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Reading Hume's 'Of the standard of taste' : taking Hume seriously

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READING HUME'S 'OF THE STANDARD OF TASTE': TAKING HUME SERIOUSLY

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READING HUME'S 'OF THE STANDARD OF TASTE': TAKING HUME SERIOUSLY

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ABSTRACT

Reading Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste':
Taking Hume Seriously

by

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Master of Philosophy

This thesis presents an interpretation of David Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'. The most distinguishing feature of this interpretation is the emphasis placed on the significance of Hume's general philosophical position in a faithful reading of this philosophical classic. The success of this interpretation will show that Hume's essay should be read as an integral part of his system of philosophy.

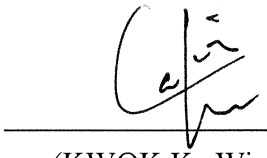
There are three parts in this thesis. The first part is an overview of some key aspects of Hume's philosophy which are relevant to my interpretation. Unlike many contemporary philosophers in the analytic tradition, Hume is a systematic thinker. A faithful reading of his works should take his general philosophical framework seriously. Therefore, this overview of his system serves as the general background of the next two parts.

The second part is a discussion of Hume's aesthetic thought. More specifically, it provides an exposition of his view on beauty and judgements of beauty. This part completes the stage-setting for the development of my interpretation, by helping the reader form a more specific conceptual framework for understanding Hume's essay.

The third part develops an interpretation of 'Of the Standard of Taste' according to what has been provided in the previous two parts. It starts with an outline of the essay, which indicates Hume's aim in writing it. After that, a few sections are devoted to some central elements of the essay. The last section of this part discusses four controversies concerning Hume's essay. These discussions establish the strength of this interpretation, or at least, the fruitful prospect of an interpretative project that integrates Hume's essay into his whole system.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.



(KWOK Ka Wing)

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

READING HUME'S 'OF THE STANDARD OF TASTE':
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Contents

List of Abbreviations

A Hume, David. *An Abstract of a Book lately Published; Entituled* A Treatise of Human Nature, &c. *Wherein the Chief Argument of that Book is farther Illustrated and Explained* (first published 1740). Cited from Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. 2 Vol. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Citations are given with paragraph number.

E Hume, David. *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*. Eds. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889.
Abbreviations of the individual essays in this collection with date of first publication:

- E-Sc The Sceptic (1742). Citations are given with page number.
- E-ST Of the Standard of Taste (1757). Citations are given with page number.

EHU Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 (first published, 1748, as *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*). Citations are given with section and paragraph number.

EPM Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006 (first published 1751). Citations are given with section and paragraph number.

L Hume, David. *The Letters of David Hume*. Ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 Vol. New York: Oxford University Press, 1932. Citations are given with volume number and page number.

T Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. 2 Vol. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Citations are given with numbers indicating the number of book, part, section, and paragraph.

Introduction

It is generally agreed that Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' is one of the most important works in aesthetics. A large literature on this essay emerged in the last 50 years. Quite a number of insightful observations have been made, but they seem to have generated more disputes than agreements. Among these disputes, the one concerning the relation between this essay and Hume's other philosophical works seems to be the most fundamental one, though it has seldom been explicitly discussed. Earlier discussions tend to treat this essay as a self-standing work; but recently, more effort has been made to draw on resources from Hume's system. The reason why this dispute seems to be the most fundamental one is quite straightforward—our stance regarding it determines whether we should bring in resources from Hume's major works in understanding the essay.

In 'Of the Standard of Taste', Hume does not employ most of his characteristic terminology. This might explain why earlier readings of it tend to avoid importing thoughts from his other writings. Another reason might be related to the advertisement in the first edition of his *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741), a later edition of which contains 'Of the Standard of Taste':

> The READER must not look for any Connexion among these Essays, but must consider each of them as a Work apart. This is an Indulgence that is given to all ESSAY-WRITERS, and is an equal EASE both to WRITER and Reader, by freeing them from any tiresome stretch of Attention or application. (E, p. 42)

However, this advertisement does not seem to be relevant here, as 'Of the Standard of Taste' was originally published under the title *Four Dissertations* in 1757, 16 years later than the advertisement cited above. In one of his 1755 letters to Andrew Millar, Hume considers this volume as 'a fourth less than my Enquiry' (L 1, p. 223). The comparison made here suggests that, perhaps, Hume thinks that the pieces in this volume are closer to his *Treatise* and *Enquiries* than to his *Essays*. Although 'Of the Standard of Taste' was written in haste to substitute for two other essays withdrawn from the *Four Dissertations* (Gracyk 2011), the fact that it was written with this aim in mind should show that Hume probably wants it to fit with the style of that volume.

If this is the case, then it is not clear that the *Essays*' advertisement should apply to 'Of the Standard of Taste', despite that fact that Hume, soon after the publication of the *Four Dissertations*, decided to insert it among the *Essays* (L 1, p.247).

Moreover, although it is true that the writing style of 'Of the Standard of Taste' is closer to his *Essays* than his *Enquiries*, it does not follow that it is intended to be a work which performs the same role as other essays. Here, Hume's distinction of metaphysical writing and moral writing is illuminating. While the former aims at discovering the 'hidden truths' of human nature by a careful analysis of the observed human phenomena (EHU 1.2), the latter aims at promoting virtue by bringing people to '*feel* the difference between vice and virtue' (EHU 1.1). Most of the essays collected in the original volume of the *Essays* should be classified as moral writings (Immerwahr 1991, p. 10-12). But this does not seem to be the case for 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Hume describes his intention in this essay as 'to mingle some light of the understanding with the feelings of sentiment' (E-ST, p. 272). It means he is trying to use his understanding to analyse and reveal the 'hidden truths' of the observed phenomena concerning the feelings of sentiment. This is doubtlessly an aim of a piece of metaphysical writing. If this suggestion is accepted, then we should treat it as a part of his science of human nature, and welcome any interpretation which duly acknowledges its theoretical background in Hume's *Treatise* and *Enquiries*.

Motivated by the above considerations, this thesis is an attempt to develop an interpretation of Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' which significantly emphasises its connection with his general philosophical framework. The success of this interpretation will show that Hume's essay should be read as an integral part of his system of philosophy.

There are three parts in this thesis. The first part is an overview of some key aspects of Hume's philosophy which are relevant to my interpretation. Unlike many contemporary philosophers in the analytic tradition, Hume is a systematic thinker. A faithful reading of his works should take his thoughts in other area of philosophy seriously. Therefore, this overview of his system serves as the general background of the next two parts.

The second part is a discussion of Hume's aesthetic thought. More specifically, it provides an exposition of his view on beauty and judgements of beauty. This part

completes the stage-setting for the development of my interpretation, by helping the readers grasp a more specific conceptual framework which guides their understanding of Hume's essay.

The third part develops an interpretation of 'Of the Standard of Taste' according to what has been provided in the previous two parts. It starts with an outline of the essay, which indicates Hume's aim in writing it. After that, a few chapters are devoted to some central elements of the essay. The last chapter of this part discusses four controversies concerning Hume's essay. These discussions should be able to show the strength of this interpretation; or at least, the fruitful prospect of any interpretative project which integrates Hume's essay into his whole system.

Part I

Overview of Hume’s Philosophy

Chapter 1
Experimental Method

Perhaps it is impossible to appreciate the value of Hume's philosophy without always bearing in mind his methodology. It would not be far from the truth to think that Hume's methodology has shaped his philosophy in every detail. The best description of his philosophy is probably found in the subtitle of *A Treatise of Human Nature*—'Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects'. By 'experimental method', Hume has in mind something similar to the method adopted by the founders of modern natural science, such as Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton; but his version is nonetheless different from theirs. Hume's own illustration of his method can be found in the introduction of the *Treatise*:

> We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compar'd, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension. (T Intro. 10)

Hume thinks that an accurate observation of experience is essential to the development of his moral philosophy. We should bear in mind that Hume's aim is to establish a science of human nature, where 'human' means what we would nowadays call a 'person', in contrast to a 'human being'. The same distinction might also be put as that between a moral being and a natural being, and relatedly that between moral science and natural science. This science of human nature includes topics which fall under today's branches of philosophy, such as epistemology, moral philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of art, philosophy of religion, etc.

In order to illustrate the role of accurate observations in Hume's experimental method, we might consider how he would discuss a belief which is observed to be held by all people. The fact that this belief is so common suggests that our believing

it might somehow be a consequence of a common human nature. Therefore, a science of human nature should try to provide an explanation of why this belief is so common. Upon analysis, it is possible that this belief is not rationally justifiable, but Hume would not thus stop here and ask his reader to abandon this belief; rather, he would revise the fact to be explained as that this belief is held by all people despite the fact that it is not rationally justifiable. He would try to trace the genesis of this belief, and show how common human nature would cause us to believe in it. A particular example in Hume's works is our causal belief.

The importance of accurate observations is that the comparison of observations is required for Hume to discover the regularities in human nature, with which he could proceed to formulate his explanation of various phenomena. If the observations are not accurate, he would not be able to find out the regularities which truly belong to the human nature, and hence his explanation will then be false. An accurate observation would involve a careful analysis of the phenomena observed, the result of which might show that a belief is not rationally justified. Without a proper understanding of Hume's methodology, his readers might wrongly take this as his conclusion, or even treat him as a sceptic who would like to reform the system of human knowledge by throwing out all beliefs which are not justified. Such a reading of Hume has mistaken what belongs to the starting point of the investigation as the end. The real explanation starts rather than ends where an irrational belief has been correctly shown to be irrational. A correct interpretation of Hume's works must make sure what the fact to be explained is.

Hume's 'experimental' method also requires that we should stay within the boundary of experience in the development of his science of human nature:

> And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical. (T Intro. 8)

Although the moral philosopher must attempt to explain the observed human phenomena by general principles, these principles should be formed wholly on the basis of experience. Thus, he must construct his explanation by using only resources

from experience. The general principles formed can be further generalised and reduced to more general ones; but once we have arrived at the boundary set by our experience, we should be contented with the simple and general principles formulated. Although it would be quite natural for us to search for the ultimate reason for such principles, ‘we can give no reason for our most general and most refin’d principles, beside our experience of their reality’ (T Intro. 9). This restriction applies to every part of his philosophy, including his theory of art criticism.

Chapter 2
Perceptions of the Mind:
Impressions, Ideas, and Their Relations

The experimental method is supported by Hume's view on the limit of experience. He thinks that all we can experience are 'perceptions' of our mind, which can be distinguished into *ideas* and *impressions*; and both could also be further distinguished into *simple* and *complex*: 'Simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex are the contrary to these, and may be distinguished into parts' (T 1.1.1.2). Hume observes a correspondence between impressions and ideas. They resemble 'in every other particular, except their degree of force and vivacity' (T 1.1.1.3). If an idea acquires enough force and vivacity, it can become an impression. However, since we can have a complex impression without the corresponding complex idea, and *vice versa*, this general observation is limited in scope. Only simple impressions and simple ideas would always have their correspondents. Together with the observation that simple ideas are always preceded by their correspondent simple impressions, Hume proposes the copy principle:

> *[A]ll our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent.* (T 1.1.1.7)

Since all complex ideas can be distinguished into parts, i.e. simple ideas, and all simple ideas are derived from simple impressions, it follows that we cannot have any idea which is not ultimately grounded in our experience, and hence we should never go beyond experience in our study of human nature.

It should be noted that complex ideas can be formed by simple ideas in quite complicated ways; so there is no straightforward way for us to explicate their underlying structure. Hume's most famous example is our idea of cause and effect:

> Our judgments concerning cause and effect are deriv'd from habit and experience; and when we have been accustom'd to see one object united to

> another, our imagination passes from the first to the second, by a natural transition, which precedes reflection, and which cannot be prevented by it. (T 1.3.13.8)

The idea of cause and effect consists in the idea of a necessary connection. Hume realises that the latter could not be derived from any simple impression of the objective necessary connection between external objects, as all we can perceive through our senses and memory are the impressions of each individual objects, as well as their contiguity in time and space, and their constant conjunction. This leaves the idea of necessary connection unexplained. Hume ingeniously appeals to the habitual transition from one idea to another in our imagination. Such a transition is so irresistible that the ideas appear to be connected necessarily—our mind seems to be determined to pass from one idea to another. Our reflective impression of the determination of this operation in our mind supplies our idea of a necessary connection, which in turn constitutes our idea of cause and effect. In this move we see that Hume does not require that an idea and its corresponding impression should be given the same name (impression of determination vs. idea of necessary connection). Also, at least some complex idea, if unanalysed, might conceal its true structure and constituents, and hence lead us to falsely believe in something—e.g. an objective necessary connection between objects—the impression of which we could never perceive.

Moreover, this example reminds us what exactly Hume is developing in his writings. When Hume could not straightforwardly find any corresponding impression for a problematic idea, especially when the belief in such an idea is natural and fundamental to human beings, he does not simply reject the belief as not rationally justified; rather, he reflects on it further, and would not give up until an impression which causes us to have such a problematic idea is found. The impossibility of any impression of a necessary connection between external objects might satisfy the sceptics' project of rejecting or withholding any idea not justified. In this case, Hume agrees that this idea of a necessary connection between external objects is not rationally justified. However, this sceptical conclusion could not explain why it is natural for us to believe in such idea. For Hume's project of developing an experimental science of human nature, this common mistake is an interesting

phenomenon to be explained, and hence, we might say, for Hume, the sceptics stop where his investigation starts. As John Biro (2009) put it:

> This shift of focus from a vain attempt to give a philosophical justification of our fundamental beliefs to a scientific account of their origin in the operations of our minds, is what Hume, with deliberate paradox, calls a 'Sceptical Solution' to the skeptical challenge. (p. 47)

It is important for the readers of Hume always to clearly distinguish the 'skeptical challenge' from his 'Sceptical Solution' when such a distinction is present.

Besides simple and complex, impressions can also be distinguished along another dimension:

> As all the perceptions of the mind may be divided into *impressions* and *ideas*, so the impressions admit of another division into *original* and *secondary*. This division of the impressions is the same with that which I formerly made use of when I distinguish'd them into impressions of *sensation* and *reflexion*. Original impressions or impressions of sensation are such as without any antecedent perception arise in the soul, from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the application of objects to the external organs. Secondary, or reflective impressions are such as proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea. Of the first kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them. (T 2.1.1.1)

The original impressions are caused by things external to the mind; while the secondary impressions arise from the mind's operations on its acquired impressions and ideas.[1] This difference has an important epistemological implication. Since the causes and effects of secondary impressions are both perceptions of the mind and hence both subjectively accessible, this provides a possibility for us to understand the nature of the human mind. As a similar access to the causes is lacking in the case of other sciences, such as natural science, this might also explain why Hume considers his science of human nature as the 'only solid foundation for the other sciences' (T Intro. 7). A detailed examination of this difference goes beyond the scope of the

[1] As suggested by Owen (2009, p. 76), the terms 'original' and 'secondary' capture more accurately the distinctions, and hence I will only refer to the two categories by this pair of terms hereafter.

present study, so I would like to point out only the implication it has for our way of reading Hume. As Hume's aim is to provide a science of human nature, which studies the operation of the human mind, and grounds, rather than being grounded by, other sciences, so when we are uncertain whether we have correctly identified Hume's target of investigation, we can check our interpretation by asking whether the cause of the target as we interpret him is subjectively accessible or not. If it is not, probably the interpretation is wrong.

Secondary impressions, or simply passions, can be further divided into 'the *calm* and the *violent*. Of the first kind is the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects. Of the second are the passions of love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility' (T 2.1.1.3). This distinction, which concerns the 'felt intensity', should not be confused with that between strong and weak passions, which concerns the power of influencing our 'choices and conduct' (Penelhum 2009, p. 249). The difference between these two distinctions is clear in the case of a settled principle of action which has a strong influence on our action, but does not produce any sensible agitation (T 2.3.4.1).

Having discussed the classification of individual perceptions, we should turn to the relations between impressions and ideas. Hume distinguishes two meanings for the word 'relations':

> Either for that quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other, after the manner above-explained; or for that particular circumstance, in which, even upon the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy, we may think proper to compare them. (T 1.1.5.1)

The former is called *natural* relation; while the latter *philosophical* relation. There are 7 kinds of philosophical relations, which fall into two classes: (a) relations of ideas: *resemblance*, *contrariety*, *degrees in any quality*, and *proportions in quantity or number*; and (b) matters of fact: *relations of time and place*, *identity*, and *causation*. Relations of ideas are those relations 'which depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together', and matters of fact are those which 'may be chang'd without any change in the ideas' (T 1.1.3.1-2). Here we can already observe that matters of fact (as philosophical relations, but not as objective fact) can be freely manipulated by the imagination, since the ideas related do not naturally introduce

each other, and the relations can be imagined to be different with the ideas held constant.

Compared with philosophical relations, natural relations are much more central to Hume's philosophy. There are three natural relations: *resemblance*, *contiguity in time and place*, and *cause and effect*. These relations are also the principles of association. Notice that there is a 'remarkable difference, that ideas are associated by resemblance, contiguity, and causation; and impressions only by resemblance' (T 2.1.4.3). For Hume, the existence of such associations is strongly supported by the regularity exhibited by the otherwise chaotic operation of the human mind. The main role played by such an association is that it facilitates the transition from one idea or impression to another and the communication of force and vivacity between ideas or impressions. If two ideas are associated by any of these principles, the presence of one naturally introduces another one. Similarly for the impressions. Hume relies heavily on the association of ideas and impressions to explain indirect passions, such as love, hatred, pride, and humility. For example, the beauty of someone's own body is pleasurable, and it resembles the pleasurable feeling of pride; also, the owner of the body and the object of pride is the same person. In virtue of this 'double relation' between the ideas of her own body and her pride, the presence of the former causes the latter. The transition between ideas or impressions is natural in the sense that it is not something we deliberately do, but just happens in our mind.

Chapter 3
General Rules

The importance of general rules in Hume's philosophy should be expected, given his claim that our adherence to them 'has such a mighty influence on the actions and understanding, and is able to impose on the very senses' (T 2.2.8.5).[2] The formation of general rules is explained by *custom* or *habit* of the *non-rational* part of the human mind, i.e. its natural 'tendency to move from an idea one has to another idea linked to the first idea by one of the principles of association' (Biro 2009, p. 48). Taking these two aspects together, we can say that human beings have a natural propensity to form and follow general rules. Commentators of Hume usually focus on the influence of the imagination on our understanding in their discussion of general rules, but it should be noted that the passions are also subject to the same influence of custom: 'Custom readily carries us beyond the just bounds in our passions, as well as in our reasonings' (T 2.1.6.8). Anyway, for ease of illustration, I will focus on the example of the imagination and its influence on our beliefs.

The formation and operation of general rules '[proceed] from those very principles, on which all judgments concerning causes and effects depend'. Hume continues:

> Our judgments concerning cause and effect are deriv'd from habit and experience; and when we have been accustom'd to see one object united to another, our imagination passes from the first to the second, by a natural transition, which precedes reflection, and which cannot be prevented by it. Now 'tis the nature of custom not only to operate with its full force, when objects are presented, that are exactly the same with those to which we have been accustom'd; but also to operate in an inferior degree, when we discover such as are similar; and tho' the habit loses somewhat of its force

[2] Whenever Hume makes a certain claim about reason or understanding, that very claim might illuminate some aspect of his philosophy which provides that claim, as the science of human nature consists in a study of human understanding which is made by human understanding. In particular, the claim that our adherence to general rules has an influence on understanding implies that this adherence also has an influence on Hume's philosophy.

> by every difference, yet 'tis seldom entirely destroy'd, where any considerable circumstances remain the same. (T 1.3.13.8)

Although this passage focuses on the relation of cause and effect, the other two principles of association could also lead to general rules. Simply put, general rules are joint products of custom and the principles of association. Their effect is the communication of force and vivacity between impressions or ideas, and it depends positively on the resemblance between a particular circumstance and the original circumstances. That the operation of general rules 'precedes reflection' and 'cannot be prevented by it' has some interesting and important consequences, and I will come back to this topic later in this chapter.

For Hume, general rules influence both the imagination and our judgements. Given that all general rules are effects of custom, one might think that custom should not operate on the two faculties in contrary manner; but the fact is that the imagination may sometimes conflict with our judgements. Hume solves this problem by distinguishing between the *first* and *second* influence of general rules:

> When an object appears, that resembles any cause in very considerable circumstances, the imagination naturally carries us to a lively conception of the usual effect, tho' the object be different in the most material and most efficacious circumstances from that cause. Here is the first influence of general rules. But when we take a review of this act of the mind, and compare it with the more general and authentic operations of the understanding, we find it to be of an irregular nature, and destructive of all the most establish'd principles of reasonings; which is the cause of our rejecting it. This is a second influence of general rules, and implies the condemnation of the former. Sometimes the one, sometimes the other prevails, according to the disposition and character of the person. The vulgar are commonly guided by the first, and wise men by the second. […] The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities. (T 1.3.13.12)

A few points should be noted. First, the first influence of general rules is presented as a source of error, or a source of prejudice (T 1.3.13.7). However, as both the first and second influence of general rules share the same nature as products of custom, with

the only differences being in the respective objects and levels of generality, the second influence of general rules can also be a source of error or prejudice.

Second, since the act of reflecting on the first influence of general rules is also an act of the mind, there should also be 'third' or 'fourth' or higher influences, each taking the one at the preceding level as its object of reflection.

Third, it seems general rules can be formed on the basis of our own direct experiences of the objects connected, as well as indirectly on the basis of other people's reports of similar experience. As long as the relevant sorts of ideas arise in our mind, no matter whether they are provided by direct experiences or indirect reports, our imagination would be accustomed to make the transition between the ideas as a result. Nonetheless, Hume would no doubt hold that the effect of our own experiences is generally stronger than that of the others' reports.

