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Author(s): Theodore A. Gracyk

Source: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), pp. 169-182

Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/431164>

Accessed: 12/05/2010 16:40

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Rethinking Hume's Standard of Taste

David Hume's aesthetic theory arises from assumptions which are fairly typical of eighteenth-century British aesthetics, focusing on taste as human receptivity to beauty and regarding it as the central issue of the philosophical field he called "criticism."¹ From his earliest discussion in Book II of the *Treatise* (1739) to the mature masterpiece "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), Hume consistently grounds taste in sentiment: "Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt, more properly than perceived."² At the same time, Hume consistently worries that this cornerstone is a stumbling block for the objectivity of standards of taste.

Hume never retracts his assumption that recognition of beauty is essentially dependent on sentiment.³ The essay on taste is his *only* direct defense of an aesthetic standard by which we can "confirm" one sentiment and "condemn" another, yet "by itself ... [this essay] is unsatisfactory as a refutation of aesthetic scepticism."⁴ Even if some tastes are better than others in the sense of being more accurate, does anyone think that Hume's essay shows that there is merit in cultivating good taste? But if the prevailing consensus is that Hume fails, perhaps we should rethink his goals and strategy. What does Hume explicitly tell us about his attempt to avoid the sceptical consequences of holding that every sentiment is a nonreferential passion?⁵

My interpretation is driven by a passage in the essay on taste where Hume describes his task as having two parts: "It is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon 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."⁶ Hume distinguishes two problems in defending a standard of taste. First, he must lay out the conditions of taste. However, the superiority of some tastes over others is not secured by an analysis of what taste is. So the second task is to show that differences in taste support a preference for some "above others." Yet Hume's actual argument on the second score is found in other, earlier essays.

I begin by sketching the sceptical challenge as Hume sees it. It seems that Hume never commits himself to all of the premises of the sceptical position; in particular, it is questionable whether he embraces an equation of beauty and sentiment. Aspects of this discussion suggest that Hume has a dispositional rather than a first-person analysis of judgments of taste, laying the foundation for his position that all taste is not upon an "equal footing." In principle if not in practice, Hume needs discoverable principles of taste which sort critics according to levels of delicacy. On this subject I take exception to Mary Mothersill's recent analysis.⁷ When we examine the essay on taste in light of all the writings that lead up to it, we find that Hume's emphasis on delicacy of taste and "universal sentiment" supports a preference for certain tastes, but only within the context of Hume's conception of a desirable life.⁸ While I offer a reading of Hume, I make no attempt to defend the position that I believe he held.

1

Hume specifies the difficulty of his mature position most fully in the essay "The Sceptic" (1742). This early essay sympathetically formulates and defends the sceptical position which he subsequently rejects; namely, that "species

of philosophy, which ... represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste."⁹ Because this essay provides a longer exposition than does "Of the Standard of Taste," it is the proper starting point for any interpretation of that essay.

To be fair to Hume, his presentation of the sceptic's position in these two essays does not represent his own views. He says that "The Sceptic" and three related essays aim "not so much to explain accurately the sentiments of the ancient sects of philosophy, as to deliver the sentiments of sect, that naturally form themselves in the world."¹⁰ Since Hume thus distances himself from the arguments of these four essays, the corresponding sceptical passages in "Standard of Taste" probably do not represent Hume's personal beliefs, either. Hume's alleged aesthetic scepticism may be no more than his summary of the consequences of Hutcheson's theory, put forth in order to criticize and subsequently modify it.

Whenever he speaks as a sceptic about taste, Hume *reduces* beauty to sentiment: beauty is "only the effect, which [the] figure produces upon a mind." A geographically informed scholar, studying Virgil's *Aeneid*, might know "everything 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." Beautiful objects "have absolutely no worth or value in themselves."¹¹ In this essay, Hume says that their value is "merely" instrumental, as causes of pleasing sentiments. And since pleasurable sentiments are all equal except for intensity and duration, the frivolous pleasure a little girl takes in a new dress is no better than the experienced rhetorician's pleasure in an eloquent, successful speech.¹² Hume thus anticipates Bentham's celebrated claim that the pleasures of pushpin are inherently no better than those of great poetry, suggesting the unpleasant conclusion that there is no standard separating good taste from bad, and no benefit to cultivating good taste.

Fifteen years later, Hume's essay on taste succinctly repeats this line of sceptical argument, completing it with the explicit conclusion that "all sentiment is right." Once again, Hume initially reduces beauty to sentiment. In his words, "beauty is no quality in things them-

selves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty."¹³ Or, as the *Treatise* proposes, the relevant sentiment is a reflective impression and cannot represent anything beyond itself.¹⁴ Because sentiments are private responses which represent nothing, the essay on taste reaffirms that judgments of taste can be neither true nor false. So "to seek the *real* beauty, or *real* deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter."¹⁵ Despite this sceptical introduction and the recurrence of his earlier assumptions, the essay on taste abruptly reverses direction in the eighth paragraph. Hume now tries to separate his consistent linking of taste, beauty, and sentiment from the sceptical conclusion that all tastes are equal.

Hume says that the sceptical doctrine, "a species of philosophy" which "seems to have attained the sanction of common sense," is opposed by common sense. The point seems to be that common sense cannot settle the issue. But common sense is itself opposed by philosophical reflection, and the latter is the main support for thinking that aesthetic qualities "are not really in the objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment of that mind which blames or praises."¹⁶ When we follow common sense or actual practice, such qualities are attributed to objects, as are colors.¹⁷ Yet many other predicates involving human passions are not attributed to objects; we predicate love and hatred of ourselves, not objects. In characteristic fashion, Hume turns to the criteria of force and vivacity for an explanation. He suggests that the sentiments of taste are attributed to external objects because "the sentiment is not so turbulent and violent as to distinguish itself, in an evident manner, from the perception of the object."¹⁸ The *Treatise* concurs, describing aesthetic responses as "calm" passions which are (usually) almost imperceptible.¹⁹ In other words, aesthetic responses are similar to color impressions insofar as both are philosophically understood to be mere *effects* of an object upon a perceiver. But the unphilosophical perceiver is not aware of them as effects and regards them as properties of the object.

