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In this paper I shall consider three problems provoked by Hume's essay, "Of the Standard of Taste." The first problem concerns an apparent circularity in Hume's definition of beauty. The second problem involves his general distinction between science and the arts or between matters of fact and relations to sentiment. The third problem has to do with Hume's apparent reduction of aesthetics to physiology.

1. The apparent circle in Hume's definition of beauty runs roughly as follows. An object is beautiful if it excites the approval of qualified critics. A qualified critic is a man whose sentiment of taste is in proper working order. A man's sentiment of taste is in proper working order if his judgments that objects are beautiful really refer to beautiful objects. Beautiful objects are those objects judged to be beautiful by qualified critics through a long stretch of history. The circle seems to go from beautiful object to qualified critic and back again. However, if I understand Hume correctly, it is a peculiarity of the sentiment of taste in particular, and of sentiments in general, that drives talk about beauty and qualified critics into a circle. Whether the nature of sentiment is peculiar enough to prevent Hume's argument from running in a vicious circle remains to be seen.

There is a passage in which one can trace the circularity of Hume's definition of beauty to the nature of sentiment (in Kennick, p. 488). He makes here a crucial distinction between sentiment and opinion. Opinion always refers to something "really in the object" or to a "real matter of fact," to which it ~~does not~~ not correspond.

Sentiment, by contrast, refers not to an object or an objective property: itself, but to the relation of an object or its properties to one's "organs or faculties of the mind." Certain properties of an object - say, its disposition to appear colored or of a certain texture - affect the organs of the percipient in such a way as to produce the colors seen or the texture felt. Seeing or touching is a sort of sentiment referring to the relation of the thing sensed to the organ of sensation. The sentiment of taste functions in much the same way. The arrangement of certain properties of an object excites the faculty or organ of taste, in such a way as to produce an agreeable sentiment. This sentiment in turn is the basis of one's judgment that the object is beautiful.

The circle in Hume's definition of beauty can be traced to two conditions that must be met for judging an object to be beautiful. The object or its properties must be presented in the right light, and the organ of taste must be in good working order. Only when these two conditions of aesthetic perception are met, can the relation between object and organ produce a sentiment agreeable enough to serve as the basis of ascribing beauty to an object. The same two conditions also hold for ordinary sense perception: the dispositional qualities of the object must be allowed to reveal themselves to organs in a healthy state, in order for the appropriate perceptual judgments to be made about the object.

Since Hume derives his circular definition of beauty from the conditions of aesthetic perception, and since he models these conditions on those of ordinary sense perception, one could just as well say that he arrives at circular definitions of any

sensible quality. The circularity of Hume's definition of beauty is tied up with the relational "circle" of percipient and thing perceived, and with the fact that beauty is not a property of things themselves, but refers to the relation that certain things bear to qualified appreciators of them. Hume's circle is not vicious, but rather inevitable.

2. According to Hume, the agreement of ^{qualified} critics over long periods of history constitutes the standard of taste. They are able to establish this standard because only for them does the relation of beautiful objects or great works of art to agreeable sentiments hold, no matter what period of history the critics live in. That the standard of taste established by relations to sentiment remains constant over a long period of time, in contrast to the relatively short "lives" of those bodies of opinion, referring to matters of fact, that we call philosophies or sciences, is one of Hume's more interesting claims. It seems, however, that he undercuts either this claim or his own theory of the standard of taste, when he bases the relation to sentiment appropriate to a judgment of taste on certain matters of fact. The good critic, whose sentiment of taste relates properly to the object, possesses certain perceptual, imaginative, and intellectual powers in a healthy state, and this, Hume asserts, is a question "of fact, not of sentiment." But if the ground of the standard of taste - the dispositions of the qualified critic - is ultimately a question of fact, is this ground not as insecure as any other opinion in the history of philosophy? It seems that Hume cannot have it both ways. Either the standard of taste rests on opinions about human nature as

corrigible as any other opinions, and then the standard of taste shifts with the prevailing anthropology; or Hume must concede some eternal significance to certain opinions in philosophy and science as well as to certain sentiments in the arts.

3. Hume more or less models the aesthetic perception necessary for judgments of taste on ordinary sense perception. Essential to the appropriate functioning of either sort of perception is that the organs of perception and the objects to be perceived are in the right condition. Roughly speaking, the organs have to be in good health and the objects must be seen in an appropriate context. In so far as the operations of the organ of taste are explained by way of analogy to the operations of the organs of sense perception, Hume is conceiving of the organ of taste, a "mental" organ, to be sure, in physiological terms. To what extent, then, do judgments of taste rest on one's physiological state? and can aesthetics ultimately be translated, as it appears to be in Hume, into physiology?

It seems that judgments of taste for Hume rest only in part, though in an essential part, on physiology. If human nature possesses an organ of taste, then hygiene and gymnastic are as necessary for its proper functioning as they are for the operations of any other organ. Without the adequate conditioning of the organ of taste, no proper judgments of taste could be made. Reason or the cognitive faculties come into play as a merely subservient, though necessary, factor in coordinating the regimen of the organ of taste.

But if Hume's restriction of the role of reason in judgments

goes too far for those afraid of reducing aesthetics to physiology, then perhaps the grounds for this fear can still be removed. The greatest fear in questions of aesthetics is, for Hume, that judgments of taste, in view of their resemblance to the judgments of sense perception, are just as arbitrary and subjective. If beauty, no more than sweetness, is a property of objects, what ground is there for claiming universal assent for a judgment of beauty but denying it to a judgment of sweetness? I think Hume would argue that neither judgments of taste nor judgments of sense perception are subjective and arbitrary, if the organ of the critic or the organs of the percipient are in the right condition at the right place at the right time, etc. It is precisely the relation of such judgments to certain constants of physiological health that gives them a claim to universal assent.

To conclude, Hume avoids scepticism in aesthetics in the same way as he avoids it in epistemology, that is, by disclosing the physiological basis of judgments in both cases.