Fourth, that the second influence of general rules corrects their first influence presupposes the uniformity of nature, including human nature. Hume is clearly aware of this supposition: 'all reasonings from experience are founded on the supposition, that the course of nature will continue uniformly the same' (A 13). Indeed, this is also presupposed by Hume's science of human nature, for all reasonings in this science, so far as Hume sticks to his experimental method, are also reasonings from experience. This supposition is not demonstrable, because its denial is conceivable, i.e. possible, and hence its demonstration, if any, could only rely on reasoning from experience which has already presupposed it (A 14). As the cause of this supposition is our custom (A 15), it might also be a general rule, which is also the ultimate one, by which all other general rules are corrected. Perhaps the indemonstrability of this supposition of the uniformity of nature explains why Hume considers the following of general rules as 'a very unphilosophical species of probability'. Also, Hume's confession that the following of general rules is the only way we can correct all unphilosophical probabilities involved in reasonings from experience marks him apart from sceptics who seek an invincible foundation of our knowledge. This aspect of Hume's philosophy imposes a constraint on our interpretation of his writings. When we interpret Hume's discussion of problems which involve general rules, or more generally, reasonings from experience, we should not expect our most accurate interpretation to be free from attacks based on some weird but nonetheless possible, or even actual counterexamples. That is a fundamental character of Hume's

philosophy, and any interpretation which attempts to eliminate it can never be faithful.

Lastly, in connection with the previous claim that the operation of general rules 'precedes reflection' and 'cannot be prevented by it', it should be added that both the first and second influence of general rules do not require the rules to be explicitly formulated. Thomas Hearn thinks that the second influence of general rules has 'a reflective character,' i.e. 'they are consciously formulated and adopted' (1970, p. 410). I agree with the attribution of a reflective character to the second influence, but I believe that this does not imply that the rules have to be consciously formulated, although it is more likely to be the case if compared with the case of the first influence. As Timothy Costelloe writes:

> Hume can be seen as emphasizing the fact that all rules, whether they arise from the imagination or the understanding, have a customary use; both influences involve that natural transition from cause to effect, which "precedes reflection and cannot be prevented by it." (2007, p. 10)

The second influence of general rules is reflective because the mind applies such rules reflectively on itself. In order for a person to be aware of the error of the first influence of general rules, she might simply attend to a particular operation of her mind, and in virtue of the unconscious second influence of general rules, have a sense that there is something wrong. She definitely can check her causal reasonings without having explicitly in mind all the eight rules proposed by Hume (T 1.2.15). It is rather the job of philosophers, or at least those more reflective people, to formulate and express the general rules both in their first and second influence:

> Philosophy, on this view, is a particular application of the general capacity to express formally the principles that organize common life. The difference is that whereas ordinary reflection enables individuals to correct errors of judgment, philosophy corrects by discovering principles, which … explain the phenomenon in question. (Costelloe 2007, p. 12)

This concurs with Hume's analogy between his 'abstruse and abstract' philosophy and anatomy (EHU 8.8, also T 3.3.6.6). Both of them aim at providing accurate

descriptive knowledge of the complex structure of their object of study, rather than attempting to render their object 'graceful or engaging' (T 3.3.6.6).[3]

In Hume's thought the influence of general rules is significant for our sense of beauty in virtue of sympathy, to which we now turn.

[3] Hume contrasts the anatomist with the painter in this analogy. A painter, he suggests, 'give[s] his figure … graceful and engaging attitude or expression' (T 3.3.6.6). Analogous to a painter is what Hume calls a 'moralist'. A moralist promotes virtuous characters by describing their beauty, so that people would be attracted and emulate them.

Hume stresses the advantage a metaphysician could bring to a moralist, since unless the moralist has drawn an accurate line between vice and virtue, she might turn out mistakenly to promote characters which are in fact vicious. Therefore, a moralist should have an accurate understanding of human nature, so that she would not confound the limit between vice and virtue.

A parallel line of thought underlies Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste', in which he tries to accurately uncover the true nature of art criticism. If he succeeds, critics should be benefited by this essay, as it can allow them to guide people in feeling the beauty of what is truly beautiful.

Chapter 4
Sympathy

In Hume's philosophy, 'sympathy' does not refer to a particular sentiment; rather, it refers to a mechanism which enables us to feel the same passion we observe or imagine the others feel. It explains how we can, from an idea of the other's feeling, come to have the same feeling. The process can be explained in four steps.[4] First, I form an idea of the other's feeling. In some cases, I directly observe another person's expression of the passion she feels, and form an idea of it. This is possible because of the resemblance between every human being. The repeated experiences of my own passions and my own corresponding expressions establish certain general connections between passion and expression. My mind naturally moves from the idea of other person's expression, which is similar to mine, to an idea of the corresponding passion.

However, it is not necessary that an actual expression should be observed for us to form an idea of other people's feelings—such an idea could also be acquired by imagining the situation of other people. In my mind there are many general rules formed on the basis of my experiences of various situations and the various sentiments they produce. When I imagine the situation of some other people, there is an idea of their situation in my mind, and the relevant general rule—which is also in my mind—causes my imagination to move from this idea to an idea of the sentiment which has been observed to be generally produced by that kind of situation. Thus, we can acquire an idea of what sentiment would be produced on those people. Perhaps Hume's real thought is that, when the person affected by the character or object in question is present, our impression of her expression, if it agrees with the expression which would be caused by the sentiment we anticipate her to have, is just a source of extra force and vivacity to be added to our idea of that anticipated sentiment.

This suggestion seems to be supported by Hume's illustration of the contrary effect of sympathy and comparison on our sentiment (T 3.3.2.5). In his example,

[4] The four-step distinction made here is an amended version of the one presented in Brown (2008, p. 233).

which is adopted from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* 2.1-4, we can form an idea of 'the miserable condition of those who are at sea in a storm' merely by thinking of such a situation. As he goes on, he tries to show what would follow if our idea of the pain of those in danger becomes stronger and more sensible. He first brings in the presence of an actual ship at a distance from the shore on which we imagine ourselves standing, and observe that the idea of pain becomes livelier. Then, he further asks us to imagine the ship to be nearer to us, to the extent that we can clearly see how those people on the ship suffer from their miserable fate, in which case the painful idea has acquired a force so great that the effect of sympathy overturns that of comparison. The role of the direct perception of the painful expressions in this example is obviously to add force and vivacity to the idea of pain already formed from the beginning.

It might be objected that the application of my own general rules to other people is illegitimate, as people differ in all sorts of ways. They have a different personality; they receive a different education; they grow up in a different culture, etc. To extend my own general rules to other people is acceptable only when the person in question is similar to me enough. In response, we should notice that the application of the general rule to the case of other people is not something I do deliberately. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the application of general rules 'precedes reflection' and 'cannot be prevented by it'. Whenever a relevant idea arises in my mind, the imagination is immediately prompted to move to another idea which is connected to the first idea by a general rule in my mind. Of course I can reflect on the details of the particular situation, and stand back from believing that the second idea should really follow. However, this is the second influence of a general rule, the operation of which presupposes that the second idea has already been produced in my mind. As the present concern is how such an idea of the others' sentiment can be formed in my mind, rather than whether the formation of this idea is rationally justified, this worry is irrelevant.

On the other hand, perhaps the problem is that the particularities of the situation and the people in question do not display sufficient similarity with my experienced situation and me. Therefore, the perception or imagination of such would not trigger the operation of the general rules in my mind, and hence I could not form any idea of the sentiment of those people. Actually, this problem cannot show that in principle

we cannot have the idea of the sentiments of those people. The general rule involved in the formation of an idea of other people's sentiments can be quite general. In order for it to be effective, I would need to understand the situation in some general way. The particularity of a situation might upon proper understanding be reduced to a specific combination of certain general features. With a clear and distinct conception of the situation, such general features can be perceived, and their corresponding ideas would then set the imagination in motion, and thus provide me an idea of a sentiment in accord with a certain general rule. The initial troublesome particularities are thus shown to be just a signal of my obscure conception of the situation, a weakness of mine which can certainly be cured if due effort is made.

The second step of sympathy is that the three principles of association, especially that of resemblance, apply to the idea of myself and my idea of any other human being. There are certain general similarities within the whole species, and also some more specific similarities between particular persons. Living in the same age or country, friendship, kinship, etc. also contribute to the association. Notice that the strength of such relations varies for different persons.

Third, Hume maintains that:

> 'Tis evident, that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that 'tis not possible to imagine, that any thing can in this particular go beyond it. (T 2.1.11.4)

Fourth, in virtue of the principles of association, the force and vivacity of the idea of myself is communicated to my idea of the person with whom I am sympathising, and in turn to my idea of her passion. Since the only difference between an impression and an idea of the same content is their degree of force and vivacity, insofar as my idea of the person's passion has become forceful or vivacious enough, it becomes that very passion. A clarification is needed here. That the passion thus acquired corresponds to an idea of *her* passion but not of *my* passion might lead some readers to raise an objection: all passions I feel are my passions, so how could I feel another's passion? Note that the idea of 'her passion' is actually a complex one, which could be distinguished into simple parts, one of which is a simple idea of the passion. This simple idea is shared by the complex idea of my passion and the

complex impression of the other's passion. What is essential for sympathy is that that simple idea of passion can become a passion.

The importance of sympathy to Hume's moral philosophy is obvious in his *Treatise*. Simply put, sympathy allows us to adopt the required general viewpoint, instead of our own interested viewpoint, to judge a person's character morally.

> It has been observ'd, in treating of the passions, that pride and humility, love and hatred, are excited by any advantages or disadvantages of the mind, body, or fortune; and that these advantages or disadvantages have that effect, by producing a separate impression of pain or pleasure. The pain or pleasure, which arises from the general survey or view of any action or quality of the mind, constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our approbation or blame, which is nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred. (T 3.3.5.1)

The moral species of love and hatred differ from the personal ones in the adopted viewpoint. The object of moral judgements is a person's character, i.e. her behavioural tendency in certain circumstances. The realisation of a tendency depends on the presence of certain circumstances, and hence the attribution of a tendency to a person does not require this tendency to have an actual opportunity of realisation. Furthermore, even if it is realised, it might not have any effect on me, or even if I am one of those being affected, the effect might vary for different people. So in order to evaluate a person's character, I need to correct my personal sentiment by adopting a general viewpoint:

> 'Tis only when a character is consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. (T 3.1.2.4)

In the case of moral judgement, to adopt a general viewpoint is to sympathise with those people affected by this character if the requisite circumstances obtain, and to share the passion they would have. This correction is actually an instance of the second influence of general rules, which is a constraint based on our reflection on the operation of our affection.

One problem concerns us at this point. Different people inevitably stand in different relations with those people in the required circumstance. As a result, the natural relations connecting a person's ideas of those affected by the character to a

person's idea of herself vary in strength for different individuals. As these principles of association determine the force and vivacity of the passion acquired through sympathy, different people will have passions of different degrees of force and vivacity, and it seems to follow that the general viewpoint does not guarantee that different people will form the same moral judgement, or at least, not the same degree of praise or blame. This problem can be solved by pointing out that the second influence of general rules is not merely a requirement to correct our sentiment, but also to correct our language:

> In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable. (T 3.3.1.16)

Hume's presentation suggests that the correction of sentiment and that of language are two different outcomes of the same requirement. This makes the requirement quite loose, as one can fulfil it even if her pronounced judgement, which reflects the general viewpoint, does not have a corresponding general sentiment as its ground. I suspect it would have been better to have separated them into two requirements. Anyway, for my purpose in this study, it is sufficient to have shown that the adoption of the general viewpoint does not guarantee or require an agreement in the force and vivacity of the sentiment actually felt. Merely using language which reflects this general viewpoint is already acceptable.

Chapter 5
Reason and the Passion

Hume distinguishes between two principal parts of human nature, ‘which are requisite in all its actions, the affections and understanding; ’tis certain, that the blind motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society’ (T 3.2.2.14). This broad distinction is operative throughout the whole system of Hume’s philosophy; however, this distinction was never drawn by him precisely enough. ‘Passions’ and ‘sentiments’ should belong to the class of ‘affections’, and ‘reason’ should belong to ‘understanding’; but Hume does not spell out the connection between these terms. For the present purpose, I will just bypass this complication.

In the passage quoted above, Hume refers to the ‘blind motion’ of the affections. So what does Hume mean by this figurative description? Hume is pointing to the involuntary nature of the operation of the affections. They are produced in the mind according to some original principles of human nature. Given a certain stimulus, a certain affection follows as a reaction. No conscious and voluntary act of the mind could alter such regularities, ‘’tis certain we can naturally no more change our own sentiments, than the motions of the heavens’ (T 3.2.5.3). In other words, our passions and sentiments are immediately produced by certain external or internal stimuli. Moreover, ‘[a] passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification’ (T 2.1.2.4). Also, motives like desire and aversion are passions.

As for reason, Hume writes:

> Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood. Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. (T 3.1.1.9)

Simply put, reason concerns the truth or falsity of philosophical relations. Recall that philosophical relations are arbitrary unions of ideas (T 1.1.5.1, also see Chapter 2), there is no natural transition from one idea to another. Reason only compares the ideas given to it, and does not produce new ideas (T 1.3.14.5). Also, reason 'can never be a motive to any action of the will', neither can it 'oppose[s] passion in the direction of the will' (T 2.3.3.1).

Such characterisations of passions and reason might lead Hume's readers to criticise him as being a subjectivist regarding morality, and as he is well known for grounding morality on sentiment:

> All morality depends upon our sentiments; and when any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us *after a certain manner*, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect, or non-performance of it, displeases us *after a like manner*, we say that we lie under an obligation to perform it. (T 3.2.5.4)

The non-representative character of sentiments implies that there is no truth or falsity in matters of sentiments:

> Now 'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounc'd either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason. (T 3.1.1.9)

So for any persons having different moral sentiments concerning the same object, one might think that they are equally right, as there is simply no standard besides the sentiments, and reason has no role to play in morality.

However, this relativist view is not Hume's position. Although reason cannot alter the original principles of human nature, it can still guide our moral sentiments by discovering the true relations of ideas and matters of fact, and thus eliminate those 'unreasonable' moral sentiments which are caused by the false relations of ideas and matters of fact:

> '[T]is only in two senses, that any affection can be call'd unreasonable. *First*, When a passion, such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is founded on the supposition of the existence of objects, which really do not exist. *Secondly*, When in exerting any passion in action, we choose

> means insufficient for the design'd end, and deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects. Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chooses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. (T 2.3.3.16)

In short, Hume's view that human nature is immutable implies that in matters of sentiments, the same input should always produce the same output. Therefore, in order to change the output, the input must be changed. Hume famously claims that:

> Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. (T 2.3.3.4)

Reason serves the passions by discovering the truth, and obeys them because of its inert nature.

A related distinction between matters of fact and matters of sentiment could be illuminated by a brief discussion on the 'is-ought' distinction. An is-statement is a descriptive statement which tells us the relations of ideas or the matters of fact; an ought-statement bears a normative force which motivates or forbids us to do certain action. Based on his distinction between reason and sentiments, Hume claims that no ought-statement could be deduced only from is-statements.

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason shou'd be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. (T 3.1.1.27)

This distinction might at first sight seem to be quite clear, but further reflection might show that it is indeed not so easy to determine the status of a statement containing the word 'ought' or its cognates. As Hume thinks that an obligation is just an action the neglect or non-performance of which displeases us after a certain

manner, it seems an ought-statement can be converted into an is-statement about our sentiment. Therefore, one might object that we can reason from at least some is-statements to ought-statements. In reply, we can point out that a statement containing an 'ought' or some other evaluative term is not necessarily an ought-statement. Hume's distinction between these two kinds of statements does not concern the term used, but concerns the way a statement is made (or what speech-act theorists call its 'force').[5] An is-statement is made by reason alone; while an ought-statement is made on the basis of a certain sentiment felt by the person who makes it. Therefore, when I say 'everyone ought not to lie', this might be an is-statement if it is just a factual report to the effect that lying displeases people, regardless of my own sentiment towards it; or it might be an ought-statement, if I make it on the basis of my felt displeasure caused by the presence of lying. Only in the latter case would I be truly under an obligation and be expressing the expectation that this is the same for the other people. The fact that most people share a certain sentiment towards lying can just be neutral for me if I am not displeased by it.

[5] Or, as Dabney Townsend puts it, this distinction is made between 'ways of thinking, understood as operations of the mind, not between two classes of propositions' (Townsend 2001, p. 4).

Part II

Hume’s Aesthetics

Chapter 6
Beauty

Compared with his deep and scrupulous treatment of knowledge and morality, Hume's discussion of beauty is brief and fragmentary. In the *Treatise* and the two *Enquiries*, beauty is merely discussed in order to illuminate his views on morality. In Hume's *Essays*, although we can find some pieces focusing on art and criticism, no systematic presentation of his view of beauty is available. Worse still, in Hume's scattered notes on beauty, he mentions without clear definitions several kinds of beauty, such as natural beauty, moral beauty, beauty of form, beauty of interest, etc. This causes difficulties for any attempt to clarify and articulate his views, especially for those commentators focusing on his aesthetics. This chapter will try to sort out some central aspects of Hume's idea of beauty. Given the difficulties just mentioned, this attempt will inevitably be brief and somewhat inconclusive; but it should nonetheless be able to help us understand his 'Of the Standard of Taste'.

The sense of beauty and deformity, according to Hume, is a calm passion (T 2.1.1.3). By itself this claim leaves undecided the nature of beauty: it can be some quality in the object, in which case the sense of it is similar to the perception of geometrical properties; or it can be purely a subjective feeling. Let's call the first case the quality-view, and the second case the sentiment-view. In the *Treatise* we can find a passage which strongly suggests the quality-view:

> [B]eauty is such an order and construction of parts, as either by the *primary constitution* of our nature, by *custom*, or by *caprice*, is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul. (T 2.1.8.2)

Also, in the second *Enquiry*, we find:

> Some species of beauty, especially the natural kinds, on their first appearance, command our affection and approbation; and where they fail of this effect, it is impossible for any reasoning to redress their influence, or adapt them better to our taste and sentiment. (EPM 1.9)

That some species of beauty might fail to 'command our affection and approbation' suggests that beauty is not equal to the sentiment it arouses.

However, in both *Enquiries* and his essays, we can find passages which both affirm the sentiment-view and deny the quality-view:

> Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived. (EHU 12.33)
>
> EUCLID has fully explained all the qualities of the circle; but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. The beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line, whose parts are equally distant from a common centre. It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon the mind, whose peculiar fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments. (EPM APP 1.14; an almost identical passage can be found in E-Sc, p. 219)
>
> The mathematician, who took no other pleasure in reading VIRGIL, but that of examining ENEAS's voyage by the map, might perfectly understand the meaning of every Latin word, employed by that divine author; and consequently, might have a distinct idea of the whole narration. He would even have a more distinct idea of it, than they could attain who had not studied so exactly the geography of the poem. He knew, therefore, every thing in the poem: But he was ignorant of its beauty; because the beauty, properly speaking, lies not in the poem, but in the sentiment or taste of the reader. And where a man has no such delicacy of temper, as to make him feel this sentiment, he must be ignorant of the beauty, though possessed of the science and understanding of an angel. (E-Sc, p. 219)
>
> Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. (E-ST, p. 268)

No clear statement of the same position can be found in the *Treatise*, hence Hume might have changed his mind after the publication of it; or at least, as the second *Enquiry* includes apparently contrary passages, the word 'beauty' might have different meanings for Hume. As suggested by Peter Jones (1976, p. 49), perhaps the quality which causes the sentiment of beauty is 'by courtesy' called 'beauty', and hence the sentiment-view is the more fundamental one. In any case, as no passage which affirms the quality-view but denies the sentiment-view can be found, while the opposite view is presented in the passages quoted above, the sentiment-view should

more likely be the central view of Hume. The next task is to determine more precisely the details of this position.

In the *Treatise*, Hume thinks that 'the power of producing pain and pleasure makes in this manner the essence of beauty and deformity' (T 2.1.8.2). Although he does not connect pleasure and pain to beauty and deformity explicitly in his later works, the same, or at least similar, connection is implicit there. However, as Hume appears to have switched from the quality-view to the sentiment-view, a different formulation should be provided. For if natural beauty is held to be a sentiment produced by a figure upon the mind (EPM APP 1.14), it seems we can at least assert for the moment that beauty is a sentiment accompanied by a certain pleasure, or itself a pleasure of a certain kind; while deformity is a sentiment accompanied by a certain pain, or itself a pain of a certain kind. Unfortunately, Hume's texts do not provide any decisive evidence for us to choose between these two different formulations; but if we bear in mind his experimental method, perhaps Hume is deliberately vague here, because no matter which formulation is the correct one, all we have in our experience is a sensation of pleasure or pain. This is obviously the case if beauty is itself a pleasure, and deformity a pain. If, on the other hand, beauty and deformity are some sentiments other than the accompanying pleasure and pain, then they do not provide separable sensations. As a result, the two formulations are effectively the same. Perhaps it is sufficient and more faithful to Hume to say merely that by pleasure we feel beauty, and by pain we feel deformity.

Although the sentiment-view of beauty should be more fundamental than the quality-view, it does not mean that Hume does not use the word 'beauty' to refer to a certain quality. The courtesy-use of the word 'beauty' is applied to qualities 'which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments' (E-ST, p. 271). In this sense, beauty is a quality's tendency to produce the sentiment of beauty, and in the absence of any counteracting qualities, an object possessing such a quality is beautiful. This quality is not always realised, as there are other factors relevant to its realisation. These factors include subjective conditions, such as '[a] perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object' (*ibid*.). More on these factors will be said in our next chapter on the judgement of beauty.

Hume distinguishes beauty into natural beauty and moral beauty, but he does not clearly spell out this distinction. We know that '[i]t is on the proportion, relation,

and position of parts, that all natural beauty depends' (EPM APP 1.13), but we cannot find any similar claim concerning moral beauty. Probably moral beauty depends on a person's moral character, but then another question arises: what is the difference, if any, between moral beauty and virtue? I shall leave this question unanswered, as I could see no hint of any clear answer in Hume.

There is another question concerning the distinction between natural beauty and moral beauty which is more interesting. Does this distinction have anything to do with art criticism? In 'Of the Standard of Taste', Hume asserts without detailed argument that differences in moral principles make us unable to relish a work which does not properly blame a vicious manner, and hence this must be allowed to be a blemish of that work (E-ST, p. 282-283).[6] No similar remark for natural beauty is available. Apart from this obscure consideration, the distinction between natural beauty and moral beauty seems to be irrelevant to art criticism.