Hume thus regards theory rather than practice or common sense as generating both the problem and any solution.²⁰ Philosophical ar-

guments challenging the judgments of ordinary life, based on the distinction between ideas of primary and secondary qualities, undermine any talk of external objects. In such conflicts, Hume's view of sentiment as arising from our unchanging human nature leads him to side with "common sense" and ordinary usage.²¹ The sceptical view is then dismissed as of "little consequence."²² So while Hume admits to an intellectual puzzle, he is always sympathetic to the practice of regarding some tastes as superior to others. Indeed, he welcomes such problems as an invitation to develop "new Principles of Philosophy," consistent with our practice and which advance beyond our previous "blind & ignorant Assent."²³ But to pull off a defense of a standard of taste, Hume modifies the emphasis of contemporary "inner sense" analyses of beauty. Where the sceptical argument *equates* beauty and sentiment, the mature position emphasizes a dispositional analysis of beauty as essentially relational. The question then becomes whether this shift supports Hume's confidence in a standard of taste.

II

Despite the many passages in which Hume equates beauty with the sentiments of the person who experiences a work of art, he is not consistent about the doctrine that aesthetic predicates only refer to responses to the object. To gain perspective on Hume's options, it should be recalled that he identifies his primary inspiration in ethics and aesthetics as Francis Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).²⁴ Hutcheson sets the stage with a Lockean account of perception, argues that taste is an inner sense, and then proposes that the term "beauty" refers to the perceiver's pleasurable sensation. As he puts it, "the word beauty is taken for *the idea raised in us*," caused by some "real quality in the objects" which ordinarily excites these "pleasant ideas."²⁵ Beauty is itself an idea of a secondary quality, *caused* by various real properties of the object judged to be beautiful.

According to Peter Kivy, Hutcheson regards judgments of taste as first-person reports of an object's disposition to cause the specific sort of pleasurable response.²⁶ "X is beautiful" indicates the speaker's disposition to experience

pleasure when viewing X. Kivy adopts the first-person analysis "since, unlike Hume, [Hutcheson] does not suggest that beauty be defined in terms of a consensus of feelings."²⁷ Given Hume's debt to Hutcheson, it is then tempting to look for a first-person analysis in Hume, as well.

But Hutcheson displays some ambivalence about the correct analysis of judgments of taste: do they convey the speaker's disposition, or that of any normal observer? The definition of beauty as the idea raised in "us" can also be taken to mean that the pleasure occurs in anyone who observes X, not just in the speaker. Hutcheson believes that it is possible to determine the qualities of objects which naturally cause the pleasure (e.g., uniformity amidst variety in cases of original or absolute beauty). He also proposes that the term "beauty" denotes in the same way as "other names of sensible ideas" (e.g., cold, hot, bitter).²⁸ But are these used to report the speaker's disposition? Saying that something is "sweet" or "hot" implies that it regularly generates the appropriate sensation under normal conditions. So Hutcheson may think that judgments about beauty, like these other ideas, convey more than the speaker's own disposition: there is an expectation that others are similarly disposed. (We will see that Hume makes the same comparison in order to challenge a first-person analysis.) Hutcheson only appeals to subjective associations of ideas to explain *differences* of taste. As Kivy notes of this theory, when tastes differ, "it is not about the presence or absence of beauty that they differ."²⁹ Finally, there is the defense of a common "sense of beauty and harmony" on the grounds that, were there none, "houses, gardens, dress, equipage might have been *recommended* to us as convenient, fruitful, warm, easy, but never as *beautiful*."³⁰ A recommendation of a house for its beauty is hardly a report of the speaker's disposition. A recommendation assumes that the audience is similarly disposed.

Let us take stock. It is doubtful that Hutcheson regards "X is beautiful" as restricted to the speaker's disposition to respond positively to X. First-person or not, a judgment of taste reports that an object *causes* a response, and it is this idea which Hume emphasizes in his non-sceptical moods. However, Hume rejects Hutcheson's assumption of a Lockean doctrine of ideas of primary and secondary qualities.³¹ Yet

whenever he presents sceptical arguments, Hume also ignores Hutcheson's embryonic dispositional account and reverts to a Lockean analysis. In such arguments, Hume stresses that beauty is "only the effect" and equates beauty and private response, as when the *Treatise* proposes that "pleasure and pain ... are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity, but constitute their very essence."³² Here, of course, we have the basis of the position which he aims to refute in the essay on taste.

Intentionally or not, the essay on taste challenges scepticism by developing Hutcheson's scattered suggestions of the dispositional analysis. Once again, the underlying idea is already in place in the *Treatise*. In the same paragraph that identifies sentiment as the "essence" of beauty, Hume also defines beauty as the "order and construction of parts ... fitted to give pleasure and satisfaction of the soul." He contends that "beauty is nothing but a form, which produces pleasure" and that "the power of producing pain and pleasure make ... the essence of beauty and deformity."³³ So Hume contradicts himself; the essence of beauty is identified with the sentiment and with its cause. He reconciles the two proposals with the suggestion that "beauty like wit, cannot be defin'd, but is discern'd only by a taste or sensation." Hume evidently means that objects betray no common cause of the sentiment, thus rejecting Hutcheson's proposal of uniformity amidst variety as a "definition." Yet he wants to emphasize that the impression grounding the judgment of taste is merely a subjective response, not a property of the object. So Hume opts for a more complex account, in which "beauty" denotes both the sentiment and the object's "power" to produce it. This power is to be understood as indirect, because the sentiment is an impression of reflection arising from sensations or ideas concerning them, and not from the object immediately. A specific sentiment is the sine qua non of beauty, but appropriate predications are restricted to whatever regularly causes this response: "some particular forms or qualities, from the structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease." And this neatly parallels Hume's moral theory, which "defines virtue to be whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the *pleasing sentiment* of approbation."³⁴

Prior to the essay on taste, Hume places little or no emphasis on the implications of this dispositional analysis. One significant exception is a footnote in "The Sceptic":

"Tastes and colors, and all other sensible qualities, lie not in the bodies, but merely in the senses." The case is the same with beauty and deformity, virtue and vice. This doctrine, however, takes off no more from the reality of the latter qualities, than from that of the former; nor need it give any umbrage ... Tho' colors were allowed to lie only in the eye, would dyers or painters ever be less regarded or esteemed? There is sufficient uniformity in the senses and feelings of mankind, to make all these qualities the objects of art and reasoning, and to have the greatest influence on life and manners. And as 'tis certain, that the discovery above-mentioned in natural philosophy, makes no alteration on action and conduct; why should a like discovery in moral philosophy make any alteration?³⁵

Philosophical doctrine aside, practical life recognizes a "real" sweet and bitter, as well as "real" beauty and deformity. Terms like "sweet" and "bitter" do double duty in ordinary usage, conveying both the private sensations themselves and the *dispositional qualities* of objects to cause such sensations with "sufficient uniformity" to be predictable. Only philosophers deny that honey is "really" sweet and lemons "really" sour; there is a perfectly understandable meaning of "real" in which honey is really sweet, and lemons really sour. Reflective impressions, including the calm passions, are neither more nor less real than impressions of sensation. And, likewise, objects are or aren't naturally fitted to produce these tell-tale sentiments. To this extent, judgments of taste are no more problematic than color attributions.

