterior hindrance to such small springs, or the least internal disorder, disturbs their motion, and confounds the operation of the whole machine. When we would make an experiment of this nature, and would try the force of any beauty or deformity, we must choose with care a proper time and place, and bring the fancy to a suitable situation and disposition. A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object; if any of these circumstances be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious, and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic and universal beauty.

Hume's idea, as it starts to emerge here, is that although the sentence "*O* is beautiful" (where *O* is the name or description of an individual) cannot be true or false, it may or may not be justified. It is justified if the speaker is correct in identifying the cause of his pleasure and if he has reason to suppose that *O* will be a cause of pleasure to anyone who satisfies the test conditions. This is a plausible view, but then why say that it is an expression of sentiment and not a judgment? If "*O* is soluble" or "*O* is green" quality, why not "*O* is beautiful"?

What follows the provisos for reliable test procedures is a panegyric.

The same HOMER who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago, is still admired at PARIS and at LONDON. All the changes of climate, government, religions and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator. . . . On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with. Envy and jealousy have too much place in a narrow circle; and even familiar acquaintance with his person

may diminish the applause due to his performances: But when these obstructions are removed, the beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments, immediately display their energy and while the world endures, they maintain their authority over the minds of men.

Hume takes seriously the notion that time will tell, that genuine poetic excellence is notably durable. In part this may be a reflection of Hume's own taste, which was old-fashioned and somewhat conventional. (It was also limited: Hume actively disliked music, and had little interest in the visual arts: literature, which for him included history and philosophy, was the major art form and his preferences were for classical authors.)

His celebration of Homer does suggest an idea that is consistent with his own theory and that would get him off the hook on the topic of laws and rules of taste. It goes as follows: the beauties of Homer, those qualities that are "naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments," are not qualities that the *Iliad* has in common with the *Aeneid*; they are qualities that are distinctive to the *Iliad*—to the original and perhaps to every adequate translation. This would mean that if we praise both the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* for, for example, "clearness of expression," that term will have to be flagged as indexical. A reader could still attribute his pleasure in the *Iliad* to its "force and clearness of expression" without committing himself to all admiring the *Aeneid* and might well insist that (in its own way) the *Aeneid* has "force and clearness of expression."

Throughout Hume's essay, the reader is left wondering about "the standard"? What is it that it is "natural for us to seek"? What are we looking for? At times it seems to be a criterion and one that has explicit conditions of application. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates pretends to be seeking instruction and asks Euthyphro to tell him what feature it is that makes every pious act pious—just giving examples will not do. It sounds as if what he is asking for is a definition. What Socrates says is that, for his own purposes, he needs a "standard"—which is a plausible translation of the Greek *paradigma*. But a paradigm in Greek, as in English, need not be a rule: it can be a clear instance, a central case. Now, Hume may be thinking that it is the great works that set our standards. If asked to evaluate someone's epic poem, and one takes the request seriously, one reads the poem in the light of the *Iliad*—and similarly for novels, string quartets, and other art forms that Hume does not consider. That would not be a bad idea.

What about the appeal to posterity? There certainly is something impressive about real perennial favorites. High-brow critics are apt to dismiss popular art as junk, which it mostly is, but it is *ephemeral* junk. Hume thinks of Homer; we would probably think of Shakespeare, who has always been popular. (Hume, incidentally, regards Shakespeare as a genius but lacking in taste—no doubt a further instance of

the French influence.) The question—one that could not have failed to occur to Hume—is, How are we to be guided in our assessment of our contemporary poets? What are we supposed to be doing while waiting for the verdict of posterity? Hume's answer—and the final major theme of the essay is that we should be guided by the opinion of those critics we have learned to trust—what Hume calls the "true judges."

Hume lists the requirements for the good critic and they turn out to be a good deal more complicated than his earlier suggestion about "perfect serenity of mind" and so forth. (This is the section in which Hume follows most closely the pattern set by Du Bos.) The first is "delicacy of imagination," a term used (rather oddly) to mean the capacity to make fine analytic discriminations. A good critic not only can say what makes for excellence in a poem as a whole but can explain in detail what each line contributes to the overall effect. By way of illustration, Hume cites from *Don Quixote* the story of Sancho Panza's kinsmen; they were laughed at for claiming to detect the taste of iron and of leather in wine submitted for their approval but were vindicated when a key with a leather thong was discovered at the bottom of the barrel. Hume finds a parallel with the good critic who can distinguish qualities of the work that are inconspicuous and escape the attention of others. (The paragraphs in which Hume draws what he sees as the moral of this tale are thoroughly confused. It is a good exercise to try to see where and why he went wrong.) The second thing a critic needs is practice. First impressions are apt to be vague and sentiments uncertain, but if one works hard, "the mist dissipates." Competence is no more easily come by for a critic than for a creative artist; "the same address and dexterity which practice gives to the execution of any work is also acquired by the same means, in the judging of it."