Beauty can also be distinguished into beauty of form and beauty of interest. Hume mentions these two kinds of beauty only in one place:

> The observation of convenience gives pleasure, since convenience is a beauty. But after what manner does it give pleasure? 'Tis certain our own interest is not in the least concern'd; and as this is a beauty *of interest*, not *of form*, so to speak, it must delight us merely by communication, and by our sympathizing with the proprietor of the lodging. (T 2.2.5.16, my italics)

Similarly, Hume does not clearly tell us the difference between these two kinds of beauty. However, as the context of this quote is a discussion on how and why we see the utility of something as beauty, we can anticipate that beauty of interest is a beauty which depends on something's utility, while beauty of form has no such dependence. Given the contention that natural beauty depends on 'the proportion, relation, and position of parts', one might be tempted to think that natural beauty and beauty of form are equal; but this appears not to be the case, for Hume holds that there are some morally beautiful mental qualities, such as cheerfulness, which are immediately agreeable 'without any utility or any tendency to farther good' (EPM 7.2). Thus, the beauty of such qualities is not the beauty of interest, though it sounds odd to call it a beauty of form; and it should be classified as moral beauty, rather than

[6] This claim is discussed in depth in Chapter 13.

natural beauty. Conversely, there are some qualities, such as physical strength, or the agility of animals, which are a beauty of interest, but should be classified as natural beauty, rather than moral beauty.

Sympathy plays an important role in our perception of beauty, especially the beauty of interest. Without sympathy, only those characters or qualities which actually benefit me would have a beauty of interest for me. However, as a matter of fact, we can see the beauty of another person's house, as well as that of an imprisoned athlete. Sometimes we might even see the beauty of some characters or qualities which are contrary to our own interest, such as the courage of our enemy. We can feel the beauty of such characters or qualities by sympathising with other people, real or imaginary, and thus our idea of such beauty is enlivened and becomes an impression.[7]

Sympathy is also involved in our perception of the beauty of form. Since our perception of beauty does not merely consist in the perception of a figure, but also involves the mind's reaction to an impression of it, the subjective conditions also partly determine the beauty perceived. Different people might perceive different beauties, because of their different sensibility, different cultural background, different personal experience, etc. For example, 'in countries, where men's bodies are apt to exceed in corpulency, personal beauty is placed in a much greater degree of slenderness, than in countries, where that is the most usual defect' (EPM 8.9). Such subjective factors constitute a person's unique 'viewpoint'. If a person sympathises with another person and thus enters into her viewpoint, an object might change from being beautiful to being deformed, or from being deformed to being beautiful. In the case of beauty of interest, we choose the viewpoint of those who are directly affected by the utility of the character or quality. However, for beauty of form, it is not clear whether any particular viewpoint should be privileged, and if so, which viewpoint that is. This problem brings us to the issue of the judgement of beauty, to which we now turn.

[7] Note that nothing said here concerns the normative question of which viewpoint should be adopted, but just shows that we have an ability to go beyond our personal viewpoint. This normative question is addressed in Chapter 7 and 12.

Chapter 7
Judgements of Beauty

Hume's view that beauty is a sentiment makes it perplexing why judgements of beauty are needed. As he puts in 'Of the Standard of Taste', 'a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object' (E-ST, p. 268). If there is no right or wrong in matters of beauty, why should there be any judgement of beauty? As a matter of fact, neither the maxim *de gustibus non disputandum est*, nor the common agreement on the comparative judgement of the merit of Milton and Ogilby appears to be representative of what ordinarily happens. On the one hand, even in ages like the contemporary world, where people are more tolerant of different factual and evaluative opinions, people both make judgements of beauty, and dispute very often on matters of beauty. On the other hand, only a small proportion of comparative judgements are made concerning objects so disproportioned as in the case of Milton and Ogilby. Although Hume does not explicitly say so, this is probably also the situation he observes. As an adherent of the experimental method, and an anatomist of human nature, Hume's task is to anatomise this phenomenon, and tell us what exactly is done by a judgement of beauty.

We should start with the reason why people make judgements of beauty, rather than rest contented with remarks limited to their own subjective sentiments. Two possible reasons can be gathered from Hume's works, and both of them rely on his supposition of a common human nature. Firstly, as stressed by Peter Jones, Hume's view on beauty is embedded in 'contexts where man is considered as a social being' (1976, p. 324). One of the most important aspects of this nature as a social being is that people want to agree with others, especially their close acquaintances (*ibid.*, p. 338). The variety of taste could not satisfy this desire, while at the same time, a certain degree of regularity is observable. The beauty of an object would not be different for a person every time she looks at it. People of similar taste are seldom totally absent in a person's circle of acquaintances. It appears that agreement is still possible. Therefore, different sentiments of beauty aroused by the same object in

different people are compared in a certain way. Judgements of beauty are made, and some of the sentiments are confirmed, while others condemned.

The second possible reason is related to Hume's view of language in general. He writes:

> The more we converse with mankind, and the greater social intercourse we maintain, the more shall we be familiarized to these general preferences and distinctions, without which our conversation and discourse could scarcely be rendered intelligible to each other. Every man's interest is peculiar to himself, and the aversions and desires, which result from it, cannot be supposed to affect others in a like degree. General language, therefore, being formed for general use, must be moulded on some more general views, and must affix the epithets of praise or blame, in conformity to sentiments, which arise from the general interests of the community. (EPM 5.42)

General language is used for the communication of something accessible to the general public. A person, in using general language, is required to adopt a general and stable viewpoint which could be shared by other people. It seems that the word 'beauty' in its 'courtesy use' should be an instance of general language. 'Beauty' in this sense refers to a certain quality in objects. As the only sensible effect such a quality produces is a sentiment, every discourse concerning such a quality is an 'intercourse of sentiments ... in society and conversation,' which 'makes us form some general unalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of' the quality in question (*ibid.*). If we do not adopt a stable viewpoint, then our 'fluctuating situations produce a continual variation on objects, and throw them into such different and contrary lights and positions' (EPM 5.41). Also, if we do not adopt the same general viewpoint, our different situations cause us to have different sentiments, and thus we lack a common ground for communication 'without which our conversation and discourse could scarcely be rendered intelligible to each other'.

Understood in this way, the word 'beauty' in its 'courtesy use' requires us to adopt the same general and stable viewpoint, and the quality of beauty in this sense should be one which gives us a sentiment of beauty under certain circumstances, including the adoption of the same general and stable viewpoint. As we are distanced from our own personal viewpoint in perceiving such a quality of beauty, the

sentiment of beauty is inevitably weaker in its intensity, and hence, for Hume, the sense of beauty is a calm passion (T 2.1.1.3). Also, recall that Hume claims in the *Treatise* that 'beauty' refers to the 'order and construction of parts' which pleases 'either by the *primary constitution* of our nature, by *custom*, or by *caprice*' (T 2.1.8.2). Now we can see that we have arrived at a narrower sense of 'beauty', as the generality and stability required by the nature of general language precludes those which please merely by caprice. Thus, it is still correct to say that all sentiments of beauty are equally right, in the sense that such sentiments do not represent anything and thus there is no question of truth and falsity for them. However, on the other hand, we can also say that not all sentiments of beauty are equally right, as the viewpoints from which the view of an object could produce these sentiments *are not all qualified as general viewpoints*; and even among different possible general viewpoints, we might still make some further discrimination, so that one and only one of them is admitted as the correct general viewpoint, and its corresponding sentiment of beauty as the right sentiment. The purely subjectivist view is thus unable to answer the internal requirement of the word 'beauty'. People make judgements of beauty at least because they may fail to adopt the correct viewpoint, and, as a result, make a mistake concerning whether an object really possesses a quality of beauty.

In both reasons above, we can see that the aim of judging beauty is to reduce variety, and to achieve stability and regularity in matters of beauty. However, it is not obvious how such stability and regularity are achievable. As Hume clearly writes, 'Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived' (EHU 12.33). A comparison between the judgement of beauty and the judgement of geometrical qualities can help us to see the problem.

In the case of a geometrical quality such as triangularity, when we have a veridical perception of it, this quality causes an impression in our mind, and this impression refers to it.[8] Depending on the agreement or disagreement between our impression and the objective quality, our impression of such quality is either true or

[8] It is in fact difficult to capture Hume's thought on such objective judgements accurately, as to speak of an objective quality in Hume's philosophy is quite tricky. Strictly speaking, Hume cannot say anything about quality as a mind-independent feature of the external world, as all we can experience are just perceptions in mind. This makes terms like 'real matters of fact' perplexing. As this problem cannot be addressed within the scope of our discussion, we can only bypass it, and understand the referential relation pointed to here as something similar to what we normally call representation.

false, as 'they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard' (E-ST, p. 268). The objective quality serves as a standard of judgement. A judgement of such an objective quality specifies the quality we should look for in order to verify it. If the quality specified can be found in the object, the judgement is true, while contrary opinions are falsified. As a result, different opinions of such objective qualities are regulated and stabilised.

In contrast, our sentiment of beauty is just a pleasurable feeling caused by a certain quality in an object, and this pleasure does not represent its cause. Therefore, we might not be able to identify the true cause of our sentiment of beauty. It is possible that a person, having correctly adopted a general viewpoint in surveying an object, and in the absence of other possible errors, feels the sentiment of beauty that object naturally produces in virtue of one of its qualities, but nonetheless has no idea of what the true cause of her sentiment is. She could only say that the object is beautiful, or, at most, that there is a certain *je ne sais quoi* which makes it beautiful. In such a case, even when that person in some sense correctly judges an object beautiful, her judgement does not tell us how to verify it, and thus when there are conflicting but equally confused judgements made by different people, we are unable to decide whose judgement is correct, and different sentiments are not regulated and stabilised.

Therefore, in order to achieve the stability and regularity that people tend to seek in matters of beauty, we need more than the ability to enjoy the right sentiment of beauty. With the assumption of a common human nature that includes certain original principles of sentiments, the same quality arouses the same sentiment of beauty in the beholders who share the same internal state under the same external situation. The internal state includes the delicacy of mental taste, the (metaphorical) viewpoint adopted, the level of intelligence, etc. The relevant aspects of the external situation include those—depending on the categories of the artworks, among which Hume's main concern is literature—which would affect our apprehension of artworks.[9] A book full of typographical errors is bad in the case of literature,

[9] James Grant (2013) points out that, with reference to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, a critic is just 'a judge only of literature' in Hume's days (p. 50, n. 25). Despite this linguistic fact, we will follow the common practice in the literature on 'Of the Standard of Taste' to use a broader sense of the word 'critic' in referring to art critics in general.

similarly for poor lighting in the case of painting, and a noisy concert hall in the case of music. Therefore, in order to achieve agreement on matters of beauty, we have to settle the disputes concerning all these factors. If a person has the ability to specify the conditions under which her judgement of beauty is made, as well as the quality which causes her sentiment of beauty, her judgement might then be able to be verified by other people. Criticism is precisely that kind of activity which involves this additional ability.

Notice here that the account given just now only describes what is needed for the same sentiment to be shared. That a judgement of beauty is generally shared by different people shows only that it is a candidate for the true judgement. So there is a question concerning what makes a judgement of beauty true, but not merely generally shared. How could we move a step further? Consider the analogy between beauty and vision given by Hume:

> If, in the sound state of the organ, there be an entire or a considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty; in like manner as the appearance of objects in day-light, to the eye of a man in health, is denominated their true and real colour, even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses. (E-ST, p. 272)

Although Hume uses the term ‘perfect beauty’ here, the term ‘true and real colour’ suggests that ‘true and real beauty’ might be acceptable for him. If colour can be true and real in the sense provided in this passage, then why not allow the same for beauty? Therefore, we will not avoid using the term ‘true beauty’ in the following, provided that it is understood in the sense suggested in this quote: true beauty is the quality which produces a uniformity of sentiment of beauty among men with sound state of the organ. Accordingly, then, an object is truly beautiful when it possesses true beauty. Hume’s exclusion of the external situation here is objectionable, but for our interpretative purpose, we might just follow him in focusing on the internal state.

What exactly the sound internal state is will be a topic in our discussion on ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ in Part III. For the moment, it suffices to say that a judgement of beauty is true when the object judged to be beautiful is truly beautiful in the sense just given. This implies that our ability to determine the truth of a judgement of beauty depends on our ability to determine the soundness of the internal state. In

order to evaluate a judgement of beauty, we have to make other judgements concerning the soundness of the internal state. As taste is a part of this internal state, we might want to distinguish two senses of 'judgements of taste'. In one sense, it means judgements made by taste. For Hume, such judgements include moral judgements and judgements of beauty. In another sense, 'judgements of taste' are those which judge the soundness of taste. For clarity's sake, hereafter, 'judgements of taste' will only be used to refer to those judgements concerning the soundness of taste, in order to sharply distinguish them from judgements of beauty, which concern the quality of beauty.

The difficulty of achieving stability and regularity in matters of beauty should not be underestimated. Nothing said above has indicated how the true cause of a sentiment of beauty and the correct general viewpoint can be identified. Hume's solution to this problem can be constructed from his discussion of taste and its standard, which forms the backbone of his essay on criticism—'Of the Standard of Taste'. Our discussion of his solution should be postponed to Part III. Before that, a brief account of how a judgement of beauty is made should be provided.

As in the case of moral judgements, sympathy also plays an essential role in a judgement of beauty. As noted above, a specific general viewpoint should be adopted in a judgement of beauty. In 'Of the Standard of Taste', this viewpoint is held to be that of the intended audience of an artwork (E-ST, p. 276).[10] Therefore, a critic has to imagine herself as a member of the intended audience. This is achieved by sympathy. In Chapter 4, four steps have been distinguished. The first step is the formation of an idea of the pleasure or pain of the intended audience. In some cases, there are no direct observations of their reaction to the artwork in question. The formation of the idea of the pleasure or pain of the intended audience is made possible by the critic's knowledge of the relevant facts, such as the details of the age and culture. Such knowledge allows the critic to achieve a general understanding of the object in the same way as the intended audience, and to form the same idea of that object. The critic's imagination will then naturally move from this idea to an idea of pleasure or pain in accord with the general rules in her own mind. Besides, there can be cases in which the critic has a chance to directly observe the intended audience's reaction to the artwork. Given the resemblance between every human

[10] More detail will be provided in Chapter 12.

being, the critic infers from the expression of the intended audience to an idea of their pleasure or pain. The direct observation of the intended audience's reaction strengthens the idea of their pleasure formed on the basis of general rules.

Once the idea of their pleasure or pain is formed, the process of sympathy goes on. The idea of pleasure or pain is enlivened by the force and vivacity of the critic's lively impression of her own self, through the three principles of association between the corresponding idea of herself and her idea of the intended audience. As a result, the idea of the pleasure or pain of the intended audience becomes that very pleasure or pain. Based on the sentiment thus felt, a judgement of beauty is made. Ideally the critic's pleasure or pain would be as strong as that of the intended audience, but as we have already seen near the end of Chapter 4, how much force or vivacity is communicated depends on how close the critic's idea of herself and her idea of the intended audience are associated by the three natural relations. Therefore, unless the critic is herself a member of the intended audience, the pleasure or pain felt would seldom be as strong as that of the intended audience. However, when the critic learns how to use general terms such as 'beauty' in a language, she also learns at the same time the effects such natural relations would have on the sentiment acquired through sympathy. Therefore, although her sentiment might not be perfectly correct, at least the language used in giving her judgement can be corrected to offset the variable effect of the natural relations.

Part III

‘Of the Standard of Taste’

Chapter 8

A Summary of 'Of the Standard of Taste'

Hume starts his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' with a discussion of the variety of taste. This variety can be found within one's circle of acquaintances, and it is more obvious among people in different countries and ages. However, beneath this appearance, the variety is indeed still greater. Some apparent agreement is in fact merely verbal, because in every language there are general evaluative terms which are used in order to express praise or blame by all competent users of that language; but if we attend to the particular applications of such terms, we can find that they are applied in very different ways by different people.[11]

Hume goes on to tell us that '[t]hose who found morality on sentiment, more than on reason, are inclined to comprehend ethics under the former observation' (E-ST, p. 266). After an illustration of a similar case in morality, he comments that '[t]he merit of delivering true general precepts in ethics is indeed very small' (E-ST, p. 268). This follows from the observation that verbal agreement can conceal the underlying disagreement concerning the application of such evaluative terms. What is really important is the application of such terms, which implies our praise or blame of the character or action in question, but not agreement merely on the evaluative import of such terms as linguistic items. Therefore, Hume continues:

> That people, who invented the word *charity*, and used it in a good sense, inculcated more clearly and much more efficaciously, the precept, *be charitable*, than any pretended legislator or prophet, who should insert such a *maxim* in his writings. (*ibid.*)

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[11] As Hume moves on, we can see that his presentation of the variety of taste here somehow distorts the actual situation. The fact is rather that despite such a variety, it can also be observed that there is no radical change in people's taste:

> The same HOMER, who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago, is still admired at PARIS and at LONDON. (E-ST, p. 271)

In contrast, Hume observes that in the case of speculative opinions:

> These are in continual flux and revolution. The son embraces a different system from the father. Nay, there scarcely is any man, who can boast of great constancy and uniformity in this particular. (E-ST, p. 283)

It seems Hume is deliberately selective here, as a rhetorical strategy, in order to build up the tension which is to be relieved by his demonstration later in the essay of how the variety of taste is constrained and stabilised.

To use the word 'charity' in a good sense is to apply it in accordance with our 'just sentiment of morals' (E-ST, p. 267). By using it justly in society, my praise of a charitable action would lead others to appreciate the virtue of that action; and my repeated just applications of the word 'charity' provide a basis on which the others could have their sentiments be connected, by certain general rules, to the kind of actions which are charitable. The effect of such a concrete model can narrow down the variety of moral sentiments within our society, and this effect cannot be achieved through merely 'delivering true general precepts'. This reflection on the case of morality shows that, despite the obvious variety in moral sentiments, there is nonetheless a certain way in which we can narrow down this variety, and achieve a certain degree of agreement. Hume's reader would then wonder: is there any similar way to reduce the variety of taste?

In the presence of the variety of taste, '[i]t is natural for us to seek a *Standard of Taste*' (E-ST, p. 268). By reference to such a standard, different sentiments could be reconciled, or at least be confirmed or condemned.[12] This seems to follow from his view that human beings have a natural propensity to form and follow general rules, or in other words, a propensity (a) to find out the regularities underlying our experience, and (b) to regulate our life in a principled way. This propensity motivates us to seek a standard of taste, that is, to find out the regularity in our aesthetic life, so that we can regulate our related activities accordingly.

However, that we have this natural tendency does not imply the existence of such a standard, nor does it imply our ability to find it even if it exists. This sceptical position is supported by a species of philosophy, which appeals to the non-referential nature of sentiments. The thought here is that since sentiments do not refer to anything beyond themselves, and are always real when felt, in one sense they are 'all right'. This line of thought also applies to the case of beauty, as beauty is a kind of sentiment. Therefore, when taste is evaluated in terms of the sentiments aroused, the fact that sentiments are 'all right' means that there is no standard of taste. This view is labelled as 'the principle of the natural equality of taste', and concurs with the common sense maxim that *de gustibus non disputandum est.*

[12] There are some other ways to read this passage. See Section D of Chapter 14 for an evaluation of the main proposals.

If there is only one species of common sense, the sceptical position above might be admitted as a truthful analysis of human nature, but this is not Hume's position on the matter. At least in the realm of art criticism, we can find cases like those in which Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison are compared. The principle of the natural equality of taste is found to be forgotten in such cases, where general agreements concerning the comparative merit of one author over that of another one are observed, and opposite sentiments are rejected as 'absurd and ridiculous' (E-ST, p. 269). This shows that at least in some cases of art criticism, it is commonsensical that 'the taste of all individuals is not on an equal footing' (E-ST, p.279), and can be evaluated.

The discussion of these two species of common sense completes the stage-setting of the essay. Hume would surely not think that all commonsensical views are rationally justifiable, but the fact that they are generally held indicates that there is probably some feature of our common human nature which is responsible for the pre-philosophical acceptance of such views, and hence this fact should be explained in Hume's science of human nature. Whilst a short philosophical analysis of the first species of common sense has been provided, the second one is at this stage only provided as a piece of unanalysed observation: only a fool doubts that Milton is greater than Ogilby. We are left with the questions: why do we have the second species of common sense? Which human phenomena are relevant? What is the nature of these relevant human phenomena? And most importantly, does it show that there is a certain mechanism which reduces the variety of taste? The remaining parts of the essay are dedicated to these questions, and their answer hinges on the idea of a standard of taste.[13]

[13] Being set up in this way, we can see that, contrary to the view of many commentators, Hume need not show that universal agreement is achievable, nor does he need to show that we can always decide whose judgement of beauty is better. Indeed, the second species of common sense is a very weak negative claim. It just shows that in some cases, the principle of the nature equality of taste does not hold, and that certain evaluative judgements of taste can be made. This is far weaker than the claim that there can in fact be universal agreement in such cases—not even in the examples used, as there is a disagreement between those being ridiculed and those who ridicule them. Misunderstanding of this sort might explain why people might be surprised by the weak claim Hume makes later that:

> It is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing, and that some men in general, however difficult to be particularly pitched upon, will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others. (E-ST, p. 279)

This sounds too weak to those people who attribute a far more ambitious project to Hume.

The rest of the essay can be separated into three parts. The first part explicates the second species of common sense by showing in what sense the tastes of different people are not on an equal footing. This explication culminates at the identification of the soundness of the state of organ as the factor which explains why the taste of different people is unequal. The second part is a development of the finding in the previous part. It discusses five causes of defective taste, from which an idea of true judge is provided, and their joint verdict is identified as the true standard of taste and beauty. This shows that 'some men in general ... will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others' (*ibid.*). Therefore, Hume has shown that there is a mechanism by which the variety of taste is reduced. The third part focuses on two sources of blameless variations of sentiment. This discussion delineates how far the second species of common sense holds.

With this overview of the whole essay in hand, we can move on to see what Hume tells us after he has set the stage for the ensuring discussion. Since the examples by which he introduces the second species of common sense are drawn from art criticism, a reflection on this kind of human activity might reveal more about such a commonsensical view. One of the salient features of art criticism is that it involves rules of art, and that is why Hume starts his reflection by considering the role of rules of art in art criticism.

According to Hume, rules of art are generalisations of experience 'concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages' (E-ST, p. 269). He finds that artworks such as poetry 'must be confined by rules of art, discovered to the author either by genius or observation' (E-ST, p. 270). Art criticism is rule-governed, for it is one of critic's jobs to identify the quality which pleases according to true rules of art. However, it is also observed that our sentiment seems not to always agree with general rules. The observation of such discrepancies might then serve as an objection to criticism in general, because it suggests that art criticism is thus an activity which appeals to rules which are partly based on sentiments, while the production of sentiments is not really governed by rules. Hume rejects this objection by claiming that this disagreement between the sentiment actually felt and the sentiment predicted according to a particular rule of art can only be an objection to that rule. 'If [some qualities] are found to please, they cannot be faults; let the pleasure, which they produce, be ever so unexpected and

unaccountable' (*ibid.*). The rule should be revised according to the new evidence given by the sentiments. Treating the problem in this way, the status of sentiment as the ultimate evidence of an object's power to please is emphasised.