Given both his sympathies for ordinary usage and his dispositional analysis in the *Treatise* and footnote of "The Sceptic," Mothersill is somewhat disingenuous to say that "everything that Hume wrote before 1757 would lead one to think that he would simply discount" the absurdity of ranking Ogilby with Milton.³⁶ Granted, his earlier writings fail to exploit the implications of the analysis. But when "Of the Standard of Taste" appeals to "general rules of art founded on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature," it

hardly constitutes a repudiation of those earlier writings.

The essay on taste analyzes “beauty” as the “particular forms or qualities” of objects “which are naturally fitted to excite [these] agreeable sentiments.” So aesthetic predicates direct us to qualities of the object. Judgments of taste predicate a causal relation between the object and some group of observers: sentiment “only marks a certain conformity or relation” between subject and object.³⁷ (Hume thus simplifies things for the sake of argument, since he regards the sentiment as an impression of reflection rather than an impression of sensation.) Similar remarks appear in the *Treatise*: “the object which is denominated beautiful, pleases only by its tendency to produce a certain effect,” and “any object [which] has a tendency to produce pleasure in its possessor ... is always regarded as beautiful.”³⁸ When someone says “X is beautiful,” one says that something in that object tends to please, even if one does not know which properties cause the sentiment.³⁹ Statements about beauty predicate a causal relation between the object and human observers, denoting *any* properties of an object which regularly cause the agreeable calm passion. (But they are not *merely* predications, for then they would have a truth value.)⁴⁰ Most significantly, “X is beautiful” is neither a simple expression of pleasure nor a first-person report: such judgments express confidence that one’s pleasure is grounded in some objective feature of the object.⁴¹

If “X is beautiful” means that an object is naturally fitted to cause a pleasurable response, there must be discoverable empirical regularities underlying “general principles of approbation and blame.” Hume often insists that where we do not know general principles linking two species of things, we cannot know that one thing causes another in a specific case. So if judgments of taste refer to dispositional qualities, they presuppose discoverable empirical regularities. Like the principles that bread nourishes and that trees flourish in May and June, rules of taste require “general observations” known only by experience.⁴²

Mothersill thinks that Hume “waffles” on whether these rules, once discovered, are themselves the standard of taste, or whether the standard is actually the paradigm cases of

beauty recognized over time by many peoples.⁴³ But when Hume observes that “the same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome ... is still admired at Paris and at London,” it is far from clear that Homer’s epics are to serve as a standard. The context suggests that Homer’s appeal across centuries and to different cultures is our best evidence of a genuine causal relationship.⁴⁴ Hume elsewhere warns that some causes “operate on a few only,” who are particularly “delicate and refined,” and in such cases it is “not possible” to actually formulate causal principles with accuracy. It is difficult to distinguish “between chance and causes.”⁴⁵ He thinks that superior beauties appeal to more delicate sensibilities, yet these are precisely the cases where genuine causal relationships are least trustworthy. Paradigm cases of beauty are identified by their appeal to a select group over *differences* of time and place, demonstrating that a causal principle is present, albeit “secret and unknown.” So the predication of beauty cannot be dismissed as unreasonable, or due to “chance,” even if few are pleased by the object at any given time or place.

Mothersill also interprets Hume as inclined towards the position that judgments of taste can be true and false.⁴⁶ Since Hume regards beauty and colors as equally real and since judgments about colors bear truth-values, principles of taste would seem capable of imparting truth-value to attributions of beauty. However, Hume holds that the essential contribution of sentiment renders them as neither true nor false.⁴⁷ Beauty cannot be discovered *simply* as a “matter of fact and existence.” Here lies the crucial disanalogy between predications of colors and of beauty. There is nothing more to an apple’s being both red and sweet than its regularly producing the relevant impressions of sensation; the relevant effects do not include sentiment. But “X is beautiful” is both a predication of causal regularity and an *endorsement* of that object and of some action or behavior directed towards it.⁴⁸ In any endorsement, “the mind is not content with merely surveying its objects, as they stand in themselves.”⁴⁹ Rules of taste do not themselves license such an endorsement, so Mothersill is correct to think that the rules, by themselves, are not supposed to be Hume’s standard. But it is highly misleading to conclude that his theory “does not require that

there be principles, but rather ... precludes them."⁵⁰

At this point, Hume's analysis allows dismissal of some judgments of taste as "unreasonable" even if he would not regard them as false. Suppose someone judges a poem to be beautiful, based only on a positive response on an initial reading. But suppose this response is idiosyncratic; neither that individual nor anyone else regularly responds to it with approval. Since asserting its beauty presupposes that the poem *regularly* produces the sentiment, but it does not, the judgment involves "a false supposition" and can be regarded as unreasonable in the same manner as some moral judgments.⁵¹ However, this basis for challenging a judgment of taste is not the sort that motivates the essay on taste. There, Hume begins with the example of someone who regards Ogilby and Milton as equals. He is concerned with cases where two artists both produce work that regularly pleases, but their relative merits are misjudged.

Taking stock, we see that without principles of taste, "X is beautiful" cannot be distinguished from "X pleases me." Without uniformity of cause and effect between specific features of objects and resulting pleasures and pains in apprehending the object, the predicates "beauty" and "deformity" would be first-person reports or expressions of our sentiments. So Hume's theory requires principles, even if we never consciously formulate them. Without them it would be pointless to endorse one artwork over another, or to recommend a work to someone else. Why should I tell you that a painting is displeasing or that a play is flawed, unless I believe that you are capable of responding as I do? However, the principles are merely empirical regularities, so they are insufficient as a standard of taste distinguishing between superior and inferior beauties. To avoid aesthetic scepticism, something more is needed to separate better from worse tastes. Let us focus, then, on Hume's purpose in discussing the celebrated key with the leather thong: empirical regularities support our confidence that a select few have a special delicacy of taste.