Practice develops skill at making comparisons, the third virtue of a critic and an important one, because it is only by comparison that one is able to determine the correct degree of praise or blame that a poem merits. (This harks back to the opening section where Milton's "elegance and genius" are highlighted when his work is contrasted with Ogilby's.) But, for comparisons to be illuminating (and this is the fourth virtue), the critic must free his mind of prejudice. If I am asked to judge the work of "a different age and nation," or if I have some personal feelings for the author in question, "I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances."

Finally, the critic must have good sense, which means that he must be able to take account of an author's intentions and to appreciate in detail the steps the author takes to achieve them. Moreover, the critic must have a developed feeling for logical and dramatic coherence: "every kind of composition, even the most poetical, is nothing but a chain

of propositions and reasonings; not always, indeed, the justest and most exact, but still plausible and specious, however disguised by the colouring of the imagination."

Hume's summary: "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found is the true standard of taste and beauty."

Is this the final answer to the question raised at the outset of the essay? Does the "joint verdict" give us a rule for deciding among "the various sentiments of men" which to confirm and which to condemn? Surely not: whether or not a poem is any good is not something to be decided by appeal to the experts, if for no other reason than that such an appeal would mean that the only valid judgments of taste are secondhand—which is absurd. The only available recourse is to become oneself a "true judge," and that, as Hume correctly observes, may be a lifetime's vocation.

On the other hand, the role of authority in critical as in moral debates is extremely murky. If one cannot in good faith assert, "This has got to be right (beautiful) because he says it is," one is nonetheless swayed by the opinions of those whose judgment one has come to trust. Here there are many issues that need to be explored.

Two points, as if afterthoughts, are raised at the conclusion of the essay. The first is that, although (as Hume sees it) "the general principles of taste are uniform in human nature," there are preferences that have to do with personal idiosyncrasies and should simply be accepted; so there is one limited field in which it is useless to dispute about tastes. The second point raises weightier issues and certainly deserves more attention than Hume is willing to allot. It is that, despite the need to free ourselves from prejudice in considering the work of another age or nation, we cannot and should not suspend our moral conviction. It would be silly to take exception to characters from the historical past because of their quaint costumes.

But where the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation, this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments; and however I may excuse the poet on account of the manners of his age, I can never can relish the composition.

Hume's claim is reminiscent of Plato at his least enlightened. The only poets or playwrights allowed in the Republic are those who are careful to depict the good guys in glowing colors and the villains as despicable. It is hard to associate such a view with Hume's own temperamental and moral commitments; the truth is that he does not say enough in the essay to give a clear picture of what he really has in mind.

The issues raised, if not settled, in "Of the Standard of Taste" are central to aesthetics. The essay is a remarkable performance and deserves careful study.

[See also Taste, article on Modern and Recent History.]

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HUSSERL, EDMUND GUSTAV ALBRECHT (1859–1938), German philosopher and founder of phenomenology, a movement in twentieth-century thought that attempts to deal with traditional issues in philosophy through analysis of human consciousness. Husserl came to philosophy as a trained mathematician and psychologist, convinced of the inadequacy of "psychologism," his contemporaries' endeavor to account for mathematical knowl-

edge solely in terms of empirical descriptions of mental states. Husserl's first major work, *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), aims at providing a description of the acts of consciousness involved in logical understanding and knowing, without reducing the validity of the content of logic to the empirical status of those acts. The success of this work gained Husserl a position at the University of Göttingen, but a penchant for self-criticism soon produced a fundamental change in his thinking. Although he was convinced that the analysis of consciousness in the *Logical Investigations* was not psychological, he became dissatisfied with its overemphasis on acts of consciousness and its consequent failure to investigate the "senses" and "essences" of things—that make the relation between consciousness and the world possible at all—as well as how those senses and essences can be availed. Taking up this sort of investigation into his analysis of consciousness and appropriating a traditional label for it, Husserl develops a "transcendental phenomenology" in his second major work, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913). Roughly paralleling Husserl's move to the University of Freiburg in 1916, where he would retire in 1929, his conception of phenomenology takes a further turn as he probes limitations of his previously published analyses: notably, their privileging of acts of judgment and their neglect of the temporal nature and passive and intersubjective aspects of consciousness. In the last two decades of his life, Husserl accordingly develops a "genetic phenomenology," concerned with the way the senses of things come to be constituted—ultimately, in the consciousness of a "lifeworld"—prior to explicit acts of perception and judgment. One fruit of these labors, most of which remained unpublished during Husserl's lifetime, is his final major work, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936).

Although traditional issues in aesthetics and the philosophy of art appear only on the periphery of Husserl's published work, he was no stranger to them, nor did he fail to recognize their import for his project of establishing the nature as well as the necessity of phenomenology as the study of pure consciousness. In his unpublished studies—especially his investigations of pictorial consciousness and fantasy—insightful treatments of such issues recur with a telling regularity. In addition, he assigns at least some of those issues a particular place within a projected system of philosophical sciences. Because Husserl's philosophy is bent on determining the senses and essences of things, as something disclosable only through an analysis of consciousness and the ways in which things are originally given to consciousness, the relevance of his philosophy to aesthetics (and vice versa) comes as no surprise. Indeed, Husserl's initial and innovative attempts to demonstrate the objectivity of logical form—without reducing the latter to either the psychological processes of the logician (psychologism) or