Here it seems that Hume is still trapped in the same predicament, as the sceptic could happily agree with all these claims about art criticism. The assertion of the authority of sentiments as evidence might even seem to support the natural equality of taste, as it suggests that sentiments are not to be corrected by rules of art. However, this is just an appearance. The next step in Hume's essay reveals a blind spot of the sceptical view. Hume does not disagree with the sceptical view regarding the non-referential nature of sentiment and hence the lack of a standard in this sense; but instead of focusing on the product of taste, he draws our attention to an aspect omitted by the sceptics—the capricious operation of the mind, including but not restricted to mental taste. Although he does not write explicitly in the same way, Hume's treatment of the mind in relation to taste is in the same spirit as his treatment of the imagination in his discussion of causal belief. There, reflective general rules concerning the operation of the imagination help us to decide when the imagination operates in accordance to its natural regularity. Similarly, concerning the operation of mental taste, general rules could be formed for the decision of when its operation conforms to its natural principles. 'A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object' are requisite for the regular operation of the mind, and only when it operates in this way would 'the beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments, immediately display their energy' (E-ST, p. 271).

It is now clear that what is at stake is the regularity of the operations of the mind. This regularity might be obscured by 'all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy' (*ibid.*). In order to establish general rules which correctly capture this regularity, it is a good idea to consider the durable admiration received by canonical artworks which pass the test of time, for it is more likely that people are pleased by such masterpieces in accordance with the natural principles of taste, instead of by some transient factors.

In brief, we should distinguish between a sound state and a defective state of the mind, and only when it is in the sound state could the sentiment actually felt be relied on as evidence, from which we judge the beauty of an artwork and derive general

rules of art. When we are not merely talking about the quality of our private sentiment, but try to judge the beauty of artworks, our own mental taste has to be judged first. The second species of common sense which rejects 'the principle of the natural equality of taste' is thus analysed to be a view concerning the soundness of the operation of taste. It is supported by our ability to judge our taste in terms of it operation.[14]

With the distinction between sound and defective states in place, Hume moves on in the next part of his essay to substantiate this distinction by discussing five traits which constitute a sound state. These five traits will be discussed later in Chapter 10. Hume summarises his discussion of them in this way:

> 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 [of true judge]; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty. (E-ST, p. 278-279)

The last step in Hume's explication of his idea of a true judge is a response to the worry that the true judge might not be found, and hence that it is impossible for us to find the standard of taste. Hume replies that whether a critic is a true judge is a matter of fact, and is to be decided by arguments. Moreover, he thinks that it is sufficient for the present purpose, that is, to provide a philosophical analysis of the

[14] Nick Zangwill wonders why there is a disparity in terms of normative force between judgements of beauty and ugliness and judgements of niceness and nastiness of food (Zangwill 2001, p. 155). He says, '[a]s far as judgments of niceness and nastiness are concerned, anything goes' (*ibid.*). Just like beauty and ugliness, in the cases of niceness and nastiness we normally would not expect that no one would agree with us. However, when there is somebody who disagrees and gives a different judgement, we might at first be a little bit surprised and ask that person to taste the food again; but if her judgement does not change, we would not insist on getting her to agree with us.

Zangwill asks that if, according to Hume, the soundness of mental taste explains why the former kind of judgements is normative, why not also say the same thing in the case of bodily taste? It seems Hume is committed to the implausible view that the latter kind of judgements should be as normative as the former one.

Zangwill's worry arises because he does not consider the courtesy use of 'beauty'. 'Beauty' in this sense is a term in general language, and this leads to the demand of the adoption of a general viewpoint. However, 'niceness' and 'nastiness' do not seem to be the same kind of terms, and are more similar to terms like 'pleasing', which are used to report purely subjective sensations. Probably it is this last requirement which explains the difference between the normative force in the case of mental taste and that of bodily taste.

There is a further complication here, which has seldom been noticed. In the famous wine tasting case drawn from *Don Quixote* (E-ST, p. 272), although it is also a case of bodily taste, there seems to be a much higher degree of normativity carried by the judgements of the two kinsmen. Why is there such a big difference in the normative force within cases of bodily taste? The answer to this question is tied to Hume's idea of general rules of art, and so we will return to this question in the next chapter (n. 15).

second species of common sense, to have shown (1) 'that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing', and (2) 'that some men in general ... will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others' (E-ST, p. 279). The first one is shown by the distinction between sound and defective states; the second one is shown by the idea of a true judge. Also, he adds that the difficulty of finding the standard of taste 'is not so great as it is represented' (*ibid.*). This is suggested by the historical observation that matters of taste are less liable to change. Hume explains as follow:

> Many men, when left to themselves, have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty, who yet are capable of relishing any fine stroke, which is pointed out to them. Every convert to the admiration of the real poet or orator is the cause of some new conversion. (E-ST, p. 280)

Such conversion narrows down the difference between people's taste, and results in the stability observed in matters of taste.

In the last part of the essay, Hume turns to discuss the two blameless sources of variations of sentiment, so as to prevent his readers from being too optimistic to think that all variety of taste could be eliminated. The variations discussed here are blameless because:

> [They] are not sufficient indeed to confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity, but will often serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation and blame. (*ibid.*)

These variations are those which concern the degree of approbation and blame, but not those in cases where the same artwork is praised and blamed by different people. One source is the internal frame of mind, or 'the different humours of particular men'; the other one is the external situation, including 'the particular manners and opinions of our age and country' (*ibid.*). Although such variations are inevitable, and no standard can allow us to correct them, an educated person could make allowance for such variations when she judges the beauty of an artwork, and in so doing, a true judgement of beauty can still be made. A detailed explanation will be provided in Chapter 12.

There is a complication concerning the second source—the external situation. If there is a difference between the moral principle held by the author and that of ours, as in a poem where a character which is evil according to our moral standard does

not receive proper punishment, this is not an instance of blameless variation. Hume writes:

> 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 never can relish the composition. (E-ST, p. 282)

This view is not sufficiently explained. An explanation will be proposed in Chapter 13. This complication affects Hume's treatment of another factor of external situation, that is, religious principles. Normally, since reason 'is not hearkened to in religious matters' (E-ST, p. 283), speculative errors in religious principles are the most excusable. However, if an artist is bigoted or superstitious, so that her religious principles imposes a set of moral principles different from ours on her artwork, this will then be treated in the same way as in cases involving different moral principles, and not to be counted as blameless.

This discussion on the two sources of blameless variations reminds us that even when we talk about the quality of beauty of artworks, rather than merely our own private sentiment of beauty, there are still some inevitable variations in our sentiment. As a result, when we judge the beauty of an artwork, if we are aware of the presence of such variations, then we should not expect or demand a total agreement on the sentiments we felt. In such cases, as long as we have made appropriate allowance for the blameless variations, a verbal agreement on the pronounced judgement of beauty is all we can achieve.

Chapter 9
Art Criticism

Art criticism is more than merely judging the beauty of artworks. It also involves the identification of the quality which causes the sentiment of beauty, the determination of the correct general viewpoint to be adopted, and the ranking of artworks within their genre. In virtue of these activities, art critics aim to discover and bring other people to appreciate the true beauty of different artworks, or in Hume's terminology, to feel the sentiment of beauty naturally caused by different artworks. This follows from the nature of judgements of beauty. As a judgement of beauty concerns whether an object really possesses a generally accessible quality, and the only sensible effect of such a quality is a private feeling of pleasure, a critic can only justify her judgements by bringing other people to see the beauty of that object themselves. This means that art criticism is essentially a social practice, as the success of a critic depends on whether other people can share her sentiment of beauty.

Critics need to communicate their sentiment with other people, including other critics and ordinary people, through discussion of the beauty of artworks. As people often disagree on the beauty of an artwork, such discussions should not be conceived as any single person's attempt to impose her own sentiment on other people. Instead, everyone involved in the discussion tries to convince the others to share their own sentiment through something similar to rational arguments.

The precise nature of such 'arguments' will be explained soon. What we should now pay attention to is the reciprocity of the discussion involved in art criticism. Each critic should be sensitive to the reactions of other people. If a critic failed to convince another person, instead of insisting on her sentiment, she should reflect on her own judgement, to see if it is rather her sentiment that is faulty. No fair criticism of 'Of the Standard of Taste' should make use of examples which treat art critics as people who are totally confident of their sentiment, and unwilling to step back and reflect on their own judgement.

Sometimes criticisms of the essay assume that the decision whether a critic's judgement should be accepted depends on the establishment of her status as a true

judge, or at least a better judge. However, for various reasons, it might be argued that such a status could not be rationally established, so that the critic's judgement could not be rationally accepted. As a result, everyone can just refuse to try to share the others' sentiment. They can insist on their own one, just because of the infirmity of the other's status as a critic. Confronted by such criticism, Hume would probably reply that the same reason which shows the infirmity of the other's status also holds for one's own self. This universal infirmity should rather cause critics to be more humble and more willing to experience different sentiments. When a critic shares another critic's sentiment, a valid ground of comparison between different sentiments could then be found, because the comparison is no longer between sentiments of different critics whose status is not established, but between different sentiments within one and the same person. With this illustration, it should be clear now why the reciprocity of the discussion between art critics should be stressed.

As the aim of art criticism is to discover and bring other people to feel true beauty, it is not enough to convince the others that something is beautiful for a certain group of critics to which they might not belong. A person might utter a statement 'this artwork is beautiful' without having that very sentiment which can ground this utterance. This can be illustrated by the distinction between is-statement and ought-statement discussed at the end of Chapter 5. The statement 'this artwork is beautiful' might be analogous to an ought-statement, in the sense that it is made on the basis of the sentiment of beauty actually felt. On the other hand, it might be just an is-statement which concerns the general taste:

> Morals and criticism are not so properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment. Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived. Or if we reason concerning it, and endeavour to fix its standard, we regard *a new fact*, to wit, the general taste of mankind, or some such fact, which may be *the object of reasoning and enquiry*. (EHU 12.33, my italics)

It is certainly not the aim of art criticism to lead a person to merely make a claim about 'the general taste of mankind'. Therefore, in order to bring other people to appreciate the beauty of an artwork, art critics have to guide them in a certain way in appreciating the artwork, so that they could have a genuine sentiment of beauty aroused by it. They determine the viewpoint to be adopted on the basis of their

art-historical and cultural knowledge. Hume requires that the general viewpoint to be adopted should be the viewpoint of the intended audience (E-ST, p. 276). He does not argue for this requirement. It is reasonable to question why that viewpoint should be privileged, as it is not the only general viewpoint available. More on this topic will be said in Chapter 12.

Besides, critics need to bring other people to attend to the quality which produces the sentiment of beauty in a certain manner. Sometimes, a person might perceive an artwork from the required viewpoint, but still not feel the sentiment of beauty it would naturally produce, because she could not duly attend to the quality which is responsible for the artwork's beauty. The critic's solution of this problem can be constructed from Hume's discussion of how to silence a bad critic (E-ST, p. 273-274). A critic first draws some general rule of art from masterpieces in which that quality is 'presented singly and in high degree' and produces the sentiment of beauty. Then she asks the opponent whom she wants to convince to see that quality's influence on these masterpieces. As that quality is presented singly and in high degree there, it is much easier for that person to notice its influence. Once the opponent agrees on such a general rule, her imagination has been sharpened by those masterpieces to be more sensitive to the influence of that quality. Then, the critic tries to demonstrate that the very same principle has the same influence on the artwork in question. Since the critic's interlocutor is now more sensitive to that quality, she might then be able to notice the influence of it, and come to feel the sentiment of beauty. Thus, the critic has succeeded in convincing her audience, in the sense that this person can now judge the beauty of that artwork on her own, according to the new sentiment she feels in virtue of her improved sensitivity. The comparison is strictly speaking made between two different judgements made by the same person, rather than between the original judgement of the opponent and that made by the critic. It should be noted that the discussion as presented here does not depend on the prior establishment of the critic as the one having a superior taste; on the contrary, it is only after the person has been convinced that the superiority of the taste of the critic would be established. The endorsement of a critic as having superior taste is implied in the acceptance of her superior judgement of beauty.

However, the critic might fail to convince her opponent. Perhaps she has misidentified the cause of her sentiment of beauty, and hence although she has

produced a general rule of art correctly on the basis of those masterpieces, the rule is simply irrelevant to the artworks in question, as her sentiment of beauty is actually caused by some other quality. Therefore, even if the opponent can see the influence of that general rule on those masterpieces, and her imagination is then more sensitive to that quality, she is not thus in any sense aided by the critic to see the beauty of that artwork. In such a case, the critic has a reason to reflect on her sentiment, and perhaps she would then discover some faults on her side, which prevents the proper identification of the true cause of her sentiment. This brings us back to the question raised near the end of Chapter 7, concerning how the true cause of a person's sentiment of beauty is identified.

The solution to this problem involves two components. First, we need an account of how a critic can determine which qualities of the artwork are possible causes of her sentiment; second, we should also show that the critic has the ability to identify the true cause among these possible causes. We start with the first component.

As mentioned before, a sentiment of beauty does not represent its cause. Therefore, in order to know what its possible cause is, we need something external to this sentiment. Since the identification of the cause of a sentiment of beauty is in fact a causal judgement, we can easily construct an account for such an identification by considering what Hume's view of causal judgement is.

Basically, a causal judgement is a judgement made according to the general rule formed on experience. When we observe a constant conjunction of two things—a certain quality and a sentiment of beauty, our imagination naturally forms a general rule connecting them, so that the appearance of one naturally introduces the idea of another. If the first one is always (or in general) followed by the second one, the first one is then considered as the cause of the second one.

Accordingly, a quality is considered as a cause of a sentiment of beauty if it 'has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages' (E-ST, p. 269). The general rule formed in this case is a rule of art, which connects empirically our private sentiment of beauty to a publicly accessible quality in artworks. With such a rule of art, a critic can add more substance to her judgement of beauty by pointing to a particular quality in an artwork as responsible for its beauty, so that she is thus able to do more than merely say that the artwork is beautiful. However, artworks are not

all beautiful in the same way. There are many qualities which have been found to cause us to have a sentiment of beauty. Therefore, a qualified critic should have a stock of rules of art, each of which suggests a different quality as a possible cause of a sentiment beauty. Perhaps in some case, the artwork in consideration possesses only one quality which resembles exactly a possible cause of a sentiment of beauty. In the absence of other possibilities, a critic can then conclude that this quality is the true cause of her sentiment. However, such a simple case probably never obtains, or is at least very infrequent. Most often an artwork possesses a number of qualities, each of which resembles imperfectly a possible cause of a sentiment of beauty. The imperfect resemblances imply that the rules of art available might not apply to these qualities. Perhaps only some of them really please, and each of them pleases to a different degree. Confronted with this messy situation, a critic needs something in addition to her stock of rules of art to correctly identify the true cause(s) of her sentiment. What might that be?

One might suggest that the critic can use her reason to make the decision, but this cannot be the case. A sentiment of beauty is produced by a highly particular combination of various factors. The same quality does not please in all situations:

> A very small variation of the object, even where the same qualities are preserved, will destroy a sentiment. Thus, the same beauty, transferred to a different sex, excites no amorous passion, where nature is not extremely perverted. (EPM 5, n. 17)

However, reasonings from experience involve the use of general rules. Even in cases where such rules are formulated explicitly so that we can employ them in our reasoning, their application always allows a certain degree of flexibility, so that they are applied also to cases which resemble imperfectly the original experience on which we form such rules. In other words, our reasoning is too general to help us in making judgements sensitive enough to the particularities that matter in the production of the sentiment of beauty. Therefore, our reason cannot help us determine which quality is the true cause of our sentiment of beauty.

This reply immediately invites an objection. When Hume talks about the use of general rules of art in determining the delicacy of a person's mental taste, he says:

> And if the same qualities, in a continued composition and in a smaller degree, affect not the organs with a sensible delight or uneasiness, we exclude the person from all pretensions to this delicacy. (E-ST, p. 273)

This passage suggests that the same qualities should always have the same effects, which seems to contradict the above reply. A possible way to reconcile the two quoted passages above is to determine what Hume means by 'the same qualities'. Perhaps Hume has conflated two different kinds of terms in his talk of qualities—purely descriptive terms and partly evaluative terms. The latter are used to refer to qualities our perceptions of which are 'coloured' by the sentiments of beauty or deformity they elicit in us. These qualities might also be captured by a complete physical description of the object, just like Euclid's full description of a circle which misses nothing but its beauty (EPM APP 1.14). Yet when a different object is considered, the same partly evaluative term would pick out some other qualities which might not be referred to by the same descriptive terms. How exactly these two kinds of terms are related is a serious issue, but we do not need to get involved into this trouble. We can proceed by simply noticing that probably in the passage quoted from the second *Enquiry* above, Hume has in mind the qualities referred to by purely descriptive terms, while in the passage from 'Of the Standard of Taste', he is thinking of those our perception of which are coloured by our sentiment of beauty. Qualities of the first kind, such as a certain narrative structure, can produce different sentiments of beauty or deformity when they are found in different objects. Therefore, in some cases, a small variation in the purely descriptive qualities an object, except its narrative structure, would destroy its beauty. In contrast, qualities of the second kind, such as a liveliness of style, cease to be referred to by the same partly evaluative term if their non-evaluative elements have had produced a different sentiment of beauty. Therefore, insofar as the term 'liveliness of style' is used, even when the quality referred to is found 'in a continued composition and in a smaller degree', a person with delicate taste should still have the same but weaker sentiment of beauty aroused.

It is of course possible that Hume is inconsistent between different works, but we do not seem to have any conclusive evidence for or against this charge. However, this speculation does illuminate something important in our interpretation of his 'Of

the Standard of Taste' regarding his view of the role of general rules of art, and relatedly, how art criticism works.

Hume starts his reflection on art criticism with a paragraph on general rules of art which should be read carefully. A little bit historical background can help us appreciate that succinct discussion. During Hume's days, there were two main views on criticism. The 'rule-based neo-classical critical theory' held that the value of an artwork depends on its conformity to a set of rules; while another view, based on Longinus' *On the Sublime*, held that the merit of some great ancient artworks consists rather in their breaking the rules (Friday 1998, p. 548-549). Hume's thought differs from both of these views. On the one hand, he disagrees with the latter view in denying that artworks can please 'by their transgressions of rule or order'; on the other hand, he disagrees with the neo-classicists in that he allows that rules of art can be rejected on the basis of sentiment (E-ST, p. 270). However, provided with only these two negative claims, the readers of the essay are still in the dark about Hume's thought on the role of rules of art.

Commentators of Hume usually assume without argument that Hume thinks that critics judge the value of artworks by checking their conformity to rules of art, but this does not seem to be the truth. Hume's position seems to be rather that, instead of using rules of art to infer from causes to effects, art critics use rules of art to help them identify the causes of their sentiments of beauty. There are two arguments which can be offered against the common reading. First, Hume explicitly holds that sentiment is the more authoritative source of evidence than rules of art at the end of his paragraph on rules of art (*ibid.*). A natural consequence of this position is to say that critics should ensure that their taste is sound enough to be trustworthy, rather than to put aside the established authority of sentiment and to ask the critics to reason according to rules of art.

Second, if Hume really thinks that a critic can reason from the presence of a quality to a judgement of beauty, the critic should be able to identify the quality before she makes her judgement. This brings in the question concerning which kind of terms, purely descriptive or partly evaluative, are used in referring to that quality. If a partly evaluative term is used, the quality referred to can only be discerned if a person has already been able to see its beauty, and thus the rule of art is redundant. But the case is no better if a purely descriptive term is used. As shown in the first

paragraph of this chapter, a critic can justify her judgement of beauty only if she can bring the others to share her sentiment. If it is allowed that a critic can reason from the presence of a purely descriptive quality to a judgement of beauty, then either it is possible to justify a judgement of beauty without anyone having a corresponding sentiment, which directly contradicts what we found previously, or we should conclude that this kind of reasoning does not justify judgements of beauty, so that there seems to be no point to reason in this way. None of the above options sounds attractive, so we would like to know if there is any better option which fits with Hume's thought.

Earlier in this chapter we have already discussed a better option, that is, the thesis that a rule of art helps a critic identify the true cause of her sentiment of beauty. We will not repeat the details of that discussion here. In order to complete the present digression on the role of rules of art, we just need to supplement that discussion with a demonstration that this suggestion fits well with Hume's text.

In 'Of the Standard of Taste', Hume illustrates explicitly only twice how rules of art are of use, both of which have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. We start with the second of the two. Hume shows us how to silence a bad critic. As we have seen above, the rule is used to draw the bad critic's attention to the right quality in some masterpieces. This is indeed just a special application of the identification of the quality which causes a sentiment of beauty.

When we go back a little bit in the same paragraph, we find the first place where Hume shows the use of rules of art. There he uses such rules to test the delicacy of taste. The rules are drawn from 'established models', where the relevant quality is 'presented singly and in a high degree', so that we do not need to isolate it from a mixture of various qualities. The absence of other possible causes of the sentiment of beauty allows us to easily draw a rule of art from such artworks. Thus having identified a quality as a cause of a sentiment of beauty, Hume continues, we can test the delicacy of a person's taste with a composition in which the same quality is found in a mixture and in a smaller degree. In this case, it is obvious that no reasoning is involved. Hume goes on to claim that:

> To produce these general rules or avowed patterns of composition is like finding the key with the leathern thong; which justified the verdict of

> SANCHO's kinsmen, and confounded those pretended judges who had condemned them. (E-ST, p. 273)

Both the rules and the key help people identify the true cause. One of the kinsmen notices the taste of iron, but strictly speaking, the cause of that taste is identified only when the key is found (similarly for the taste of leather detected by the other kinsman). Readers of Hume's essay tend to connect the taste of iron too close with the key, without mentioning the quality of being contaminated by iron object in-between. This, I suggest, might explain why Hume's analogy between the rules and the key is misleading. If we take this intermediary component into consideration, then we can understand better how the analogy holds.