III

The story of Sancho's kinsmen is introduced to explain the concept of *delicacy*, suggesting that

Hume regards delicacy as the primary quality of good critics:

though the hoghead had never been emptied, the taste of the one was still equally delicate, and that of the other equally dull and languid: But it would have been more difficult to have *proved* the superiority of the former. ... In like manner ... the different degrees of taste would still have subsisted, and the judgment of one man been preferable to that of another; but it would not have been so easy to silence the bad critic.⁵²

Experiencing displeasure at the hint of leather and iron in the wine, the kinsmen demonstrated their superior delicacy of taste. In other words, they demonstrated a verifiable ability to "perceive every ingredient in the composition," however minute or masked by other qualities, and responded to each with "a sensible delight or uneasiness." Without principles of taste, we cannot tell whether sentiment is directed towards a quality of the object and so cannot "silence the bad critic." The difficulty with beauty is in *discovering* these regularities, because reflective impressions, including sentiments, are considerably less predictable than sense impressions such as colors. Where we can discover them, these principles provide a distinction between normal and abnormal tastes, and between more and less acute tastes; laws of taste codify patterns of taste. Hume's strategy requires that he now prove that a rare, "delicate" taste is the most valuable.

Those who adopt a more conventional reading of Hume may think he aims to show that good taste differs from bad by virtue of its greater accuracy, and then develops a model for improving one's taste. But Hume does not present the issue as a simple question of whose taste is more accurate. He clearly frames the problem as one where the failure of taste involves a preference for something else, such as for Ogilby over Milton. The sticking point is that he admits that there is pleasure to be had in inferior artists. "Ariosto pleases" despite numerous faults, and "did our pleasure really arise from those parts of his poem, which we denominate faults, this would be no objection" because "if they are found to please, they cannot be faults."⁵³ French Roman Catholics are routinely pleased by plays containing reprehens-

sible bigotry which would offend anyone else, just as entire nations have corrupted or limited taste, enjoying one style of music or theater and detesting another.⁵⁴ All of these pleasures are, as sentiments, equal. As sentiments, all are “right,” and all can be predicted to occur with regularity in their respective audiences. Hume even allows that, technically, these objects possess beauty.

Hume’s difficulty is defending a distinction between *inferior* and *superior* beauties: “The coarsest daubing ... [and] most vulgar ballads are not entirely destitute of harmony or nature; and none but a person, familiarized to *superior beauties*, would pronounce their numbers harsh, or narration uninteresting.”⁵⁵ Yet the proposal that there are degrees of beauty does not follow directly from the difference between good and bad critics. Even if those who can only enjoy obvious, inferior beauties are “pretended” and “bad” critics, they are only “bad” in the sense of being less accurate. In turn, accuracy can only be established by identifying empirical regularities between pleasures and displeasures and a critic’s observation of the more subtle or minute qualities of the work. While principles may thus establish who possesses keener faculties, Hume has not yet established that a more delicate taste has “preference” over a “dull and languid” taste. Nor has he shown that any beauties are “superior,” much less subtle ones.

We have arrived, then, at the customary sticking point of any analysis of Hume’s defense of a standard of taste. Hume’s move from predictable differences in taste to levels of delicacy and then to superiority of some taste (a normative conclusion) seems either to beg the question or to generate a potentially vicious regress.⁵⁶ What justifies the conclusion that someone with delicate, accurate taste thereby knows superior beauties, or that such taste has preference over all others?

When Hume describes his ideal critic, he describes someone with a good deal of education, leisure, and wealth; in short, a member of the upper classes.⁵⁷ James Noxon consequently interprets Hume’s standard of taste as whatever “a succession of connoisseurs has chosen to preserve.”⁵⁸ But what, in Hume’s argument, shows that upper class taste is *better*, that the pleasures of a narrow segment of society are in any way superior? Nor is the problem resolved

by the subtext identified by Mothersill, that “standards of taste are set by particular works of great and lasting beauty.”⁵⁹ Hume acknowledges that these “model” beauties are important, but specifically as “the best way of ascertaining” who counts as the connoisseur with delicacy of taste.⁶⁰ But again, how does he know that these “established” beauties are the superior ones? The problem is that Hume allows that all pleasure is equally “right.” If he defines good critics in terms of a capacity to enjoy specific works, he reintroduces the evaluative issue all over again. As long as beauty is analyzed in terms of a regular tendency to produce pleasure, Hume seems unable to justify our practice of ranking Milton above Ogilby or to regard a taste for one as superior to a taste for the other.

Worse yet, Hume is less than confident that established masterpieces lead us to the good critics, much less that we know who the good critics are:

But where are such critics to be found? By what marks are they to be known? ... These questions are embarrassing; and seem to throw us back into the same uncertainty, for which, during the course of this essay, we have endeavoured to extricate ourselves.⁶¹

Hume does not answer by directing us to classic works that have stood the test of time. Furthermore, Hume’s doubts are voiced immediately after his well-known summary of good critics as those of “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice.” Peter Kivy argues that three of these characteristics (delicacy, lack of prejudice, and good sense) are not limited to aesthetic judgment, and so are empirically identifiable qualities of critics apart from their judgments about specific cases of beauty. Hence, “Hume need not, with respect to these qualities, ultimately define good critics in terms of good art.”⁶² While this breaks the circle, Kivy worries that a regress is generated. Instead of evaluating objects for their beauty, we must independently evaluate persons for “good” sense. Without an independent standard of good sense, Hume’s theory falls back into “the same uncertainty.”

However, it seems that Hume’s lengthy discussion of the five characteristics of good

critics is only a tangent to his argument. While this is a bold claim, the text substantiates it as long as one does not confuse his description of the good critic with his case that such critics are best. The discussion of the five characteristics is framed, *at both beginning and end*, with the proposal that delicacy of taste is of singular import:

a delicate taste of wit or beauty must always be a desirable quality; because it is the source of all the finest and most innocent enjoyments, of which human nature is susceptible. In this decision *the sentiments of all mankind are agreed*. Whenever you can ascertain a delicacy of taste, it is sure to meet with approbation.⁶³

According to these sentences, an appeal to the sentiments of humankind proves that delicate taste (“good” in the sense of more accurate) has preference (“good” in the normative sense). It is this proposal that banishes Hume’s qualms about throwing us “back into the same uncertainty.” There may be some dispute about who has good sense and so on, “But that such a character is valuable and estimable will be agreed in by all mankind.”

More significantly, this is the context in which Hume summarizes his strategy: “It is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon 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.”⁶⁴ Kivy proposes that “universal sentiment” means “opinion” here, but given that this is an opinion of preference and approbation, it must be grounded in reflective judgment or “sentiment” in Hume’s technical sense.