Actually, besides being contaminated by some iron object (the key), there can be other possible causes of the taste of iron—for example, the hogshead might be contaminated by blood (objective), or the kinsman has a small bleeding wound in his mouth (subjective). These alternative possibilities are not rejected before the discovery of the key. Therefore, the finding of the key helps the kinsmen and the townsmen identify the true cause of the taste of iron in the hogshead. Their judgements are justified because the presence of the key with the leathern thong shows that there is really an objective quality—namely, being contaminated by objects made of iron and leather—that is possessed by the wine.[15]

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[15] In a footnote in last chapter (n. 14), we found a difference in the degree of normativity between judgements of niceness and nastiness and judgements made by the two kinsmen. Here we can see the reason. If 'niceness' and 'nastiness', as in Zangwill's usage, are in fact not terms in general language, then when someone says that some food is nice or nasty, she is just expressing what she feels, but not asserting that the food has a *specific* generally accessible quality called 'niceness' or 'nastiness'. Of course there is a certain quality—or, we might say, a certain *je ne sais quoi*—in the food that is responsible for the pleasant or unpleasant taste, but such a quality is not thus identified by the judgement of niceness or nastiness.

In contrast, when one of the kinsmen says that there is a taste of iron in the wine, he is in a certain sense pointing to the existence of some *specific* substance in the wine. 'A taste of iron' does not just refer to a particular sensation, but also ties that sensation to what is found to cause it in general. In other words, 'a taste of iron' can be viewed as shorthand of 'a taste generally caused by objects contaminated by iron' (this is a partly evaluative term as the word 'contaminated' is used). Operating in the background is a general rule connecting a certain quality to a particular kind of sensation. The quality 'being contaminated by iron' is an objective matter, and hence not every opinion is right. Therefore, the judgement of the kinsman carries a normative force that is absent in judgements of niceness and nastiness.

Similarly, linguistic constructions like 'the beauty of expression', 'the beauty of structure', etc. should be understood in the same way as 'a taste of iron'. They are also terms the existence of which presupposes a corresponding general rule—in this case, a rule of art—connecting a certain quality to a sentiment of beauty. The role played by such a general rule is also of identifying the cause of the sentiment. This observation, if sound, provides further support to the interpretation developed here.

Analogously, when a person is pleased by an artwork, there are different possible causes of her sentiment. Beside the presence of a quality of beauty, perhaps she might be under the influence of some defective external situation (objective), or she has been set in a joyous mood by some irrelevant factors (subjective). However, in this case, not only is she unable to ascertain the true cause of her sentiment before the 'general rules or avowed patterns of composition' are produced, but she might even be unable to include the true cause in the list of possible causes, as she might not have experienced that quality before, and hence could not come up with it as a possibility. The rules allow the critic to come up with a list of qualities, among other factors, such as internal and external defects, as the possible causes. In cases where there is only one possibility, the critic can conclude that the quality identified by the rule is the true cause, and her judgement can be justified, as she can use the same rule to convince other critics.[16] As for cases where more than one possibility can be found, the critic would need to make a decision as to which one is the true cause. This remark closes this digression on the role of rules of art, and carries us forward to the second piece of an explanation of how a critic can identify the true cause of her sentiment of beauty.

In the *Treatise,* we find in a footnote the following passage:

> No questions in philosophy are more difficult, than when a number of causes present themselves for the same phænomenon, to determine which is the principal and predominant. There seldom is any very precise argument to fix our choice, and men must be contented to be guided by a kind of taste or fancy, arising from analogy, and a comparison of similar instances. (T 3.2.3, n.1)

This passage suggests that it is one of the functions of our mental taste to identify the true cause of a person's sentiment of beauty. The idea seems to be that the sound

[16] It is not clear whether there is any disanalogy here. In the wine tasting case, it seems the finding of the key immediately justifies the kinsmen's judgements; but in the case of criticism, the critic is merely equipped with a rule which helps her convince the others and justifies her judgement. This seems to be a significant difference, but perhaps it is not. We can easily imagine some people who have no idea of what consequence the key would have to the hogshead, so that even after the key is found, the kinsmen would still need to show further the influence of the presence of a key in a hogshead to these people. Conversely, we might also imagine that for the quality identified by the rule, were it to be pointed out, the other people would immediately be able to relish it, so that simply producing the rule would constitute equally obvious evidence as finding the key. These two possibilities show that the difference between the case of wine tasting and that of criticism is just a difference in the degree of familiarity, and is not philosophically significant. Then, it sounds more reasonable to say that there is no disanalogy here.

operation of the mental taste enables a person to identify the true cause. As a result, the need of making judgements of taste is introduced once again. It should now be obvious how important it is to discuss taste and the standard of taste in a philosophical reflection on art criticism. Taste does not merely produce the sentiment of beauty which could ground our judgement of beauty, it also singles out the true cause of this sentiment, so that art critics could justify their judgement of beauty by bringing other people to attend to the relevant quality and feel the same sentiment of beauty. However, as mental taste does not always operate properly, art critics have to reflectively judge the operation of their taste in order to ensure that their taste does not mislead them to form wrong judgement or to single out the wrong cause of their sentiment. Therefore, a standard of taste is required, so that they can judge their taste.[17] Before we move on to the discussion of the nature of the standard of taste, we should first examine what Hume means exactly by 'true judge'.

[17] Just like the case of 'judgement of taste' and 'judgement of beauty', most if not all commentators of Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' also do not distinguish 'standard of taste' from 'standard of beauty'. However, this distinction should better be drawn along a similar line as in the case of 'judgement of taste' and 'judgement of beauty': 'standard of taste' refers to a standard concerning the soundness of the operation of the mental taste, and 'standard of beauty' refers to a standard concerning whether something truly possesses a quality of beauty.

Chapter 10

True Judges and Their Five Traits

It should be obvious that true judges play an important role in Hume's account of the standard of taste, as their joint verdict is 'the true standard of taste and beauty' (E-ST, p. 278-279). True judges are those critics who have delicacy of taste, by which they are 'sensible of every beauty and every blemish, in any composition or discourse' (E-ST, p. 274). Also, they have to be practiced, so that the power of their taste could be fully executed. Moreover, in order to rank an artwork properly among those in the same genre, true judges have to form comparisons. Besides, they should be free from prejudice, and adopt the viewpoint of the intended audience. Lastly, they should possess good sense, which enables them to check the influence of prejudice, to grasp the relation between different parts of an artwork, to determine how well an artwork has met its end, and to understand the reasonings involved in an artwork.

These five traits of true judges are sometimes held to be the marks by which true judges are known. If this is true, then the question whether something is beautiful could be solved by finding the true judges, and then asking for their joint verdict on it. It would then follow that a person could have a correct belief that something is beautiful without having to have any direct experience of it. The joint verdict of true judges, as the true standard of taste and beauty, is the best testimony of an object's beauty; and if a person is justified to believe that some critics are true judges, then she is also justified to believe in their joint verdict. This proposal might sound attractive, and hence the question where true judges are to be found appears to be crucial to art criticism.

However, this interpretation is probably wrong for two reasons. Firstly, it does not fit well with the text. After his summary of the character of the true judges, and the identification of their joint verdict as the true standard, Hume writes in the next paragraph:

> But where are such critics to be found? By what marks are they to be known? How distinguish them from pretenders? These questions are embarrassing; and seem to throw us back into the same uncertainty, from

> which, during the course of this essay, we have endeavoured to extricate ourselves. (E-ST, p. 279)

If Hume really thinks that the five traits are the marks by which true judges are known, then these questions are too simple to be embarrassing. It seems Hume is not treating these traits as the marks of true judges.

Secondly, a reflection on the five traits shows that, when they are considered as perfections, they cannot be known, and hence true judges could not be known by them. We should look at each of them in turn.

Consider first the delicacy of taste. If a critic has a perfectly delicate taste, she is sensible of every beauty and every blemish. That means in order to determine whether a critic has this perfection, we have to be able to compare the beauties and blemishes to which she is sensible to all of those indeed possessed by an artwork. If the person's responses track the work's actual features, then this critic has a perfectly delicate taste. However, this means we should first be able to detect all of the beauties and blemishes of an object, before we can compare them with those sensed by the critic. As a consequence, unless we have first ascertained that some other critics have a perfectly delicate taste, we can never make the comparison and thus we are unable to determine whether the critic in question has the same perfection. However, in order to ascertain that the taste of these other critics is perfectly delicate, we need still some other critics who have perfectly delicate taste. An infinite regress is generated. An appeal to the ability in question could be justified only if it has already been justified in a prior instance.

Worse still, even if we grant that we have perfectly delicate taste and that we are capable of ascertaining that this is so, it is still impossible to make the comparison. The sentiment caused by beauties and blemishes are just a certain kind of pleasure and displeasure. Such sentiments do not represent anything, thus we could not decisively infer from them to their causes. We have seen in Chapter 9 that the identification of the cause of a sentiment is an ability of sound taste. This ability of taste partly depends on its delicacy, since unless it is perfectly delicate, there might be some qualities that escaped its attention, and thus our taste might not be able to identify the true cause. Therefore we could only rely on our taste, which has been assumed for the sake of argument to be perfectly delicate, to identify the true cause of the sentiment. It seems we could not compare the beauty and blemish sensed by

the critic with those actually possessed by the artwork and correctly identified by our perfectly delicate taste, because unless we beg the question and assume that the taste of that critic is perfectly delicate, we are not justified to think that she can identify the true cause of her sentiment, and hence her verbal report of what she sees is not trustworthy.

A perfectly practiced critic should be a person whose taste can no longer be improved by practice. In order to determine whether a critic is perfectly practiced, we should be able to determine if her taste could be further improved by more practice. There seem to be only two possibilities. First, we might focus on the effect of further practice. Perhaps we know that no more practice advantageous to the critic's taste is possible; but this kind of knowledge seems to be impossible. Since whether further practice is advantageous could only be ascertained retrospectively, and it seems always possible for a critic to engage in further practice, we can never reach the temporal point at which we could acquire such a kind of knowledge. Or second, we might focus on the current status of the taste of that critic. Perhaps we know beforehand how such the taste of a perfectly practiced critic would be, and then compare it with that of the critic in question. This leads to an infinite regress, as that perfectly practiced critic can be known only if we have already found another perfectly practiced critic, and so on.

Similar reasons should hold for the perfection corresponding to the condition of forming comparisons. We can never know if a critic has made all possible or all necessary comparisons, either because it seems it is always possible to have new artworks in the same genre in the future, or we cannot determine whether a critic possesses this perfection unless we have already determined that another critic have it.

Hume thinks that it is one of the roles of good sense to check the influence of prejudice, so the question whether a critic is perfectly free from prejudice depends on the question whether she has perfectly good sense.

The case of good sense is similar to that of delicacy of taste, because both of them are abilities the superiority of which is judged by the performance, which is in turn judged by a comparison with an objective standard. The problem is that the standard is known only through that particular ability in question. Perfectly good sense is required to know for certain the objective standard, such as the general

viewpoint of the intended audience, the relations between the parts of a work, the end of an artwork, and the reasonings involved. Unless we have perfectly good sense, and know that our sense is perfectly good, we could not be justified to think that we have infallible knowledge of the objective standard, and hence could not determine decisively whether other people have perfectly good sense. However, as the same reason holds for our own case, we could not be justified to believe that our sense is perfectly good even if it is. Therefore, both freedom-from-prejudice and good sense when considered as perfections could not be known.

If these five traits as perfections could not be known, then either true judges could be known through other marks, or true judges could not be known at all. Hume does not provide any alternative marks of true judges, so he probably thinks that they could not be known. This has an apparently devastating consequence for the argument of Hume's essay, as the upshot seems to be that no true standard of taste and beauty can be known. A complete response to this problem will be provided in the next chapter. The rest of this chapter will try to show that, although we cannot know the five traits as perfections, we can form comparative ideas of each trait. This finding will then help us in the next chapter to see what exactly a standard of taste and beauty is according to Hume.

Although we cannot know whether a person's taste is perfectly delicate, we can still compare the judgements of beauty made by different critics, and judge whose taste is better. In Chapter 9 we have seen how critics discuss such matters. A critic tries to bring her opponents to see the beauty of an artwork they did not see. She might fail, so that her opponents would after all still be unable to see that beauty. In some cases this would happen because that quality is indeed not beautiful; in some cases it is just because the discussion was not effective. There could be other reasons. When such an attempt fails, we could not decide whose taste is better. However, if a critic succeeds in bringing other critics to see the beauty they did not see, this is evidence that her taste is more delicate, in the sense that she is more sensitive to the beauties and blemishes of the artwork in question. Moreover, recall that in Chapter 7 we have shown that the aim of judging beauty is to achieve stability and regularity in matters of beauty. Because of the more comprehensive objective ground now sensible, the scope of possible variation in the operation of taste would probably be narrower. Hence, the judgement of beauty afforded is probably more stable and

regular and thus a better one. Experience of the constant conjunction of more delicate taste and better judgement of beauty leads us to form a general rule connecting them.

Of course the real situation is probably more complex. For instance, perhaps there is some other beauty which is not noticed by that critic, but is clearly seen by her opponents. In such a case, we might not judge conclusively whose taste is more delicate. Nonetheless, we have a method for making such a decision. Also, we have pointed out in Chapter 8 that Hume does not aim at providing an account of how universal agreements are always achievable, so this complexity is not a problem for him. Notice that in this account, the delicacy of a critic's taste is shown only after her opponents have made a better judgement of beauty under her guidance. This agrees with our observation in Chapter 9 that we do not need to know whose taste is better in order to be convinced by the better judgement.

It might be worried that it is not so easy to bring other critics to see what they could not see. Yet Hume is quite optimistic on this point. He thinks that:

> Many men, when left to themselves, have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty, who yet are capable of relishing any fine stroke, which is pointed out to them. (E-ST, p. 280)

It is much more difficult to see every beauty and blemish of an artwork wholly by one's own endeavour than when guidance by other critics is consulted. This optimism might well be put into question. However, even if we can show that this optimism is unjustified, this can only show that art criticism is not something easy, which sounds more like a support for the account proposed above.

It is not clear what it means to say that a critic is more practiced and has formed more comparisons than another critic. Sometimes we compare in the quantitative sense, so that we count the times each critic practiced and the number of comparisons formed. Sometimes a qualitative sense is adopted, so that we judge how well-practiced a critic is and whether she has made enough comparisons according to her performance in judging the beauty of an artwork. However, for any just inter-personal comparison of these two aspects, whether the quantitative or the qualitative sense is adopted, it has to take into consideration the talent of the critics being compared. Moreover, it does not seem to be the case that such inter-personal comparisons are the source of the idea that practice and forming comparison have a positive effect on our taste. It should be rather that when a person reflects on her own

self to compare the judgements of beauty she makes before and after she has practiced and formed comparisons, she would then find that her taste can thus be improved. Perhaps as a result, she generalises this situation, and forms the idea that, in general, a better critic is more practiced and has formed more comparisons.

Similarly, when a critic reflects on the viewpoint adopted, and revised her judgement by removing personal factors from her viewpoint, or adding more details about the situation of the intended audience to her viewpoint, she would find that her judgement of beauty becomes more general, so that more people could be convinced by her judgement. Thus she forms the idea that the more a person is free from prejudice, the better her judgement is.

The case of good sense is probably similar to that of delicacy of taste. The previous observation that people can perceive better the beauty of an object when guided by other people should also hold in this case. When a critic is guided by another critic, so that the latter's understanding of an artwork is presented to her, she might be able to understand that artwork in the same way, and to make a new judgement of beauty. She could then compare the two understandings and the two judgements of beauty, and find the defects in her previous understanding and judgement, which are now revealed and corrected. After several similar experiences, she would be able to observe that better understanding is generally joined with sounder judgement.

That we can compare critics in terms of the five aspects above has great importance, because it means we can form general rules, implicit or explicit, with regard to the factors which affect the operation of taste. When it is observed repeatedly that sounder judgements of beauty are produced by critics who perform better along these five dimensions, reflective general rules on our taste are formed. With these rules, we know how to improve and correct our taste; and when we have evidence that our taste is operating under the influence of some defect in these five aspects, we know that we should not trust our own taste. Also, these general rules are similar to those general rules of art in the sense that they should be revised if they conflict with experience, as they are generalisations of experience. Moreover, it can now be seen how the idea of a better critic is related to the five traits on the basis of experience. Observations show that the five traits can improve judgements of beauty,

and as a better critic is one who makes better judgements of beauty, observations also show that a better critic is a critic whose five traits are better.

Lastly, it should be noted that the comparative ideas of the five traits are not the marks by which better judges are known. In the survey of these comparative ideas above, we can see that these advantages are known after we have ourselves made the judgements made by that critic who has these advantages, and as a result discovered that their judgements are better. As we have seen in Chapter 9, the superiority of a judgement of beauty is recognised by an internal comparison between it and another judgement made by the same critic. Only when we have first come to know whose judgement is better, and thus also who the better judge is, we would then be able to compare and evaluate the five traits of critics. Otherwise, we could at most say that their five traits are different, without any just evaluation possibly to be made. In other words, the mark of a better judge is her generally better judgements.

Chapter 11
Standards

It is surprising that Hume's general idea of what can be counted as a standard is not discussed in most writings on his 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Although he does not discuss it in length, in the *Treatise* Hume talks about a kind of standard which is imaginary, just, but useless, and this discussion is indeed very important for our understanding of 'Of the Standard of Taste'. It will be shown in the following that the true standard of taste as the joint verdict of true judges is precisely an instance of such an imaginary standard.

The term 'imaginary standard' is first mentioned in Hume's attempt to show that utmost precision and exactness should not be expected in geometry concerning the three proportions of objects—greater, less and equal. He asserts that 'the only useful notion of equality, or inequality, is deriv'd from the whole united appearance and the comparison of particular objects' (T 1.2.4.22). These proportions are often directly determined by the eye or the mind at once. Such decisions might be wrong, and we correct them in two ways: either by 'a review or reflection', or 'by a justa-position of the objects; or where that is impracticable, by the use of some common and invariable measure' (T 1.2.4.23). Such corrections are constrained by our instrument or art of measuring, so that we can never be totally free from errors. We know that there are bodies so minute that they could not be discerned, but nonetheless we can imagine that the addition or removal of any one of these minute bodies will render two equal figures unequal. As a result, Hume thinks that, on the basis of the observed improvement in the fineness of the corrections made, the natural propensity of the imagination to continue its motion causes us to imagine that even more and more refined corrections can be made, and thus we also imagine that the indiscernible inaccuracy in judgements of equality could be corrected. At last, we 'suppose some imaginary standard of equality, by which the appearances and measuring are exactly corrected, and the figures reduc'd entirely to that proportion' (T 1.2.4.24). An example would be the standard of equality in length reduced to the

equality in the numbers of indivisible points, which are too minute for computation and hence can only be useless (T 1.2.4.19). Hume continues:

> This standard is plainly imaginary. For as the very idea of equality is that of such a particular appearance corrected by justa-position or a common measure, the notion of any correction beyond what we have instruments and art to make, is a mere fiction of the mind, and useless as well as incomprehensible. (T 1.2.4.24)

It is not difficult to see how the idea of the true standard of taste as the joint verdict of true judges is also imaginary or fictional in a similar way. As shown in last chapter, we cannot determine whether a critic is a true judge. This means that the true standard of taste is useless, because we cannot know what a joint verdict of true judges is without knowing who they are. This is not to deny the justness of this standard, as their taste is imagined to be the best possible one, and hence their joint verdict, if it exists, must be the best one.

We have also seen in Chapter 9 that we can determine which judgement of beauty is better before the establishment of the comparative status as critic of those whose judgements are compared. Such decisions might be wrong, as when we try to make the same judgements as those made by the critics in question, we might fail to do so because of some external or internal defects, including the defects of our own taste. Perhaps we are not well-practiced, or have not made enough comparisons, or are not free from prejudice, etc. Such defects can be discerned in reflection, and be corrected accordingly. After that, we re-assess the judgements in comparison, and amend our evaluation of them. Two judgements which seemed to be equally good previously might then be discovered to be unequal. We can then observe that such corrections improve the accuracy and justness of our evaluation of judgements of beauty. However, we can only make such corrections in cases where we can discern the defects in our evaluation. Our ability to make such discernments constrains our ability to improve our evaluation both of judgements of beauty and soundness of taste.

However, it can be observed that our ability to discern the defects could be improved, so that a more accurate evaluation of judgements of beauty can be made. Because of the natural propensity of the imagination to continue its motion, this observation causes us to fancy some imaginary critic, whose judgement only has

some as yet indiscernible advantage over the one made by the best judge we can now distinguish. For the moment, due to our limited ability in evaluating judgements of beauty, the two judgements appear to be equally good. However, when our ability to discern the defects in our evaluation of judgements of beauty is improved, that advantage becomes discernible, so that we can judge that the imaginary critic is the better one.

The imagination will then lead us to imagine that more and more refined corrections of our evaluation can be made, and finally, we imagine some true judges whose five traits are all perfect. Although we do not in fact have the ability to distinguish them, if they exist, from those who differ from them only indiscernibly, we still imagine that if we could make such a distinction and we will take their joint verdict as the true standard of taste and beauty. An imaginary standard is thus supposed. The joint verdict is the true standard of taste, because it is what the perfect taste would rule. It is also the true standard of beauty, because it is based on the sentiment of beauty naturally produced by an artwork when the operation of mental taste is perfectly sound.

If anyone gives a verdict which does not conform to the true standard, this implies that her taste is not the best possible one, and the sentiment of beauty she feels is not the one which would be naturally produced by the artwork if her taste were the best possible. However, if a verdict conforms to the standard, it is still possible that the critic who makes this verdict is not a true judge, as the difference can be too minute to be reflected in language or general ideas. This should be expected, as it is part of the idea of an imaginary standard that there can be something which differs from it indiscernibly.

Although this imaginary standard is useless, as our ability is not fine enough to make the relevant distinctions in order to apply it, this does not prevent Hume from providing a philosophical analysis of the second species of common sense and showing that the variety of taste is in fact under control. In Hume's response to the possible challenge concerning the difficulty of finding any true judge, he tells us that:

> It is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing, and that some men in general, however difficult to be particularly pitched upon, will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others. (E-ST, p. 279)

We have now come to a position to understand why having proved these two points is sufficient. The first point, that 'the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing', is proved by the observation that the taste of different people deviate from the sound taste in various degrees and various ways. The second point, that some men in general are preferred by universal sentiment, is proved by the observed effects of some character traits, that is, the five traits of true judges, which contribute to the sound operation of taste, and their preferability, which is implicit in the word 'sound', are held by Hume to be 'acknowledged' or 'well known'.[18]

Having proved these two points is sufficient for the purpose of providing a philosophical analysis of the second species of common sense because they show together that, concerning the soundness of the operation of taste, people have the ability to judge and correct their own taste. The fact that the tastes of different people are not equally sound does not entail that people know this inequality; but that some character traits are in fact preferred because of their contributions to sound taste implies that people have the ability to judge the soundness of taste, and that they prefer having a sound taste. As shown in last chapter, the judgement of the soundness of taste depends on the judgement of the stability and regularity of its product, that is, the judgement of beauty made by taste. Evaluations of judgements of beauty are made on the basis of internal comparisons between different judgements of beauty. Normally the case would be that in which an old judgement is compared to a new judgement, and the new one is made under the guidance of another critic. Such guidance can take different forms, such as pointing out the influence of a certain quality previously omitted, asking for more practice or more comparisons, detecting the unnoticed personal prejudice, providing a better understanding of an artwork, etc. In virtue of such guidance, a person's taste is corrected and improved, so that a new and better judgement of beauty can be made and then be compared with the old one. Therefore, the ability of judging taste depends on the ability to correct one's own taste. From the different kind of corrections arises a useless imaginary standard, as

[18] In fact, Hume does not provide any direct evidence for his view that the five traits are preferable. He tells us that 'every one pretends to' have the delicacy of taste (E-ST, p. 272); 'a delicate taste of wit or beauty must always be a desirable quality' (E-ST, p. 274); and '[i]t is well known ... [that] prejudice ... is no less contrary to good taste; nor has it less influence to corrupt our sentiment of beauty' (E-ST, p. 277). The other three traits are then claimed to be advantageous to the delicacy of taste or the freedom-from-prejudice. Perhaps Hume is taking the preferability of these traits as an obvious fact.

the imagination keeps on imagining further corrections, even beyond our ability to discriminate the difference.

The examples used when Hume mentions the second species of common sense can be analysed in this way. When someone prefers Ogilby over Milton, or Bunyan over Addison, it can be found that this preference is a result of the defects in the operation of her taste. That there is a general agreement in rejecting her sentiment as absurd and ridiculous suggests that people have the ability to judge the taste of different people. This suggestion can be accepted, because the fact that the character of true judge is universally preferred presupposes that people have an idea of such a character, and this in turn presupposes their ability to judge the soundness of taste.

That people can judge the soundness of taste and that they have a preference for the character of true judge shows that there is a natural mechanism in human nature which allows and causes people to converge on better judgements of beauty. Therefore the variety of taste is actually constrained by this mechanism, which also explains the lack of radical shifts in taste in history.

If the true standard of taste is an imaginary standard which is also useless, then we are left with a question: is there any actual standard of taste? One might think that the general rules formed on the observations that judgements of beauty can be improved by the five traits might serve as standards of taste. However, this cannot be the case. Towards the end of last chapter we have seen why the comparative ideas of the five traits are not marks by which better judges are known. We can make inter-personal comparative judgement of these five traits only after we have already judged the taste of different critics. This judgement concerning their taste is made on the comparison of the judgements of beauty they make. In any particular discussion between critics, the one who makes the best judgement among them has the best taste, and her verdict would be counted as the standard. Of course her verdict is fallible, but this does not mean that it cannot serve as a standard. After Hume has illustrated his view on geometrical equality of objects, he applies the same analysis to the case of right lines. He writes, ‘The original standard of a right line is in reality nothing but a certain general appearance’ (T 1.2.4.30). Such a general appearance is fallible, but could be corrected and refined by measurement or juxtaposition, though it could never become certain. That an uncertain and fallible general appearance is referred to as a ‘standard’ by Hume shows that he does not think that a standard

should be infallible. This suggests that we should distinguish a standard of taste from the true standard of taste, and that the latter is useless does not imply the former is also useless. While the true but useless standard of taste is the unknowable joint verdict of true judges, an actual but fallible standard of taste is the verdict of the critic who proves to have the best taste in a discussion.

Chapter 12

Viewpoint and Sympathy

Among the five traits of true judges, one of them requires special attention. A true judge should be free from prejudice. This requirement might be referred to as the freedom-from-prejudice requirement. When a true judge judges the beauty of an artwork, she should forget herself, and adopt the general viewpoint of the intended audience, or simply the intended viewpoint. Hume thinks that, in order to produce the desired effects, an orator must have her intended audience in mind, as their particular features determine how they would respond (E-ST, p. 276). Without due argument, Hume simply extends the case of oration to other art forms. Perhaps he thinks that in the case of other art forms, the artist, in creating an artwork, also has an intention to produce a certain response in a particular audience. As a result, the artist's idea of her intended audience shapes her artwork, and the proper understanding of it would have to acknowledge this fact.

Peter Kivy (2011) questions the consistency of a relevant passage in Hume's essay:

> A critic of a different age or nation ... must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment of the oration. In like manner, when any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances. (E-ST, p. 276)

He thinks that the first part of this passage corresponds to what he calls 'the method of Historicism',[19] but the second part, in contrast, corresponds to what C. S. Lewis calls 'the method of The Unchanging Human Heart' (Kivy 2011, p. 112-113). If Kivy is right, then the freedom-from-prejudice requirement is inconsistent, as it is impossible for a critic to place herself in a particular situation and at the same time holds on to nothing more than the unchanging human heart.

[19] This label does not fully capture Hume's idea, as he does not focus only on artworks from a different age, but also those from a different nation.

The problem of Kivy's reading is that he misunderstands the second part of the passage. When Hume uses the term 'a man in general', the contrast in his mind is that between features that are tied to that particular person and those that are not. When an author addresses her work to the public, she does not put into it features that are accessible only to some particular individuals among her intended audience. Rather, the relevant features should be accessible for everyone sharing that point of view. When I read the work, if I have my response because of my being the particular person I am, then this response is not relevant to the work. Therefore, what Hume is saying is not that I should forget any peculiarities, but just '*my* individual being' and '*my* peculiar circumstances'. What remains would be something that can be shared by other people, and that is what it means to consider myself as 'a man in general'.

Understood in this way, the alleged inconsistency is resolved. When I adopt the intended viewpoint, the relevant features of it, however peculiar they are, are not *my* peculiarities, and can be general to everyone who adopts it.

The kind of freedom here is a condition in which a person is not tied to any particular viewpoint, but is able to switch easily from one viewpoint to another, depending on what the artwork requires. Also, a true judge is not required to forget herself entirely. All that is required is that her judgement be made from the intended viewpoint. She can at the same time be fully aware of how the artwork appears to her from her own personal viewpoint.

This requirement apparently makes Hume's view a version of relativism, as the beauty of an artwork is relative to a particular viewpoint. An artwork is not beautiful *simpliciter*, but beautiful for the intended audience. This looks very like the relativist analysis of the structure of judgements of beauty: 'An object O is beautiful for a certain group of people P'. This might make it perplexing why a particular viewpoint—that of the intended audience—should be privileged over the others. It should be possible for critics to agree on the judgement that an artwork is beautiful for its intended audience, while at the same time judge that it is ugly for some other group of people. Insofar as there is an agreement over the former judgement, there seems to be no reason to reject the latter one, as well as many other judgements made from other viewpoints. Perhaps a critic might even be justified to make the former judgement on the basis of authentic reports from the intended audience, without

herself adopting their viewpoint. Why does Hume make such a strong claim that when the intended viewpoint is not adopted, a critic's sentiments 'are perverted' (E-ST, p. 277)?

Hume does not address this problem in 'Of the Standard of Taste', but a possible answer could be constructed out of what we have discussed so far. Earlier in Chapter 7, it has been mentioned that the word 'beauty' is a term in general language, which refers to a certain quality which is generally accessible. This means a critic must be able to perceive the beauty in making a judgement of beauty. Judgements of beauty made wholly on the basis of testimony, without the critic being able to perceive the beauty, are thus ruled out. Given this requirement of general accessibility, to say that beauty is relative to a certain viewpoint implies that the viewpoint should be generally adoptable. One possible candidate of such a viewpoint is one which consists of elements common to the whole species, which corresponds to the method of The Unchanging Human Heart. The problem of such a viewpoint is that, when it is adopted, we do not have enough resources to understand some qualities in an artwork embedded in a certain cultural background.

This problem prompts us to consider another option, that is, the viewpoint of the intended audience, which corresponds to the method of Historicism. This seems to be a better option, as the cultural content of an artwork, if intelligible, should be accessible to the intended audience. Or perhaps we may say that an artwork is intended to be understandable for its intended audience. However, there might seem to be another problem, that is, it is not obvious how it can be a general viewpoint. The sense in which such a viewpoint is general here is not that it is thin in details, but that, as we have shown above, it does not involve features peculiar to some particular individual(s), and hence is generally adoptable for the common people. The adoption of it would not require some knowledge of the intended audience that is not publicly communicable, so that any critic with a fair level of intelligence could form an idea of it.

From these considerations, we can see that only the viewpoint of the intended audience could fit with the nature of the word 'beauty' as a general term.[20]

[20] It might be objected that perhaps there are other candidate viewpoints we haven't considered. Perhaps someone can just adopt a viewpoint that is consistent with the intended viewpoint. This cannot be right, as some completely irrelevant viewpoint could be consistent with the intended one. Another suggestion would be that someone can adopt a viewpoint which completely coincides with

Therefore, when a critic does not adopt this viewpoint when she judges the beauty of an artwork, she is not following the linguistic convention of the usage of the word 'beauty', so that her judgement should be rejected.

Here we can see that Hume's view is quite different from relativism. For a relativist, the different viewpoints adopted by different people are on a par; but for Hume, there is one and only one viewpoint that is proper to the judgement of beauty. If we consider these two views further, we can also find that the relation between the viewpoint and the critic is not the same in these views. The relativist associates the viewpoint to the critic, so that which viewpoint is adopted depends on who the critic is. In contrast, for Hume, the viewpoint is instead associated with the artwork, so that it is the artwork, as created in a particular historical situation by an artist acting on certain intentions, which determines which viewpoint should be adopted. Perhaps we might say that an artwork has an intrinsic requirement concerning which viewpoint should be adopted in judging its beauty. It should be clear now that Hume's view is not a version of relativism.

There is another problem concerning the freedom-from-prejudice requirement, which is related to the later discussion in 'Of the Standard of Taste' of the two blameless sources of variation. There seems to be some tension between these two parts of Hume's essay. The freedom-from-prejudice requirement seems to have eliminated the idiosyncrasies among different true judges by demanding them to adopt the intended viewpoint; on the other hand, the allowance of two blameless sources of variation just brings back the individual differences. How could this tension be resolved?

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that of the intended audience in aspects relevant to the appreciation of the artwork, but nonetheless they are different in the irrelevant aspects. It seems these two viewpoints are in effect equivalent, but if Hume really thinks that artworks are shaped by the artist's idea of her intended audience, we should still not accept this proposal. On the one hand, if a critic knows that the viewpoint she adopts completely coincides in the relevant aspects with that of the intended audience, she has no reason to prefer the former over the latter. On the other hand, if the viewpoint she adopts just happens to coincide with the intended one, then it seems she would not be able to justify her decision. We should bear in mind that Hume is focusing on art criticism here. When a critic is choosing among different possible viewpoints, in so far as art criticism is considered as an activity which concerns whether an artwork is truly beautiful, she should choose the viewpoint which she is justified to believe that it shows her the artwork's true beauty. If the two viewpoints coincide just by chance, then it seems she can justify her decision only if she knows that they are in effect equivalent in the relevant aspects, but that is possible only if she has already perceived the true beauty of that artwork from the intended viewpoint. This means that, again, she has no reason to prefer her viewpoint over the intended one. How about reasons which appeal to the difference between the two viewpoints in aspect irrelevant to art criticism? Since Hume is focusing on art criticism in his essay, he does not need to respond to this question.

Given the assumption of a common human nature, everyone having the same sound taste, adopting the same viewpoint, and being in the same external circumstances should be pleased, or displeased, by the same artwork. The same artwork can be beautiful and deformed at the same time if critics adopt different viewpoints. It is the role of the freedom-from-prejudice requirement to prevent variations caused by differences in the viewpoints adopted. However, as shown in Chapter 7, adopting the same viewpoint does not prevent variations in the degree of force or vivacity of the pleasure or pain felt. The two blameless sources of variation comprise factors which affect the natural relations between the idea of the critic herself and that of the intended audience. Indeed, different critics inevitably stand in different relations with the intended audience. It is easier for us to sympathize with those whose humour resembles ours, and also those whose culture is similar, contiguous, or causally connected to our own culture. This leads to an inevitable variation in the degree of force or vivacity to be communicated through sympathy, and thus the idea of pleasure or pain is enlivened to different degrees for each critic. The variation of the degree of force or vivacity of the pleasure or pain implies a corresponding variation in the degree of our approbation or blame, as Hume holds that '[t]he very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. ... Our approbation is imply'd in the immediate pleasure they convey to us' (T 3.1.2.3). However, insofar as the same viewpoint is adopted, pleasure would not become pain, and hence beauty would not become deformity, and *vice versa*. Therefore, the two sources of variation 'are not sufficient indeed to confound all the boundaries of beauty and deformity, but will often serve to produce a difference in the degrees of our approbation or blame' (ST, p. 280).

For 'a man of learning and reflection', he is well aware of the influence of these two sources of variation, and hence 'can make allowance for these peculiarities of manners' (E-ST, p. 282). A true judge is surely also such a man of learning and reflection for Hume. What is the kind of allowance made by such a critic? Hume does not deny that it can be a correction of the sentiment, but given the involuntary nature of the sentiment, this is extremely difficult. Nonetheless, such a man of

learning can at least make a correction of the language employed in pronouncing his judgement.[21]

We can now see that the apparent tension between the freedom-from-prejudice requirement and the two blameless sources of variation can be resolved easily. Once we know that the freedom-from-prejudice requirement concerns the way we obtain the pleasure or pain proper for the judgement of beauty and deformity, and that the two blameless sources of variation concern the actual degree of force or vivacity of that pleasure or pain, we realise that they concern different though related issues, so there is indeed no tension between them.

Lastly, with our better understanding of Hume's discussion on the two sources of blameless variation, we can see how exactly this consideration is connected to the previous parts of his essay. Having provided a philosophical analysis of the second species of common sense, Hume has in fact just shown that the variety of taste described in the beginning of the essay can be reduced, because the taste of people converge in virtue of improving their ability to make judgements of beauty. However, a sameness in the judgement of beauty they make does not imply sameness in the sentiment they have. Even when all defects are eliminated, and everyone becomes a true judge, particular judges still inevitably stand in different relations to the intended audience, and as a result their sentiments inevitable vary in degree of force and vivacity. However, since allowance can be made to offset such variations in formulating judgements of beauty, we neither need to nor could remove them. In short, the variety of taste is controlled, but can never be eliminated.

[21] Perhaps the ability to correct the language used in formulating one's own judgement of beauty is also one of the reasons why good sense is required for true judges. If this is also what Hume would agree, we might wonder why he does not mention this contribution of good sense in his discussion of it. A possible reason is that the focus there is on how a critic could feel the proper sentiment, but not how to express the judgement made on the basis of the sentiment felt.

Chapter 13
Moral Prejudice

In Hume's discussion of the external blameless sources of variation, he holds that if the artwork incorporates moral principles that are different from ours, or in order words, if the artwork involves some moral prejudice, it is both impossible and improper for us to enter into that sentiment which allows us to relish it (E-ST, p. 282). Hereafter these two claims will be referred to as the psychological impossibility[22] claim and the normative claim respectively. Hume does not provide a detailed explanation for these two claims. At most we are told that 'a very violent effort' is needed to alter a person's own moral principles, and that a person is 'justly jealous of' her own moral principles the rectitude of which she is confident of (E-ST, p. 283). However, this only puts the same claims in another way.

Worse still, apart from lacking sufficient explanation, the two claims above appear to contradict the freedom-from-prejudice requirement. Following Hume, we might take a poem as an example. Assume that in this poem, judging from our moral principles, 'vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation' (E-ST, p. 282). Since the purpose of poetry is 'to please by means of the passions and the imagination' (E-ST, p. 277), we can say that the intended audience of this poem are those who will be pleased by it by means of the passions and the imagination. However, we are morally displeased to find that vicious characters or manners are not properly blamed or punished. Therefore, we are not the intended audience. Note that it is not the description of the vicious characters or manners taken in itself that causes the problem; rather, it is the

[22] By 'impossibility' I do not mean a strict impossibility, in which case I would have contradicted Hume's allowance that one could nonetheless alter one's moral principles and enter into that alien sentiment if 'a very violent effort' is made. The kind of impossibilities in my mind can be illustrated in this way: imagine that an ordinary person is asked to use her foot to hold a pen and draw as well as she could as using her hand. In ordinary discourse, we would happily allow people to say without qualification that it is impossible, while at the same time be fully aware that in certain extreme cases, such as if her arms were amputated, she might make 'a very violent effort' and turn such an 'impossibility' into a possibility. If this example does not work, consider some extremely difficult *yoga* poses or skills in artistic gymnastics. Although it seems in some of such cases, even a very violent effort might still not be enough to change the impossibilities into possibilities. In short, the kind of impossibilities here is relative to an ordinary human being under ordinary circumstances.

absence of proper blame and punishment that makes the poem displeasing. The freedom-from-prejudice requirement demands us to adopt the viewpoint of the intended audience in judging the beauty of this poem. That means we should enter into the sentiment of the intended audience, and be pleased by the poem in which vicious characters or manners are not properly punished; but this is claimed to be impossible and improper later on in Hume's essay.

This problem is formulated by Michelle Mason (2001) as what she calls 'the moral prejudice dilemma' (p. 60b).[23] As a result of these contradictory claims, Mason thinks that a critic should either overlook her own moral principles in judging the poem, or insist on her moral principles and hence fail to be a true judge. This formulation is not quite right, as the first horn of it ignores Hume's psychological impossibility claim. Therefore, the consequence might be better put in this way: our inability to alter our moral principles means that it is impossible in such cases for us to be free from prejudice in judging the beauty of the artwork, and this failure is morally proper. This consequence does not seem to be attractive. In order to evaluate Hume's position, this chapter will start with an attempt to accurately understand why exactly Hume makes the psychological impossibility claim and the normative claim. This understanding will then allow us to see what consequences can be attributed to his position, and to evaluate it accordingly.

Hume's two claims concerning cases of moral prejudice should be considered separately, and we shall start with the normative claim. For Hume, what it means to say that something is improper for us to do can be understood by looking at his idea of obligation, as it can be viewed as saying that we have an obligation not to perform it:

> All morality depends upon our sentiments; and when any action, or quality of the mind, pleases us *after a certain manner*, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect, or non-performance of it, displeases us *after a like manner*, we say that we lie under an obligation to perform it. (T 3.2.5.4)

Accordingly, if something is improper for us to do, that just means that the performance of it displeases us after a certain manner. Where there is any moral prejudice, the absence of proper blame and punishment for vicious characters or

[23] Works cited from *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, as well as other publications which have two columns on one page, will be cited with page numbers followed by an English letter 'a' or 'b', which stands for the left column and the right column respectively.

manners is a sign that ‘the limits of vice and virtue’ are confounded, and this displeases us (E-ST, p. 283). This means we lie under an obligation to avoid confounding the limits of vice and virtue. It we failed to meet this obligation, this shows that our own character is morally defective. If we were to adopt the viewpoint of the intended audience and enter into the sentiment of them, we would then not be displeased by the confounded limits of vice and virtue. Such an idea of ourselves is displeasing, so we have the obligation not to enter into the sentiment of the intended audience, that is, it is improper for us to do so.

The reasoning behind the psychological impossibility claim is much more difficult to understand. In Chapter 7 we have seen that to adopt the viewpoint of the intended audience is to sympathise with them. This involves the formation of an idea of their pleasure, and by the communication of force and vivacity from a critic’s idea of her own self to her idea of the intended audience, and finally to the idea of their pleasure, this idea of pleasure is enlivened to be that very pleasure. Therefore, if it is impossible for us to adopt the viewpoint of the intended audience in the case of moral prejudice, there is probably something going wrong in this process.

We might separate the process of sympathy into two parts: the first is the formation of the idea of the pleasure of the intended audience, and the second part is the communication of the force and vivacity among ideas. At first glance, both parts in the case of moral prejudice seem to be as normal as in the innocent case. We should have no difficulty in forming an idea of the pleasure of the intended audience. That we find it improper to enter into their sentiments presupposes our knowledge of their pleasure. On the other hand, the natural relations between the idea of our own selves and our idea of the intended audience should not be so weak as to be completely inoperative. After all, all human beings resemble each other more than other species of animals, but it is arguably true that we can also sympathise with animals. Merely holding different moral principles should not be a difference so destructive to the operation of sympathy. A more careful diagnosis is required to unveil the problem.

We should start with an investigation of the idea of the pleasure of the intended audience. How is it formed? Does the existence of moral prejudice affect the formation of it? It has been shown in Chapter 7 how an idea of the pleasure of the intended audience is formed in an innocent case. It should be helpful for us to see

how the account presented there might apply to a poem in which vicious character or manners receive proper blame or punishment first. Imagine a poem, intended to be recited to Tibetans, which describes sky burial, the most widely practiced form of burial in Tibet. It is believed that, according to the teaching of Tibetan Buddhism, after a person dies, to have his own body to be eaten by hungry predatory birds is the last generous and virtuous thing he could 'do' in this world. In this poem, a young Tibetan man goes to the sky burial site right before the *rogyapas* (body-breakers) disassemble the body of his deceased father who is a pious Buddhist. This is forbidden by the rule that relatives of the deceased person are not allowed to enter the site. This young man wants to stop the ceremony and get back his father's body, but fails to do so. After that, he is severely punished by *lamas*.

When we read this poem, we might at first be displeased by this kind of burial, because it is too different from the kinds of burial practiced in our own culture, and even conflicts with our attitude towards the bodies of deceased people. However, after a study of the cultural background of this practice, we come to understand the religious and moral meaning of it. With such factual knowledge, we know that it is sacred and virtuous for Tibetans. As the young man in the poem attempts to stop the sky burial of his father, we can now understand his action as an attempt to stop something sacred and virtuous from happening. Given this understanding, we have an idea of how the intended audience sees what the young Tibetan man does. All these are matters of fact, which are objects of reason.