In the space of a few pages, Hume tells us three times that the standard of taste depends on a general agreement of sentiment concerning taste (*not* a general agreement about the *objects* of taste). He even calls this a “true and decisive standard.” Recall that the anti-sceptical goal of the essay is to make “a decision ... confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.” Because there is uniform sentiment that one taste among the diversity of tastes is superior, that taste is indeed superior. Specifically, delicate

taste, or taste pleased and pained by less obvious pleasures, is agreed to be the most desirable.

This strategy is precisely what we should expect if Hume’s aesthetic theory is to parallel his position on “moral taste.” In the second *Enquiry*, for instance, variations in moral approbation give way to genuine moral judgments when we turn away from the sentiment that arises from our particular point of view and adopt a “universal” perspective. My private sentiment then gives way to “*universal sentiments* of censure or approbation, which arise from humanity, or from views of general usefulness and its contrary. Virtue and Vice then become known.”⁶⁵ Even a geographically or temporally “remote” person takes pleasure in the idea of a cheerful, courageous, and benevolent individual, even if the one will never profit from the existence of the other. Mere reflection upon the idea of such a character yields a sympathetic pleasure and thus approbation, due chiefly to the utility for those who interact with such a person. Now, one’s taste is as much a part of one’s character as generosity or courage, so it must be by appeal to universal sentiment about taste itself that one taste will be confirmed and another will be condemned. The masses may not appreciate Milton, but they may take sympathetic pleasure in there being a delicate minority that does so. In the next section I explore Hume’s reasons why this delicate minority is so agreeable to “all mankind.”

At first glance, this move may seem another embarrassing begging of the question. Indeed, Mothersill notes it and brushes it off without exploring its lead.⁶⁶ But if we take it seriously, it leads us to several of Hume’s other essays. Hume has proposed that good taste is possessed by only a minority of critics, while genuine but somehow inferior pleasure is obtained by the majority of persons. His repeated remarks about universal sentiment tell us that a *sentiment* confers value on the sentiments of those critics who deserve to be called “good.” In other words, a more widespread sentiment establishes the pleasures of a “few” as the standard of taste. All sentiment is “right” because no sentiment is false, but when sentiments become the object of sentiment, some are more pleasing than others. After all, Hume hopes to show that we are justified in “confirming” some sentiments and “condemning” others, so that one person’s taste

is "preferable to that of another." This can only occur if we compare tastes; "the value, which all men put upon any particular pleasure, depends on comparison and experience."⁶⁷ Since beauty implies rules of taste, it is possible to identify and to compare regularities of taste, and thus compare the pleasure afforded by Milton or Shakespeare with that of, say, Ogilby.

Hume thus preserves his central assumption, emphasized in both the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*, that every genuine value judgment is essentially dependent on sentiments which arise from our common human nature. In order to regard an enemy as truly vicious and not merely one's personal rival or adversary, one "must choose a point of view, common to him with others ... and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and symphony."⁶⁸ So if we are to have a standard for evaluating pleasures, that standard must involve a comparison of tastes in which sentiment becomes the object of sentiment. And we see that this is precisely what Hume proposes in the essay on taste.

Hume thus avoids the purported but problematic move from good critics to good works of art, or from good works to good critics. Rules of taste are empirical regularities between various features of works and the response of specific audiences; these rules can only be discovered by noting that identifiable features of different works appeal to different audiences (an empirical, non-evaluative distinction). Good critics are then identified by an evaluative judgment grounded in a comparison of these audiences. We might compare the audience for the writings of Eudora Welty with that for Stephen King, or the audience for jazz with that for heavy metal. Each group takes pleasure in its respective objects, but for each pair does one audience elicit general approval more readily than the other? When we compare them, we feel that the audience with more delicate taste is better off than others (the sentiments of "all mankind are agreed" that their response is more desirable). This audience consists of comparatively better critics and the works which furnish their pleasure are therefore better works.

iv

There is no argument in "Of the Standard of Taste" to show that delicacy is really a desir-

able thing. After all, those with less delicate taste enjoyed the hogshead of wine more than Sancho Panza's kinsmen. To complete Hume's argument, we must look to the essays "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" and "Of Refinement in the Arts" ("Of Luxury" in later editions). In these formative essays, Hume provides a model in which aesthetic pleasure can be evaluated in terms of social context. We are furnished with additional details about Hume's conceptions of delicacy and innocent enjoyment, fleshing out the pivotal passages in the essay on taste. It becomes clear that when Hume later claims that some tastes "will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above all others," he assumes that those tastes are preferable only if considered in relation to their effect "both on private and public life."⁶⁹ The regular effects of different tastes allow us to distinguish between vicious, innocent, and virtuous tastes.

Considered apart from any undesirable effects, all pleasure is of value:

No gratification, however sensual, can *of itself* be esteemed vicious. A gratification is only vicious, when it engrosses all a man's expense, and leaves no ability for such acts of duty and generosity as are required by his situation and fortune.⁷⁰

Immediate or obvious pleasures, such as a pleasant meal, are innocent unless they lead to some neglect of duties to oneself or others. "To confine one's expense entirely to such a gratification, without regard to friends or family, is an indication of a heart destitute of humanity or benevolence."⁷¹ So taste, as a pattern of preferences, is vicious and reprehensible when it involves excess and selfishness. More often, taste is disagreeable when it is a symptom of other vices which are present. Unrefined tastes, such as the Tartars' "beastly gluttony" in feasting on their dead horses, are undesirable due to their association with other undesirable character traits.

Hume assumes that aesthetic pleasure is, in itself, always a good thing. This is hardly surprising, since his general doctrine of sympathy holds that our recognition of any pleasurable sentiment in another person should, if considered apart from our own interests, generate a similar sentiment in us. But beyond this, "inno-

cent” pleasures (those which entertain and please with negligible effects on self or society) have a further favorable quality, namely the promotion of positive public consequences.⁷² The “honest industry” required to secure them is preferable to the vicious effects of indolence in society. In short, Hume thinks that anyone who considers the social dimension of taste will disapprove of tastes which are associated with independently vicious behaviors, and will approve of any which are not.