Next, we can move on to matters of sentiment. In our own culture, preventing something virtuous from being done is a vice which displeases us. A general rule is formed on the observation that such behaviour is generally followed by a feeling of pain, so that whenever an idea of such behaviour is present in our mind, the imagination moves naturally from this idea to an idea of pain. The two ideas are connected by the natural relation of cause and effect. When we have an idea of the intended audience in mind, together with the relevant knowledge of their culture, we imagine and come to have an idea of their view of the action described in the poem. Then, our imagination naturally moves from this latter idea to an idea of their pain, in virtue of the relation of cause and effect between them. The reason why the general rule involved here is one of our own general rules but not one of the intended audience's is that it does not make sense to say that our own mind is affected by

some other people's general rules. No matter what general rules the intended audience holds, it is impossible for our imagination to blindly and unreflectively move from one idea to another idea according to general rules in their mind. In virtue of the same mechanism, the proper punishment received by the young Tibetan man produces in our mind an idea of the pleasure of the intended audience.

A comment should be added here concerning the general rule. I propose that such a general rule is what Hume calls a 'moral principle' in his discussion on the case of moral prejudice. A moral principle should be considered as a particular manifestation of original principles of human nature.[24] It cannot be an original principle itself, as Hume's assumption of the common human nature would then deny the possibility of there being different moral principles among different cultures. Moreover, as general rules are something which connect *ideas*, they are different from original principles of human nature, which determine what *sentiment* (*impression*) will be caused by what happens in our mind. Since the moral principles involved in Hume's discussion of moral prejudice can determine whether a critic can form an *idea* of pleasure or pain from an *idea* of the characters or manners described in an artwork, it should be a general rule, rather than an original principle.

On the other hand, a moral principle must not be overly specific. For example, if there is a general rule which connects an idea of pain with a highly specific idea of somebody who goes into the site of sky burial and stops the ceremony, then it cannot be possessed by anybody who lives in a culture which does not have the practice of sky burial, as repeated experiences of sky burial would not be available for the formation of custom in the imagination. Without that general rule, when such a person reads the poem in the above example, her imagination cannot move from the former idea to the latter. This just means that even if she has all the relevant factual knowledge, her imagination still cannot naturally move from her idea of the action to any idea of pain. It does not mean that she cannot arbitrarily relate these two ideas together. However, the relation of ideas here in this case would be just a philosophical relation; or more precisely, it is just another piece of fact. In the absence of a natural relation, the communication of force and vivacity between ideas

[24] Since these original principles are not something we can directly know, we can only form on the basis of experience some general rules which trace their particular manifestations. These general rules are not always explicitly formulated, as the common people might only have their imagination be influenced by them, but do not know explicitly what they are. Only those more reflective people, such as philosophers, would have some of their general rules explicitly formulated.

that is requisite for sympathy is no longer possible. The force and vivacity of my idea of my own self can be communicated to my idea of the intended audience; but this latter idea cannot communicate its force and vivacity to any idea of pain related to it just by philosophical relation. As a result, even in a case where there is no conflict between moral principles, the critic also cannot enter into the sentiment of the intended audience. This should not be allowed by Hume, so what he calls 'moral principle' should not be too specific. A general rule which connects an idea of the prevention of virtuous action with an idea of pain would be general enough to count as a moral principle.

We can now move on to a case which involves moral prejudice. We can imagine another poem, in which almost all the same events are described, except that the young Tibetan man is not properly punished. This case is much more complicated. First of all, who would be the intended audience? There seems to be two candidate groups of the intended audience. On the one hand, as the end of poetry is 'to please by means of the passions and the imagination', the intended audience seem to be those who would be pleased by this poem. On the other hand, when we try to adopt the viewpoint of the intended audience, that is, when we imagine how they would react to the poem, we can only have an idea of an intended audience which is naturally connected to an idea of pain. Here is the reason. Given all the relevant knowledge, we know that the action of the young Tibetan man is an attempt to prevent something virtuous from happening. This must be agreed by the intended audience. As we are trying to formulate a case of moral prejudice, this requires that the different moral principles should concern the same action understood in the same way, but differ only in whether pain or pleasure follows. According to our own relevant general rule, which has been shown above to be the only possible one which can affect the operation of our own mind, the above idea of the action of the young Tibetan man is only naturally connected to an idea of pain. Therefore, when we imagine the sentiment of the intended audience by considering how they would understand the poem, only an idea of pain could be formed and naturally connected to our idea of them.

This is not to deny that an idea of pleasure might be arbitrarily related to our idea of the intended audience; but the relation in this case would then be a philosophical relation, which is either a matter of fact, or a relation of ideas. Perhaps

we might have a chance to directly observe the reaction of some group of Tibetans, who are the intended Tibetan audience and thus are actually pleased by the poem, so that the philosophical relation is a matter of fact; or we might reason from the assumption that the end of poetry is to please to the conclusion that the intended audience should be pleased by the poem, so that the philosophical relation is a relation of ideas.

In brief, in this case of moral prejudice, our idea of the intended audience is related to an idea of pleasure through a philosophical relation, and to an idea of pain through a natural relation. Since the process of sympathy requires the ideas involved to be connected by natural relations, as the communication of force and vivacity depends on natural relations but not philosophical relations, we can now see why Hume thinks that it is impossible for us to enter into the sentiment of the intended audience in cases involving moral prejudice. The problem is not located at the connection between the idea of our own self and the idea of the intended audience; rather, it is located at the connection between the idea of the intended audience and the idea of pleasure. This latter connection is a philosophical relation, and that means no matter how much force and vivacity is added to the idea of the intended audience, the force and vivacity cannot be further communicated to the idea of pleasure, and hence it cannot be strengthened to become that very pleasure itself. In contrast, as the idea of the intended audience is naturally related to the idea of pain, the process of sympathy is not obstructed, and therefore the idea of pain can become the very pain itself. This means that when we sympathise with the intended audience, that is, when we try to adopt their viewpoint, although we might know that they are pleased by the poem, the only sentiment we can feel is pain, not pleasure. It is thus impossible for us to enter into the sentiment of the intended audience.

Now we have explained both the psychological impossibility claim and the normative claim. We can then proceed to see what consequence these two claims have. Hume thinks that when we read a poem like the one in the second example above, we can only find the poem deformed (E-ST, p. 282). This is because our judgement of beauty is made on the basis of the sentiment felt, and since we can only feel pain, we judge it to be deformed. However, one might ask, why does not Hume allow in this case that we might make allowance for the difference in sentiment felt which is caused by external factors? An educated person might be able to recognise

the influence of the difference in moral principles, and it seems quite possible for her to correct her language or sentiment in making the judgement of beauty. What is the reason for Hume's denial of this possibility?

Here is a simple reply. In last chapter, it has been pointed out that the allowance that is provided by the correction of language or sentiment concerns the variations in the degree of the fore and vivacity of the sentiment felt. Such variations are the effects of the influence of the internal frame of the mind and the external situation caused on the operation of sympathy. As sympathy is just a mechanism of the mind by which an idea is enlivened to become a passion, it cannot change pleasure into pain, or pain into pleasure. Therefore, in the case of the poem in question, where the moral prejudice causes us to feel pain while the intended audience should feel pleasure, the kind of allowance mentioned in the discussion of blameless variations is not applicable.

This reply is not fully satisfactory, as it can be further questioned why Hume does not allow any correction of language or sentiment which could deal with such cases. Apart from his more fundamental thought that a judgement of beauty should be based on the sentiment genuinely felt, there seems to be no strong reason to deny that a critic can judge something to be beautiful when he is aware of the fact that he is under the influence of moral prejudice and is thus actually feeling pain. Perhaps one of Hume's worries is that when the actual sentiment felt does not correspond to that of the intended audience, the critic could have no reference point to rank the artwork within the particular genre to which it belongs. Her pain tells her nothing about how strong the pleasure of the intended audience would be relative to the pleasure occasioned by other works in the same genre. We might grant that this is a practical problem, but it is not enough to support the conclusion that such a correction is in principle impossible. It might be very difficult to achieve a precise ranking under the influence of moral prejudice, but given that it is also extremely difficult to be a true judge, merely being difficult could not be counted as a decisive reason in support of Hume's position. It might be argued that indeed Hume is also aware of this weakness of his view, and that is why he seems to allow that our sentiment could be changed through some very violent effort (E-ST, p. 283). We have no way to rescue Hume's view from this question, so we will leave it as such.

Chapter 14
Controversies

Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' has raised many interpretative problems and has been the object of many discussions in contemporary aesthetics. In this chapter, a few of them will be responded to on the basis of the interpretation we have developed in previous chapters.

A. Levinson's 'Real Problem'

In Levinson (2006), the author presents a 'real problem' which he considers as one likely to be raised by a modern reader of Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Levinson admits that his paper 'is not primarily an exercise in historical scholarship (p. 367),' i.e. he does not claim that this problem is a problem for Hume, but he just wants to show that a solution to it could be found in Hume's essay. In our discussion below, it will be shown that both Levinson's problem and solution are based upon his misunderstanding of Hume's essay, and if we re-formulate his problem according to our interpretation, we can see that it should not be in any sense a problem for Hume.

Levinson's 'real problem' could be briefly summarised as follows: given that I am not an ideal judge, the artworks I enjoy and prefer are not the same as those enjoyed and preferred by ideal judges. I simply cannot share their enjoyment because of the difference in our taste. For me, those artworks approved by ideal judges are less enjoyable than those which I like. Why should I care what an ideal judge likes? Why should the joint verdict offered by ideal judges have any bearing on my taste, so that I should like what I do not like, or try to become more like an ideal judge?

A problem immediately arises: Levinson seems to be assuming that, for Hume, art criticism is at least mainly an activity which helps us maximise our enjoyment in art. It suggests that if it can be shown that following the joint verdict of true judges could maximise our enjoyment in art, then it justifies the view that we should care about their joint verdict. Although it can be agreed that true judges can determine which artworks can provide the highest enjoyment human beings are capable of

having, as suggested in Hume's discussion of delicacy of taste (E-ST, p. 274), it does not follow that enjoyment maximisation is the aim of art criticism, nor does it follow that true judges necessarily enjoy only those artworks judged by them to be the best. Chapter 9 has shown that art criticism is an activity which answers to the demand of making judgements of beauty, when 'beauty' is taken as a term in general language. Its aim is to correctly judge the beauty of artworks, which is understood as the power of some qualities in artworks which naturally pleases when a critic is in a sound state of internal organs (and under the appropriate external circumstances). However, later in Chapter 12, the role and effect of sympathy were identified. We know that if the natural relations between the critic's idea of the intended audience and her idea of herself are weak, she is not able to feel much pleasure from considering an artwork, even if she judges it to be good. Therefore, Hume's view allows that, depending on the qualities of the intended audience, a true judge might enjoy more a lesser artwork than a better one. Insofar as the correction of language is appropriately made, a critic's preference and enjoyment are independent of her judgement of beauty. Therefore, for Hume, art criticism should not be conceived as an activity which aims at the maximisation of enjoyment, as this is irrelevant to its aim of correctly judging the beauty of artwork.

Also, the claim that the best artworks can provide the highest enjoyment human beings are capable of having should not be understood as implying that all true judges are equally pleased by such artworks. At most, the highest enjoyment an artwork could afford is only accessible to those true judges in the intended audience, or those who can fully correct their sentiment beyond merely correcting their language, so that they are pleased to the same extent as a true judge among the intend audience. However, this is not part of the requirement for a critic to be a true judge. In other words, being a true judge does not make a person always capable of having the highest enjoyment affordable by every artwork. This shows that, if it should be justified that the joint verdict of true judges should be listened to, Hume would never think that the justification comes from the prospect of highest enjoyment.

As for Levinson's solution to the 'real problem', in addition to the same problematic assumption discussed above, it also involves another problem. His solution relies heavily on the idea that a true judge is 'a reliable indicator or identifier of artistic value, that is, intrinsically-worthwhile-experience-affording capacity—in

its varying degrees' (Levinson 2006, p. 380). Levinson thinks that we need to test critics by checking whether they can fully appreciate the masterworks, and after their status as true judge has been established, we have a reason to attend to their joint verdict, as they are 'our best barometers of the artistic value of works of art generally' (*ibid*, p. 381). This means that our reason to attend to the joint verdict of true judges depends on the prior establishment of their status as true judge. However, even if we set aside the impossibility of establishing who the true judges are, and weaken Levinson's view to the extent that we have a reason to attend to the verdict of judges who are merely better than us in virtue of their superior but less than ideal taste, we should still not accept Levinson's view. According to the account provided in Chapter 9, we need not establish the superiority of a critic's taste before our assessment of her judgement; rather, our approbation of her taste is implied by our acceptance of her judgement. We 'internalise' her judgement, in the sense of coming to see an artwork in the same way as the critic sees it, and thus share her sentiment. We can then compare her judgement and our own one, so that we could determine whose judgement is better. If the critic's judgement is better than ours, we accept that her taste performs better in this case. When we observe that the same critic usually makes better judgement of beauty, then we believe that the ability to make better judgement of beauty is part of her character, and admit that she is a better judge.

Levinson's worry should not be dismissed simply because of these misunderstandings. We should try to re-formulate it according to our interpretation to see if it could be revived. Levinson thinks that his 'real problem' is a question which 'most naturally arises in the mind of an ordinary, skeptical art-lover in regard to Hume's solution to the problem of taste' (*ibid*, p. 372). Perhaps the criticism presented above has misidentified the domain of the 'real problem'—it is not a problem for art critics, but a problem for art-lovers. However, it will then make the 'real problem' irrelevant to Hume's essay, as 'Of the Standard of Taste' is a work which focuses on art criticism. It is directed to critics, that is, those who care about the true beauty of artworks. It should be reminded that, as presented in Chapter 8, the possibility of there being a standard of taste is secured by a consideration on examples drawn from art criticism, which concern the comparative merit of Ogilby and Milton, Bunyan and Addison (E-ST, p. 269). Thereafter, Hume does not extend

his consideration beyond the realm of art criticism, and hence any interpretation which makes such an extension is not a fair interpretation of Hume's view.

From Levinson's formulation of the 'real problem', although no clear characterisation of art-lovers is provided, we can still see that they are the kind of people whose interest lies on the maximisation of enjoyment afforded by artworks, and at most only derivatively on the true beauty of artworks. As Levinson puts it:

> The crucial practical, as opposed to exegetical, question concerning Hume's solution to the problem of taste is why one should *care* what is truly beautiful, if one accepts Hume's account of how such things are identified, to wit, through the converging verdicts of ideal critics. (Levinson 2006, p. 372-373)

If art-lovers' main concern is true beauty, instead of the maximisation of their own enjoyment, the practical question 'why one should *care* what is truly beautiful' would not make any sense. As a result, the 'real problem' is not really a problem for Hume, at least within the scope of 'Of the Standard of Taste'.

Moreover, even if we allow that Hume—being a philosopher, but not merely the author of that essay—should in some sense respond to this problem, it is still not very clear how important the 'real problem' is. After all, if the problem is how one should maximise her enjoyment, it is just a personal matter. Many factors figure in her consideration, including her education level, prior exposure to the art world, sensibility to beauty, amount of leisure, humour, cultural environment, etc. These should all be taken into account in her cost-benefit analysis. Due to the particularity and complexity of such concerns, there is hardly any interesting general answer to be provided.

If we only focus on the estimation of enjoyment to be afforded by the appreciation of artworks, we still cannot see the significance of the 'real problem'. The standard of taste would only be interesting to those who care about what is truly beautiful. There is no reason to impose on Hume any claim which requires everyone to be bound by a standard of taste. If a person just wants to maximise her enjoyment, why should Hume try to force or convince her to listen to the joint verdict of true judges? We have pointed out that making correct judgements of the beauty of artworks and maximising one's own enjoyment of art need not coincide. Although it is claimed that the best artworks could afford the highest enjoyment a human being is

capable of having, it does not mean that such enjoyment must be able to offset all the effort and sacrifice required for a person to acquire the ability to enjoy it. All these are just practical, but not philosophical, considerations of life-planning for an individual person. Hume does not need to provide any answer to the 'real problem'.

B. A Circular Definition?

One of the most famous criticisms of Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' is the charge of circularity. It is roughly the view that Hume defines good works of art as those approved by good critics, and good critics as those who approve good works of art. One particular formulation of the problem is provided by Peter Kivy:

> (1) good works of art are works of art approved by good critics; (2) good critics are critics possessing five requisite qualities; and (3) critics possessing the five requisite qualities are critics who approve good works of art. (Kivy 1967, p. 60)

Kivy's own solution to this problem consists in an attempt to show that three of the five requisite qualities (delicacy, lack of prejudice, and good sense) can be defined without appealing to good artworks. Whether his attempt succeeds is not our concern here. Rather, a problem in the formulation of the problem itself should be considered.

Kivy thinks that Hume defines good artworks in terms of good critics. However, this claim is questionable. The truth seems to be that Hume has not provided any definition of good artworks in his 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Although it is true that good artworks are those approved by good critics, but it seems this just follows from the claim that good critics are those who approve good artworks. Merely being a true claim about good artworks does not mean that it is a definition of good artworks. Indeed, it would be strange that if Hume does really provide any definition of good artworks here. 'Of the Standard of Taste' is an essay on our judgement concerning the operation of taste in the realm of art criticism. It does not aim at telling its reader what is a good or bad artwork; rather, it aims at providing an account of how we could determine when our taste could be trusted in judging the beauty and deformity of artworks, and hence their goodness. It should be objected that beauty and deformity are not the only qualities which are relevant to the evaluation of artworks; but granted this problematic assumption, a correct understanding of the essay's aim should not prompt us to expect any definition of good artworks. Hume would

probably reserve this project of defining good artworks to art critics, or at least, to another occasion where he writes as an art critic. Some specific qualities which contribute to the beauty or deformity of artworks might be identified in such definition, but this is outside of our concerns here.

This response might not be satisfactory, and it is in no way meant to be conclusive. A stronger reply to this charge of circularity is directed to the contention that Hume defines good critics in terms of good artworks, or, in particular, the second and third claim in Kivy's formulation. Kivy's second claim defines good critics as those possessing the five requisite qualities. This might seem to commit him to the view that these five qualities form a complete list of the requisite qualities, but this would not be something we would like to accept. We have seen previously in Chapter 10 that these five traits are found in experience to be contributive to the improvement of a person's ability in judging the beauty of artworks. This makes it a contingent fact that they are thus associated with good critics, and we should better allow the possibility of there being some other qualities omitted by Hume.[25]

A better way to formulate Kivy's claims would be:

(2') Good critics are critics whose internal organs are sound;

and

(3') Critics whose internal organs are sound approve of good works of art.

However, although (3') may not seem false to some readers, it should still be rejected, because Hume would not define those critics in this way. For Hume, (3') would be too narrow. Critics whose state of internal organs is sound do not only approve good works of art. They do so in virtue of their taste, the operation of which is in an ideal condition, so that it can be trusted in judging the beauty and deformity of artworks. Even if we might assume for the sake of simplicity that beauty and deformity are the only factors which ultimately determine the artistic value of an artwork, so that a beautiful artwork is a good artwork, and a deformed one is bad, we should not think that Hume defines artistic beauty and deformity in terms of good and bad artworks. Rather, he tells us that:

> Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease; and if they

[25] Examples of other qualities include '[e]motional receptivity or openness' and 'serenity of mind or capacity for reflection' (Levinson 2006, p. 371), courage (Durà-Vilà 2014, p. 77).

> fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ. (E-ST, p. 271)

Those which please in this way are beautiful, and those which displease are deformed. Accordingly, it seems fair to think that Hume implicitly defines beauty as the kind of forms or qualities which please in virtue of the original internal structure of the human mind, and deformity is the kind of forms or qualities which displease in the same manner. The internal structure referred to here is surely not the physical structure of the human mind. Rather, it is actually the totality of the original principles according to which passions are caused in the human mind. Therefore, it might be clearer to re-cast the definition as: beauty is the kind of forms or qualities which please according to certain original principles of the human mind, and deformity is the kind of forms or qualities which displease in the same manner. Given this general definition of beauty and deformity, we could then add a restriction that the forms or qualities should be considered from the viewpoint of the intended audience to make it a definition of artistic beauty and deformity. There is no need to mention good or bad artworks in this definition, and hence the charge that the definition is circular fails.

It might be objected that my response is only effective against this particular version, as another circular definition could be found in Hume's essay. Given the above definition of beauty and deformity, a circular definition can be formed by adding a second definition, which defines those original principles of the human mind mentioned in the first definition as the principles of human mind according to which beauty pleases and deformity displeases. Thus, those original principles of the human mind and beauty and deformity are defined in terms of each other.

In response to this second version of a circular definition, the last thing we would do is to reject the first definition, as our acceptance of it grounds our rejection of the first version of the circular definition. Therefore, we should start by examining the second definition. We might ask first, is there any other way to define those original principles? A possibility seems to be to give an extensional definition which lists all those particular original principles, but two problems arise.

First, these particular principles would probably be something which connect a certain impression of forms or qualities to pleasure or displeasure, but unless we appeal to a prior distinction between the pleasure of beauty and the displeasure of

deformity and other kinds of pleasure and displeasure, it seems this list might include irrelevant original principles. This means we could not break the circle by giving an extensional definition.

Second, we do not have direct access to such original principles. All we can have are just some observations of their particular manifestations, which is determined by external situations. From such observations, we might be able to form some general rules connecting certain forms or qualities with pleasure or displeasure, and perhaps we might also be able to reduce them into rules which are more general; but we could never know whether such general rules correspond exactly to those original principles. This means that it is impossible for us to provide any extensional definition.

Hume would respond to the first problem by asserting that:

> [U]nder the term *pleasure*, we comprehend sensations, which are very different from each other, and which have only such a distant resemblance, as is requisite to make them be express'd by the same abstract term. (T 3.1.2.4)

Both 'pleasure' and 'displeasure' are abstract terms which refer to distinct sensations which have only a distant resemblance. That the same term is used should not lead us to think that we are not able to distinguish different kinds of pleasure and displeasure. We do as a matter of fact have a prior distinction of the pleasure of beauty and the displeasure of deformity and other kinds of pleasure and displeasure. Moreover, although we should also distinguish different kinds of pleasure and displeasure by the manners they are produced, we also know how to make such distinctions. Only when the forms or qualities are considered in general would the pleasure or displeasure produced be that of beauty or deformity. Should this response be accepted? Perhaps, but then Hume still needs to respond to the second problem.