However, distinguishing between innocent and vicious pleasures does not yet suggest that a taste for fine wine is more desirable than a taste for beer, or that Milton’s poetry is better than vulgar ballads. When Hume identifies pleasing effects of poets upon society, he notes art’s tendency to “encrease of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and to contribute to each other’s pleasure and humanity.”⁷³ By generating sociability and mutual sympathy, art is admirable even to those who do not enjoy it, yet this public benefit does not explain why a refined taste is more appealing than a more common one. He likens good taste to a fragile plant; nearly everyone profits from the “coarser” arts, so they have wide appeal and “take root.” But “the arts of luxury, and much more the liberal arts, which depend on a *refined* taste or sentiments, are easily lost; because they are relished by a few only.” As specialized “amusements,” less accessible works are not of any special public benefit.⁷⁴ So Hume must still explain why, among tastes which are not vicious, refined tastes are preferable to a taste for more obvious gratifications. A taste for Milton seems a disadvantage when compared with mainstream taste, which is readily pleased by the common entertainments of the place and age.

To illustrate the superiority of refined taste, Hume shifts discussion from public benefits to private ones. Focusing on one of the chief characteristics of a good critic, delicacy, he identifies personal benefits that cannot be attained by more common tastes.⁷⁵ Of course, it would not help his case to argue that delicacy is good because it is possessed by good critics or required to appreciate a great work of art. And Hume does not. He argues that because the private benefits of delicacy of taste arouse an approving sentiment even in those with com-

mon tastes, critics with delicacy of taste are good critics.⁷⁶

Hume’s case for the appeal of delicate taste occurs in one of his earliest essays. In “Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,” delicate taste is defined independently of any presumption of which critics are “good” ones: it is a “sensitivity to beauty and deformity of every kind.”⁷⁷ Both here and in the essay on taste, delicacy is treated as a matter of degree of sensitivity to pleasing and displeasing effects, so that delicate and indelicate tastes are differentiated quantitatively (“by degrees”). As he says in the second *Enquiry*, “No quality ... is absolutely either blameable or praise-worthy. It is all according to its degree.”⁷⁸ Of two critics, the one who is sensitive to more pleasures and/or displeasures possesses greater delicacy of taste. If one person enjoys Shakespeare’s comedies indiscriminately and another enjoys them while also sensitive to other features overlooked by the first (and is displeased by some of them), the latter has the more delicate taste. These subtle, displeasing features are objective flaws just in case they regularly displease those who notice them. Assessment of delicacy presupposes an empirical comparison of critics, apart from any presumption of whose taste is better. But delicacy is not automatically desirable. Besides the obvious fact that sensitivity to subtle flaws diminishes one’s pleasure, Hume argues that delicacy of passion is detrimental to someone possessing it. So Hume knows that he must offer further reasons whereby “every one will agree with me, that ... delicacy of taste is as much to be desired and cultivated as delicacy of passion is to be lamented.”⁷⁹

The essay on taste concurs. In the very passage where Hume first says that “the sentiments of all mankind” agree that a delicate taste is a more desirable taste, he notes its disadvantages. Delicacy is “on many occasions ... a great inconvenience both to a man himself and to his friends.” Despite its disvalue, “it is the source of all the finest and most innocent enjoyments, of which human nature is susceptible.”⁸⁰ The disadvantages of delicacy are more than compensated by the desirability of the enjoyments. But the essay on taste nowhere explains *why*. Let us turn to the earlier “Of the Delicacy of Taste,” which identifies two private benefits of delicacy of taste.

First, "poetry, eloquence, music, or painting" improve the "temper" of their audience, making our emotions "soft and tender" and producing "an agreeable melancholy."⁸¹ But even if true, this is merely an argument for the fine arts as generally conducive to a desirable character; it does not provide reason to prefer a taste for one artist over any other. But Hume also remarks that the beauties of fine art "draw off the mind from the hurry of business and interest," and this is somewhat more useful. Less accessible works of fine art require greater leisure, study, and abstraction from personal concerns; after all, we saw that Hume recognizes that delicacy of taste will be restricted to those whose leisure and fortune allow for its development. In other words, refinement of taste requires a pattern of life quite different from that required for more common amusements, and the more studious, detached attention demanded by the finer arts is of personal benefit to those few who can achieve it.

Hume's second area of private benefit develops this line of thought. Delicacy of taste "is favourable to love and friendship" to a degree beyond that of other innocent pleasures. The more "obvious" the pleasure, the larger the audience which relishes it.

Anyone, that has competent sense, is sufficient for their entertainment: They talk to him, of their pleasure and affairs, with the same frankness that they would to another; and finding many, who are fit to supply his place, they never feel any vacancy or want in his absence. ... One that has well digested his knowledge of books and men, has little enjoyment but in the company of a few select companions. ... And, his affections being thus confined within a narrow circle, no wonder he carries them further, than if they were more general and undistinguished.⁸²

The more discerning the taste, the fewer who share the same pleasures and interests; the pool of companions thus narrowed, the attachment within this company is stronger, leading to a more "solid friendship" than is likely among those who are satisfied by less specialized entertainment. Oddly enough, the fewer who enjoy Milton at any one time, the better to have a taste for Milton.⁸³ No special bond is created among the millions who enjoy middlebrow art and commercial entertainment; but the chal-

lenge of fine art, when its pleasure requires a complex appraisal of myriad factors, creates a division between its audience and those with less specialized interests. A social division between delicacy of taste and mass taste provides a rare benefit to those few who can achieve a taste for less accessible art. (Presumably, the same benefit does not arise for those whose taste places them at the other extreme. Those with the crudest tastes will, like the Tartars feasting on horse meat, engage in a vicious pleasure relative to other pleasures available in any given time and place. And too much delicacy is undesirable because it will lead to a lack of like-minded companions.)

This argument fleshes out Hume's assertion, in the essay on taste, that delicacy of taste is associated with "the finest and most innocent enjoyments, of which human nature is susceptible." Solid friendship among persons of like circumstance and interests is central to Hume's conception of human happiness as a basic social virtue.⁸⁴ In a free and prosperous society, the fine arts offer an unparalleled opportunity for satisfying our instinctive need for companionship and social intercourse. "And in a view to pleasure, what comparison between the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study ... what comparison, I say, between these and the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and expense?"⁸⁵ Normal human sympathy ensures that those who see the public and private benefits of refined taste for fine art will be moved to approve of it as "good" taste.