It seems Hume should agree with what the problem states. However, he might continue by saying that this is an inevitable result of his experimental method. Recall a passage cited in Chapter 1:

> And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the

> ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical. (T Intro. 8)

On the one hand, we should aim at generalising the principles formed in our science of human nature as far as the limit of experience allows. On the other hand, Hume tells us from the very beginning that we cannot discover any ultimate original principles of human nature. This means we are indeed unable to have any clear idea of what he calls 'original principles'. As we keep on generalising the principles already formed on our experience, we imagine that this process might continue. As it is certain that we must never be able to form principles more general than the ultimate original principles, we imagine that we might at last arrive at some general principles which correspond exactly to the original principles, despite the fact that we can never know this correspondence, and thus can never claim to have made such a discovery.

Moreover, as 'all reasonings from experience are founded on the supposition, that the course of nature will continue uniformly the same' (A 13), and Hume's science of human nature is constituted by reasonings from experience, the uniformity of nature is a presupposition of Hume's science of human nature. The existence of original principles of human nature is just a particular instance of this presupposition. Insofar as 'Of the Standard of Taste' is part of Hume's enterprise of developing a science of human nature, the existence of original principles is an inevitable presupposition. Therefore, the two definitions in the second version of the circular definition should not be taken literally. The first definition might be clarified as saying that beauty is the kind of forms or qualities when considered in general are found to cause pleasure of beauty, and deformity is the kind of forms or qualities when consider in general are found to cause displeasure of deformity. The inclusion of the term 'beauty' in the *definiens* is harmless, as it refers to a certain kind of forms or qualities in the *definiendum*, but in the *definiens*, it refers to a certain kind of sentiment. Similarly for 'deformity'. This revised definition does not affect our rejection of the first version of circular definition, as it still does not mention 'good or bad artworks'.

As for the second definition, it is now irrelevant to the first definition, so we need not revise it. The only term in the revised definition of beauty and deformity which seems to require a further definition is 'in general'. We can say that 'in

general' means in the absence of personal particular interest inaccessible to other people. Also, in order to approximate to the meaning carried by 'original principle', it should also function as a restriction on the way of considering the forms or qualities to the extent that the highest regularity and uniformity of experience could be achieved. It is not clear whether we can define 'in general' without mentioning the idea of 'original principle but still capture fully the original thought expressed by the first definition. If not, perhaps this might support the thought that the existence of original principles is a presupposition of reasoning, rather than something acquired from experience. In any case, it seems a definition of 'in general' would not mention 'beauty' and 'deformity', and hence there is no threat of circularity.

C. Ideal Judges

As the true standard of taste is identified as the joint verdict of true judges, we can find the true standard of taste only if we can consult the joint verdict of true judges. So if they are ideal, it means we cannot find the true standard of taste. What Hume says is just useless in practice. On the contrary, it is not clear how a real judge could possess all five traits of a true judge as perfections. This does not seem to be just a matter of rarity—it is simply impossible.

Our discussion in Chapter11 has demonstrated that the true standard of taste as the joint verdict of true judges is just an imaginary standard. We imagine, but do not find in experience, some critics who have the best possible taste. This means that true judges are ideal. However, in order to be more confident of this conclusion, we should examine what reasons might be provided to support the view that true judges are real.

James Shelley supports the view that true judges are ideal. His reason is a textual one, which appeals to Hume's reference to the five traits as perfections (Shelley 1994, p. 439b).[26] He thinks that even the two kinsmen in the wine tasting example from *Don Quixote* also do not possess delicacy of taste, because each of them fails to notice every ingredient in the wine, and hence they are not true judges. Stephanie Ross argues against Shelley by pointing out that the conditions of practice

[26] Note that Shelley maintains in the same article that a person might consult the true judges, and their joint verdict 'can assure us that a particular difference of taste represents an inequality of taste' (Shelley 2004, p. 438b-439a). It seems that he is contradicting himself by saying that true judges are ideal and that true judges can actually be consulted by non-ideal critics.

and forming comparison cannot be understood as perfections because 'they are not properly conceived of as whole or completed', as they must involve 'the gradual accumulation of experience' (Ross 2008, p. 22-23). Also, she thinks that 'it is always possible to engage in *further* practice and/or to entertain *additional* comparisons', and this possibility obtains only for actual beings, so true judges are real (*ibid*, p. 23).

Ross's first reason cannot support her conclusion. In order for her first reason to be relevant, Ross has to deny that we have ideas formed by imagination which go beyond the boundary of experience, but we should not accept this consequence. That the conditions of practice and forming comparison must involve 'the gradual accumulation of experience' only holds for the ideas formed within the limit of experience. However, Hume thinks that, upon the repeated observations that more practice and more comparison formed can improve our judgement of beauty, our imagination continues its motion and imagines that for any judgement of beauty, it could be further improved by more practice and more comparison formed.

In addition, it can also be observed repeatedly that the more practice and more comparison formed, the smaller is the improvement of our judgement. Therefore, our imagination also imagines that there will be some stage at which no further improvement is possible. At that stage, the critic would be 'perfectly practiced' and have formed 'perfectly sufficient comparisons'.

These two ideas of perfections are formed by the imagination, whose operation is not controlled by reason. That they are irrational, or could not be properly conceived, does not mean that we cannot have such ideas. Unless it has been shown in advance that the idea of a true judge is an idea formed totally within the limit of experience, Ross's first reason cannot show that the two conditions of true judges are not conceived as perfections. Note that although Hume rejects the idea of going beyond the limit of experience in his science of human nature, he does not ask for a complete elimination of every idea formed by the imagination operating beyond the limit of experience. That we have such ideas is one of the facts of human nature, which calls for explanation, but not reformation. All Hume demands is that in rational enquiries, we should limit ourselves to employing only those ideas which stay within the limits of experience.

As for Ross's second reason, it needs to be clarified. If that 'it is always possible to engage in *further* practice and/or to entertain *additional* comparisons' can

be counted as a reason against the construal of the two conditions as perfections, then it seems Ross is implicitly assuming that if the two conditions can be construed as perfections, then it is impossible to engage in further practice and/or to entertain additional comparisons, and her argument should be a *modus tollens.* If this is the case, then the conditional should be questioned. Why would the two conditions construed as perfections make it impossible to engage in further practice and/or to entertain additional comparisons? It is reasonable to say that in this case, further practice and additional comparisons will not improve the judgement of beauty made by a critic having these perfections, but if she wants to do so, she can.

It seems Ross either actually means that it is always possible to improve one's judgement of beauty by engaging in further practice and/or by entertaining additional comparisons, or her argument involves a hidden premise which is a false conditional, and hence should be rejected. A charitable reading should reject the second disjunct, so we should consider the first disjunct, which is a revised version of Ross's second reason.

Given what we have just said in our discussion of her first reason, it is obvious that this revised version is self-defeating. What it says is exactly what a person would think when her imagination has gone beyond the limit of experience. By reason alone, we can never arrive at the conclusion that improvement is always possible. It is by custom that our imagination makes us expect such a possibility. However, we have also seen that this cannot be the whole picture, as the imagination also leads a person to expect that, ultimately, no further improvement could be made. Ross then faces a dilemma: either she should deny that the imagination can go beyond experience, or accept that such an operation of the imagination also leads to the ideas of the two conditions construed as perfections. The first horn forces her to give up her second reason, both the original version and the revised version; the second horn forces her to accept that we have the two ideas which she wants to deny. No matter which horn she would choose, she fails to show that true judges are real.

As a result, we can still understand the five traits as perfections which 'can alone entitle a critic to [the] valuable character' of true judge (E-ST, p. 278), and since actual judges cannot possess all such perfections, true judges are ideal.

D. Standard of Taste: Rule or Joint Verdict

So far in our discussion of the standard of taste, we have stuck to the characterisation of it as the joint verdict of true judges. However, in the earlier part of 'Of the Standard of Taste', there is a short but crucial paragraph, that is, paragraph 6, which seems to characterise it in another way:

> 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. (E-ST, p. 268)

Some discussions have emerged concerning the relation between these two seemingly quite different characterisations.[27] The most common way to express the problem is to ask whether Hume thinks that the standard of taste is a rule or a joint verdict. There is also a tendency to identify the rule mentioned in paragraph 6 with a general rule of art discussed later in Hume's essay, and also to identify the decision with the joint verdict of true judges. As a result, there are two other formulations of the problem: whether the standard of taste is the set of general rules of art or the joint verdict of true judges? Or whether the standard of taste is a rule or a decision? The last formulation seems to have led people such as Wieand (1984) to focus on paragraph 6 and sometimes even to suspect that this paragraph provides inconsistent characterisations. However, the identifications of 'rule' and 'decision' in paragraph 6 as 'rule of art' and 'joint verdict' respectively seem to have muddied the water, rather than to have contributed to our understanding of Hume's essay. In the following, it will first be shown that both identifications are not well supported, and indeed should be rejected. This will involve an argument to show that the standard of taste cannot consist in general rules of art, and also a clarification of the relations between 'rule' and 'decision' in paragraph 6. Second, an account will be provided to show how paragraph 6 should be understood given Hume's view that the standard of taste is the joint verdict of true judges; our suggestion is that there is also an actual but fallible standard of taste.

Strictly speaking, both the identification of 'rule' with 'rule of art' and that of 'decision' with 'joint verdict' lack textual evidence, as Hume has never explicitly made these identifications. For those who make the first identification, perhaps they are motivated by the fact that the only kind of rules discussed in Hume's essay is what he calls alternatively 'rules of composition', 'rules of criticism', 'rules of art',

[27] Probably the most central texts on this problem are Wieand (1984) and Shelley (1994).

'rules of beauty'.[28] However, this could hardly be counted as an evidence for the first identification. Instead of merely appealing to the fact that no other kind of rules is mentioned in the essay, some positive reason should be provided. Usually, supporters of this identification argue that the standard of taste consists in a set of rules of art. If this is what Hume thinks, then the identification is strongly supported by the characterisation of a standard of taste as a rule in paragraph 6. Therefore, we should determine whether it is the case that the standard of taste consists in a set of rules of art.

Given the interpretation we have developed so far, we can see why the standard of taste does not consist in a set of rules of art: the two items perform different functions. General rules of art are generalisations of our experience of what we have observed to please or displease generally. They concern what is beautiful. On the other hand, standard of taste concern the operation of taste, which help us to determine when our taste can be trusted in judging beauty. The very concept of rules of art itself does not impose any restriction on who can form such generalisations. Indeed, both true judges and critics with defective taste can form rules of art on the basis of their experience. We have no reason to suppose that those with defective taste will have completely chaotic artistic experience. Insofar as there can be a certain degree of regularity in their experience, it is sufficient for their imagination to form some general rules. With these general rules implicitly or explicitly in mind, they are then able to identify the possible causes of their pleasure or displeasure, just as true judges do.

If we compare the two sets of rules of art, that of the true judges and that of those inferior critics, we need some standard to decide which set is better. However, this standard cannot itself be another set of rules of art, because we would then be required to find some further standard to establish its authenticity. Hume's proposal is that we should judge these set of rules of art by judging the taste of the respective groups of critics, and only the sets of rules of art formed by true judges will be established. Some general rules concerning the operation of taste which correspond to the five traits of true judges have been discussed in Chapter 10, and in Chapter 11 we have seen in what sense the joint verdict of true judges is both the true standard

[28] Wieand is right in saying that they are actually the same, but are only referred by different labels depending on the purpose of their employment (Wieand 1984, p. 131). Following him, the expression 'rules of art' will be used throughout our discussion.

of taste and of beauty. For the problem in hand now, it is sufficient to have acknowledged the different roles performed by the standard of taste and rules of art.

It has seldom been noticed that beauty and taste require different kinds of judgements. This confusion of the two kinds of judgement might explain the worry concerning the fallibility of particular rules of art. Hume explicitly holds that if the prediction drawn from a rule of art disagrees with the actual sentiment felt by critics with sound taste, then the rule should be revised or abandoned. Together with the view that the standard of taste is a set of rules of art by which various sentiments are confirmed or condemned, it is not clear whether sentiment or rules of art should be taken as more authoritative. Even if we grant that, for true judges, there is no discrepancy between the sentiment felt and the prediction drawn from rules of art, there is still a difficulty. Unless a critic has been established as a true judge, she would have no idea whether she should trust her sentiment or the prediction of some rules of art she holds. It has to be explained how a certain set of rules of art could be established as correct, from which a standard of taste can be derived. One possibility is to argue that only those provided by true judges should be accepted; but we have seen in Chapter 10 that we cannot determine whether a critic is a true judge, and even if we put aside this problem, without distinguishing the different task of judging beauty and judging taste, this view might then be trapped in a circle by saying that true judges are those who judge according to the correct rules of art, or that the five traits of true judges are what make them judge according to the correct rules of art.

In contrast, our interpretation, which does not take rules of art as constituting the standard of taste, does not suffer from the same difficulty. According to our interpretation, judgements of beauty are not made with any reference to rules of art; rather, we ensure that the operation of our taste conforms to the standard of taste, and then we judge the beauty of an artwork according to our sentiment. The authority of sentiment as the ultimate standard of beauty is preserved. We do not need to be worried by any conflict between particular rules of art and our sentiment, as those rules do not constitute any standard by which sentiment are judged. The use of rules of art is just to help us identify the true cause of our sentiment. When correctly formed, they connect our private sentiment to its cause which is publicly accessible. With these rules, we are able to discuss the beauty or deformity of artworks, so that we could convince our opponents or detect pretenders.

With these considerations, it seems we have a strong reason to reject the view that the standard of taste consists in a set of rules of art. We can now move on to the second identification, that is, the identification of 'decision' in paragraph 6 with 'joint verdict'. In order to reject this identification, we have to clarify the relation between 'rule' and 'decision' in paragraph 6. As suggested by Wieand, this relation might be interpreted in two ways: first, the standard of taste is a rule by which sentiments may be reconciled, or in cases where the sentiments are not reconciled, this rule may at least afford a decision which confirms and condemns the various sentiment; or second, the standard is either a rule or a decision (Wieand 1984, p. 130).

Wieand rejects the first interpretation because he thinks that it wrongly 'marks off reconciliation from the confirming and condemning of sentiments' (*ibid.*). If he has understood it correctly, then we should agree with him, but it is not clear why this interpretation should be understood in this way. It could be consistently understood as saying that the rule always affords a decision which confirms and condemns various sentiments, while sometimes something extra also happens, that is, the reconciliation of sentiments. Understood in this way, the reconciliation is not marked off from, but rather based on the confirmation and condemnation of various sentiments. This is a much more natural way to understand the word 'reconciliation'.

On the other hand, Wieand thinks that the second interpretation implies that Hume might mean that 'a reconciliation *just is* a confirmation or condemnation' (*ibid*, p. 131). It is not clear why this follows; but if he is right, then this should be counted as a *reductio* of this interpretation, as this is not an acceptable understanding of 'reconciliation'. The second interpretation could be rejected on another ground. Assume for the sake of argument that this is the right interpretation, and consider the case in which the standard of taste is not a rule, but is a decision. Since the text tells us that the decision is afforded by something, so we should ask in this case what affords this decision which is also the standard of taste. It is difficult to answer this question, but for our purpose, we do not need to give a definite answer. For those who identify 'decision' with 'joint verdict', they could not answer that the decision is afforded by the joint verdict. Would it be afforded by some rules of art? No, because this would just be saying that there are some rules of art which afforded the standard as decision but themselves are not the standard. This should be rejected because if

we ask here what could justify those rules of art to be something which could afford a standard of taste as decision, which is in turn identified as the joint verdict of true judges, this position will then appear to be claiming that the ideal and infallible verdict could be afforded by something fallible. This is a highly suspicious position and hence we should reject the identification of ‘decision’ with ‘joint verdict’ if the second interpretation were accepted.

As we have rejected the first interpretation as understood by Wieand, the only alternative interpretation we have in hand is the revised version of the first interpretation suggested above, that is, that the standard as a rule always affords a decision which confirms and condemns various sentiments, while sometimes, reconciliation of sentiments might be achieved in addition. We might accept for the sake of argument the identification of ‘decision’ with ‘joint verdict’, and see what would follow. This interpretation says that the decision is afforded by a rule, so what is this rule? Again, this cannot be the joint verdict, as it should not be able to afford itself. We have also rejected the view that the standard of taste consists of rules of art. It seems there are only two possibilities remaining: the general rules concerning the operation of taste in terms of the five traits, or an actual standard of taste, which is the verdict of the best judge in a discussion.

With regard to the first possibility, one might suggest that such general rules allow us to determine who the true judges are, and ‘afford’ their joint verdict. The problem of this suggestion is that neither our ideas of the five traits as perfections nor our comparative ideas of them are marks by which true judges or better judges are known. This has been shown in Chapter 10. We know who performs better on these five aspects only after we have already judged who has better taste; but if we have already know whose taste is better, even if we assume that we could then find the true judges by discussing with all critics in the world, we do not need those general rules to know the joint verdict. It does not make sense to say that they afford the joint verdict.

As for the second possibility, it would mean that the joint verdict of true judges could be afforded by a fallible verdict of a less than perfect judge. Even if we allow that the infallible verdict can be somehow drawn from a fallible verdict, this would not fit with the concessive tone of the ‘at least’ in paragraph 6.

As it seems the identification of ‘decision’ with ‘joint verdict’ renders paragraph 6 problematic under this interpretation and the second interpretation provided by Wieand, together with our rejection of his first interpretation as understood by him, we might conclude that unless there is some other interpretation of paragraph 6, the identification of ‘decision’ with ‘joint verdict’ should be rejected if paragraph 6 can be understood without this identification.

We can now move on to the next step, that is, our account of how paragraph 6 should be understood. The revised interpretation provided above—that the standard as a rule always affords a decision which confirms and condemns various sentiments, while sometimes, reconciliation of sentiments might be achieved in addition—will be adopted. What we need to do is to add more detail to it in order to fully understand it. The proposal is that, the word ‘rule’ here means what we call ‘a ruling’ nowadays. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as ‘[a]n order made by a judge or court with reference to a particular case only’ (Definition 4.a, ‘rule, n.1’). This meaning is rarely used nowadays outside legal contexts, but it was used more often in Hume’s age. It should not be surprising that Hume might use it in this way, given that he studied law from 1726 to 1729. Moreover, in *The Life of David Hume*, the author, E. C. Mossner, tells us that ‘[i]n the end, Hume’s legal knowledge, both theoretical and practical, was not inconsiderable. … In short, David Hume was fully qualified to become an advocate’ (Mossner 1980, p. 55).

In paragraph 6, Hume extends the meaning of ‘rule’ from legal context to the realm of beauty, and means by it a judgement of beauty made with reference to a particular case only. Understood in this way, a ‘rule’ is just the joint verdict of true judges when we talk about the true standard of taste, or a verdict made by the critic whose taste is the best in a discussion when we talk about an actual but fallible standard. In either way, a rule affords us a decision which confirms those sentiments which agree with it, and condemns those which disagree with it. Here, the word ‘decision’ does not have any special meaning—it just means a decision. Sometimes, but not always, those critics whose sentiment is condemned are convinced by those whose sentiment is confirmed, so that the former view the artwork in a different way, and come to share the latter’s sentiment. Various sentiments are thus reconciled in virtue of the confirmation and condemnation of sentiments. However, there are bad critics who refuse to listen to others’ views and stick firmly to their own judgements.

In such cases, we might still confirm and condemn different sentiments, but they are not reconciled.

Conclusion

We have gone through a long journey in developing our interpretation of Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste'. I should end by recapitulating some key features of this interpretation.

We started with an overview of some key feature of Hume's philosophy in Part I. In Chapter 1 we highlighted his experimental method. This method is supported by his view on the limit of experience. We introduced in Chapter 2 the basic categories of items within this limit. Such items are the materials on which human mind operates. Two kinds of mental operations were discussed afterward: the formation and application of general rules in Chapter 3, and sympathy in Chapter 4. Lastly, this part ended with an attempt in Chapter 5 to clarify the distinction between two principal parts of human nature: reason and the passions.

Part II narrowed down our focus on Hume's aesthetic thought. Chapter 6 surveyed a few distinctions between different senses of 'beauty', among which the distinction between sentiment-view and the quality-view is the central one. Chapter 7 tried to explain what judgements of beauty are, but failed to address the question how critics identify the true cause of their sentiment of beauty. In the meantime, we brought forth the importance of judgements of taste, understood as judgements which concern the soundness of the operation of taste, rather than those which are made in virtue of taste, such as judgements of beauty and moral judgements.

Part III is the place where we started the construction of our interpretation of 'Of the Standard of Taste'. A summary of the essay is given in Chapter 8. Relatively large amount of effort was spent on the earlier part of the essay in order to search for Hume's aim in writing it: to supply a philosophical analysis of the commonsensical view that 'the taste of all individuals is not on an equal footing' and can be evaluated. This finding illuminated the structure of the whole essay, and facilitated our succeeding discussion. Part 9 is an attempt to unveil the nature of art criticism in light of Hume's thought. It showed that, contrary to the common reading of the essay, we can evaluate different judgements of beauty before we know which critic is better. It also involved a digression on the role of general rules of art, which showed that their main role is to help critics in identifying the possible causes of their sentiment

of beauty. We found that it is also one of the functions of taste to single out the true cause among the possible causes.

As we moved on to Chapter 10, we turned to Hume's idea of true judges and their five traits. We demonstrated the seemingly devastating impossibility of knowing such a preferable character. The true standard of taste and beauty which is identified by Hume as the joint verdict of true judges is thus shown to be useless. However, in Chapter 11, we introduced Hume's idea of an imaginary standard. We argued that the true standard of taste is indeed an imaginary standard by giving a genesis of the idea of it. This discovery showed that although the true standard of taste is useless, this does not prevent Hume from achieving his aim in the essay.

The first half of Chapter 12 clarified Hume's freedom-from-prejudice requirement; while the second half resolve the apparent tension between this requirement and the two blameless sources of variation. A better understanding of how sympathy works in our judgements of beauty was thus acquired, and further enhanced by our solution for the problem of moral prejudice presented in Chapter 13. This solution relies heavily on the difference between natural relations and philosophical relations provided in Chapter 2.

Finally, in Chapter 14, we responded to four controversies concerning Hume's essay. We discussed in turn Levinson's 'Real Problem', the charge of circularity, the question whether true judges are real or ideal, and the suggestion of Hume's gives two standards of taste. The responses provided to these four controversies are grounded firmly in our interpretation, which is significantly based on resources from Hume's major philosophical works. The success of these responses will add plausibility to our interpretation; or, at least, it will show the advantage of all similar interpretative strategies which integrate 'Of the Standard of Taste' with Hume's system.

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