Let me summarize the full picture sketched in Hume's writings. Hume says that pleasure is the "essence" of beauty, and pain of deformity, because these sentiments are the real locus of value of objects which are classified as beautiful or ugly. Yet aesthetic predicates denote more than pleasant and unpleasant responses; any *object* which regularly causes pleasure in some viewers is properly regarded as beautiful. This relational interpretation of beauty allows Hume to reject aesthetic scepticism. The extent to which different objects cause pleasure and pain is relative to the delicacy of taste of the audience, where delicacy is understood as an ability to discriminate and thus respond to more properties of the object. But delicacy cannot be established unless there are principles of taste,

namely empirical regularities “founded on experience.” And to the extent that the pleasures are innocent instead of vicious, and refined instead of obvious, our sentiments regularly favor critics whose pleasure requires the greatest refinement of taste. As a term of recommendation, then, “beauty” belongs to objects which regularly appeal to a delicacy of taste. Every pleasure is “of itself” equal, yet some tastes are more desirable than others.⁸⁶

THEODORE A. GRACYK
Philosophy Department
Moorhead State University
Moorhead, Minnesota 56563

1. Hume ranks criticism as an equal of morality among the “sciences” of human nature. See *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960 [1888]), pp. xii, xv-xvi, and *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), Vol. I, p. 13.

2. Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 165 (XII, iii); page references are followed by section references.

3. Compare *Treatise*, pp. 299–300 (II, i, VIII); first *Enquiry*, p. 165 (XII, iii); and Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” *Philosophical Works*, eds. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose (Darmstadt, 1964; rpt. of London, 1882), Vol. 3, pp. 268–271. All essays cited from this volume are also in David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays*, ed. John W. Lenz (New York & Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), but because the essays are relatively short, page references are given only for Green and Grose.

4. “Standard of Taste,” p. 268; Carolyn Korsmeyer, “Hume and the Foundations of Taste,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35 (1976): 205.

5. Hume says that “no sentiment represents what is really in the object” (“Standard of Taste,” p. 268). See also *Treatise*, p. 415 (II, iii, 3).

6. “Standard of Taste,” p. 279.

7. Mary Mothersill, “Hume and the Paradox of Taste,” *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd ed., eds. George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, and Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), p. 271. For another response to Mothersill, see S.K. Wertz, “Hume and the Paradox of Taste Again,” *Southwest Philosophy Review* 7 (1991): 141–150.

8. To determine the full range of Hume’s view of taste, searches were conducted with the *Past Masters* infobase. The result is 150 paragraphs in which Hume uses the term “beauty” and 124 in which he uses “taste.” 34 of these coincide. Of the remaining 90 involving “taste,” most discuss either “moral taste” or the taste of food, drink, etc.

9. “Standard of Taste,” p. 268. Some commentators refer to Hume’s aesthetic scepticism as subjective relativism.

10. Hume, “The Sceptic,” Green and Grose, vol. 3, p. 197, n. 1.

11. “The Sceptic,” p. 219; a parallel passage is found in the second *Enquiry*, pp. 291–292 (App. I, iii).

12. “The Sceptic,” pp. 219–220.

13. “Standard of Taste,” p. 268. For a similar passage concerning morals, see *Treatise*, p. 469 (III, i, 1).

14. Because the sentiment is a calm passion, it is a reflective impression (*Treatise*, p. 275) and because it is an impression, it cannot represent anything (pp. 84 and 202).

15. “Standard of Taste,” p. 269, emphasis added. See Mothersill, “Paradox of Taste,” pp. 273–275. Hume’s position that sentiments are neither true nor false is consistent with “The Sceptic,” p. 218, the *Treatise*, p. 458 (III, i, 1), and the second *Enquiry*, p. 294 (App. I).

16. “The Sceptic,” pp. 216–217.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 219, n. See also the *Treatise*, p. 167 (I, iii, 14), where Hume says that “the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects.”

18. “The Sceptic,” p. 218. Hume suggests that aesthetic judgments, moral judgments, and causal judgments are alike insofar as all are “projections”; see Barry Stroud, *Hume* (The Arguments of the Philosophers) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 185.

19. *Treatise*, p. 276 (II, i, 1).

20. Hume works out the opposition between theory and common sense in greater detail concerning moral theory; see David F. Norton, *David Hume: Commonsense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 134–141.

21. Hume says that it leads him to side with the “general opinion of mankind” and “popular authority,” *Treatise*, pp. 546–547 (III, ii, 8). The interpretation developed in parts III and IV below is an extension of this germinal idea.

22. “The Sceptic,” p. 215.

23. Hume, *Letters*, I, p. 156.

24. See Peter Kivy, “Hume’s Neighbour’s Wife: An Essay on the Evolution of Hume’s Aesthetics,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23 (1983): 195–199, and Kivy, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: Breaking the Circle,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967): 57–58.

25. Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, ed. Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 34 (I, 1, ix).

26. Peter Kivy, “Recent Scholarship and the British Tradition: A Logic of Taste—The First Fifty Years,” *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2nd ed., eds. George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), pp. 259–261.

27. Kivy, “Recent Scholarship,” p. 261.

28. Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 38 (I, 1, xvi).

29. Peter Kivy, “Editor’s Introduction,” Hutcheson’s *Inquiry*, p. 11.

30. Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 38 (I, 1, xv); emphasis added.

31. *Treatise*, pp. 226–231 (I, iv).

32. *Treatise*, p. 299 (II, i, 8). Korsmeyer says that the essay on taste “is strongly reminiscent of Hutcheson” (“Hume and the Foundations of Taste,” p. 204). But this is really only true of what Hume elsewhere calls the “immediately agreeable.” See below, n. 39.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 299 (II, i, 8).

34. Second *Enquiry*, p. 289 (App. I).

35. "The Sceptic," p. 219. An appeal to "true and real colour" is used to bolster the dispositional analysis in "Standard of Taste," p. 272.

36. Mothersill, "Hume and the Paradox of Taste," p. 275.

37. "Standard of Taste," p. 271. Elsewhere, Hume speaks carelessly of beauty as one among several causes of "favourable sentiments," as if beauty is to be identified with the causal property itself; "A Dissertation on the Passions," in Green and Grose, vol. 4, p. 155. Hume's wording is equally loose in his moral theory; see Stroud, *Hume*, pp. 182–183.

38. *Treatise*, p. 576 (III, iii, 1). In this passage, Hume contends that one has the agreeable sentiment through sympathy when one recognizes that the object's "possessor" is pleased by it. See also pp. 584–585 (III, iii, 1) and 363–365 (II, ii, 5). The latter says that "most" recognitions of beauty depend on sympathy.

39. Hume argues that *awareness* of these empirical regularities is sometimes necessary for one to have the sentiment, particularly when admiring someone else's property. When one knows that the design of the object will please its owner, this knowledge leads the idea of the utility of the design to an idea of its pleasurable effect on the owner, so that natural sympathy produces a corresponding pleasure in anyone who understands the causal connection between design and pleasure. See *Treatise*, p. 576 (III, iii, 1). Because of this cognitive requirement, Hume classifies such cases as "beauty merely of imagination," as opposed to cases where an object is "immediately agreeable." See pp. 364 (II, ii, 4) and 590 (III, iii, 1). According to the second *Enquiry*, beauties of imagination provide a more stable appraisal (p. 173; I).

40. As Anthony Savile interprets Hume, "on Hume's view an object is beautiful if and only if, in virtue of having a certain order of parts, it tends to be true that anyone with a certain mental set who were to perceive the object would be pleased by doing so, where this pleasure causally derives from that perceptual activity." Savile, *The Test of Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 161. Following J.L. Mackie's usage, we would then identify Hume as advocating dispositional descriptivism, but Mackie is certainly correct that Hume is not *merely* a descriptivist; Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 73–75.

41. For parallels with Hume's moral theory, see Stroud, *Hume*, pp. 180–182.

42. "Standard of Taste," p. 269; examples of bread and trees from the first *Enquiry* (IV, ii).

43. Mary Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, pp. 180, 183–184, and "Hume and the Paradox of Taste," pp. 271–285. Hume says that the joint verdict of good critics "is the true standard of taste and beauty" ("Standard of Taste," pp. 278–279), but since a joint verdict is needed to lead us to the discovery of empirical regularities, this remark does not itself settle the issue of what the standard really is.

44. "Standard of Taste," p. 271.

45. Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," Green and Grose, vol. 3, p. 175.

46. E.g., Mothersill, "Paradox of Taste," p. 270.

47. Given Hume's position that "the sense of beauty in ... external objects" is a calm, reflective passion, and that as such it "is an original existence, and contains not any representative quality," it does not admit of truth or falsity; see

Treatise, p. 415 (II, iii, 3). Hume is even more explicit in the second *Enquiry*, p. 294 (App. I). Finally, sentiment must accompany understanding, and "no sentiment represents what is really in the object," so Hume cannot allow a truth value for predications of beauty; "Standard of Taste," p. 268.

48. Hume does not employ the vocabulary of endorsements, but he holds that moral predicates are based on sentiments of "blame or approbation," and he stresses this just before he supports his views on "moral beauty" by analogy with "natural" beauty. See the second *Enquiry*, p. 291 (App. I). In a passage describing probable reasoning as a "species of sensation," he compares it to "taste and sentiment" for art and contends that the "preference" is "my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence" (*Treatise*, p. 102; I, iii, 8).

49. "The Sceptic," p. 218.

50. Mothersill, "Hume and the Paradox of Taste," p. 283.

51. See *Treatise*, pp. 415–417 (II, iii, 3).

52. "Standard of Taste," p. 273, emphasis added.

53. "Standard of Taste," p. 270. Here we have an analog to the comparison between the rhetorician and the little girl in "The Sceptic."

54. *Ibid.*, p. 284; "The Sceptic," p. 217; "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," p. 183. For more about Hume's own critical judgments, see Teddy Brunius, *David Hume on Criticism* (Almqvist & Wiksell: Stockholm, 1952), chap. 6.

55. "Standard of Taste," p. 276, emphasis added.

56. For the recent history of this criticism of Hume, see Stuart G. Brown, "Observations on Hume's Theory of Taste," *English Studies* XX (1938): 193–198; James Noxon, "Hume's Opinion of Critics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20 (1961): 157–162; Kivy, "Hume's Standard of Taste," pp. 60–63; Noël Carroll, "Hume's Standard of Taste," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984): 181–194.

57. See "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," in Green and Grose, vol. 3, p. 185.

58. Noxon, "Hume's Opinion of Critics," p. 160.

59. Mothersill, "Hume and the Paradox of Taste," p. 271.

60. "Standard of Taste," p. 274.

61. "Standard of Taste," p. 279.

62. Kivy, "Hume's Standard of Taste," p. 61.

63. "Standard of Taste," p. 274, emphasis added.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 279, emphasis added.

65. *Enquiry*, p. 274 (IX, i), emphasis added. See also pp. 228–232 (V, ii) and *Treatise*, pp. 580–584 (III, iii, 1).

66. Mothersill, *Beauty Restored*, p. 202.

67. "Of Refinement in the Arts," in Green and Grose, vol. 3, p. 305. See also *Treatise*, p. 593 (III, iii, 2), and "The Sceptic," p. 224.

68. Second *Enquiry*, p. 272 (IX, i); see also *Treatise*, pp. 468–471 (III, i, 1–2).

69. "Of Refinement," p. 300.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 307, emphasis added.

71. *Ibid.*

72. "Of Refinement," p. 307.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

74. "Rise and Progress of the Arts," p. 185.

75. Kivy interprets delicacy as one among several independent characteristics of good critics. As I read Hume, the

others are necessary conditions of delicacy. See Kivy, "Breaking the Circle," pp. 62–63.

76. Hume's emphasis on delicacy mitigates Kivy's concern that the requirement of "good sense" generates a regress of evaluation. Hume sees strong sense as "requisite to the operations" of taste ("Standard of Taste," p. 277). Delicacy of taste for fine art requires "so many circumstances to be compared" that it is "inseparable" from strong sense ("Delicacy of Taste," p. 93). So if we can identify delicacy, there is no need to identify good sense independently. In fact, on Hume's theory as developed in this paper, it seems relatively unimportant which of two critics has stronger sense; if both possess delicacy of taste, the benefits of taste arise from their arguing with one another.

77. "Delicacy of Taste," p. 92.

78. *Enquiry*, p. 233 (VI, i).

79. *Ibid.*

80. "Standard of Taste," p. 274.

81. "Delicacy of Taste," p. 93.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

83. As the second *Enquiry* puts it, "If refined sense ... be not so *useful* as common sense, their rarity, their novelty, and the nobleness of their objects make some compensation, and render them the admiration of mankind" (p. 241; VI, i).

84. See the second *Enquiry*, pp. 204 (III, ii) and 277 (IX, i).

85. Second *Enquiry*, pp. 283–284 (IX, ii).

86. My thanks to Donald Crawford and the two anonymous referees for this journal, and to all who have discussed earlier versions of this paper, particularly Crispin Sartwell and Hal Walberg.