

16.7 | *Criticism and the Standards of Taste*

The passages assembled in this section are rather a mixed bag. Some are about critics as such, and express the dislike they evoke from the authors who are subject to their barbs. Some are about criticism as such; and some are examples of criticism. The one art that predominates in all these texts is literature; yet, perhaps, the points made can be generalized by the reader so that he sees their applicability to other arts, at least to the extent of understanding that a critical as contrasted with an uncritical appreciation of any work of art involves an appeal to principles or criteria that have something to do with the excellence of the work being considered.

This obviously leads to questions already mentioned in connection with beauty—

questions about taste as responsive to the characteristics of the work being appreciated, about the distinction between good and bad taste, and about the process by which good taste is cultivated. The quotations that bear on these questions should be related by the reader to the passages in the preceding section that are concerned with the objectivity and subjectivity of beauty.

There are a few passages that deal with style—both in literature and in life. They are placed here because of the relation of differences in style to differences in taste.

For passages that might have appeared here instead of in other sections of this chapter, or in other chapters, the reader should consult the index under appropriate terms of interest.

1 *Socrates*. Then beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity—I mean the true simplicity of a rightly and nobly ordered mind and character, not that other simplicity which is only an euphemism for folly?

Very true, he [Glaucon] replied.

And if our youth are to do their work in life, must they not make these graces and harmonics their perpetual aim?

They must.

And surely the art of the painter and every other creative and constructive art are full of them—weaving, embroidery, architecture, and every kind of manufacture; also nature, animal and vegetable—in all of them there is grace or the absence of grace. And ugliness and discord and inharmonious motion are nearly allied to ill words and ill nature, as grace and harmony are the twin sisters of goodness and virtue and bear their likeness.

That is quite true, he said.

Plato, *Republic*, III, 400B

2 *Socrates*. This is the distinction which I draw between the sight-loving, art-loving, practical class and those of whom I am speaking, and who are alone worthy of the name of philosophers.

How do you distinguish them? he [Glaucon] said.

The lovers of sounds and sights, I replied, are, as I conceive, fond of fine tones and colours and forms and all the artificial products that are made out of them, but their mind is incapable of seeing or loving absolute beauty.

True, he replied.

Few are they who are able to attain to the sight of this.

Very true.

And he who, having a sense of beautiful things has no sense of absolute beauty, or who, if another lead him to a knowledge of that beauty is unable to follow—of such an one I ask, Is he awake or in a dream only? Reflect: is not the dreamer, sleeping or waking, one who likens dissimilar things, who puts the copy in the place of the real object?

I should certainly say that such an one was dreaming.

But take the case of the other, who recognises the existence of absolute beauty and is able to distinguish the idea from the objects which participate in the idea, neither putting the objects in the place of the idea nor the idea in the place of the objects—is he a dreamer, or is he awake?

He is wide awake.

Plato, *Republic*, V, 476A

3 *Athenian Stranger*. Are beautiful things not the same to us all, or are they the same in themselves, but not in our opinion of them? For no one will admit that forms of vice in the dance are more beautiful than forms of virtue, or that he himself delights in the forms of vice, and others in a muse of another character. And yet most persons say, that the excellence of music is to give pleasure to our souls. But this is intolerable and blasphemous; there is, however, a much more plausible account of the delusion.

Cleinias. What?

Ath. The adaptation of art to the characters of men. Choric movements are imitations of manners occurring in various actions, fortunes, dispositions—each particular is imitated, and those to whom the words, or songs, or dances are suited, either by nature or habit or both, cannot help feeling pleasure in them and applauding them, and calling them beautiful. But those whose natures, or ways, or habits are unsuited to them, cannot delight in them or applaud them, and they call them base. There are others, again, whose natures are right and their habits wrong, or whose habits are right and their natures wrong, and they praise one thing, but are pleased at another. For they say that all these imitations are pleasant, but not good. And in the presence of those whom they think wise, they are ashamed of dancing and singing in the baser manner, or of deliberately lending any countenance to such proceedings; and yet, they have a secret pleasure in them.

Plato, *Laws*, II, 655A

4 *Athenian Stranger*. The excellence of music is to be measured by pleasure. But the pleasure must not be that of chance persons; the fairest music is that which delights the best and best educated, and especially that which delights the one man who is pre-eminent in virtue and education. And therefore the judges must be men of character, for they will require both wisdom and courage; the true judge must not draw his inspiration from the theatre, nor ought he to be unnerved by the clamour of the many and his own incapacity; nor again, knowing the truth, ought he through cowardice and unmanliness carelessly to deliver a lying judgment, with the very same lips which have just appealed to the Gods before he judged. He is sitting not as the disciple of the theatre, but, in his proper place, as their instructor, and he ought to be the enemy of all pandering to the pleasure of the spectators. The ancient and common custom of Hellas, which still prevails in Italy and Sicily, did certainly leave the judgment to the body of spectators, who determined the victor by show of hands. But this custom has been the destruction of the poets; for they are now in the habit of composing with a view to please the bad taste of their judges, and the result is that the spectators instruct themselves;—and also it has been the ruin

of the theatre; they ought to be having characters put before them better than their own, and so receiving a higher pleasure, but now by their own act the opposite result follows.

Plato, *Laws*, II, 658B

5 A master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this—the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us.

If it is thus, then, that every art does its work well—by looking to the intermediate and judging its works by this standard—so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art, while the mean preserves it; and good artists, as we say, look to this in their work.

Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1106b5

6 The many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1281b7

7 What to one man is food, to another is rank poison.

Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, IV

8 Be not too rigidly censorious,
A string may jar in the best master's hand,
And the most skilful archer miss his aim;
But in a poem elegantly writ,
I will not quarrel with a slight mistake,
Such as our nature's frailty may excuse;
But he that hath been often told his fault,
And still persists, is as impertinent,
As a musician that will always play,
And yet is always out at the same note;
When such a positive abandon'd fop
(Among his numerous absurdities)
Stumbles upon some tolerable line,
I fret to see them in such company,
And wonder by what magic they came there.
But in long works sleep will sometimes surprise,
Homer himself hath been observ'd to nod.

Horace, *Ars Poetica*

9 All language demonstrates three kinds of excellence: correctness, precision, and elegance (for to speak with propriety, its highest quality, is usually included by writers under elegance). Language also has the same number of faults, and these are the opposites of the qualities just mentioned.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, I, 5

10 I know that there are some writers who would gladly ignore the importance of composition altogether, because they contend that unpolished lan-

guage, presenting itself spontaneously, is more natural and manly. But if such writers actually contend that the natural is only that which has sprung from nature which preceded culture, then all oratory is at an end. . . .

As the current of a river is more forcible in a descending channel which offers no obstruction to its course, than amidst rocks that oppose the broken and struggling waters; so also language that is properly corrected and flows smoothly is preferable to that which is rugged and fragmentary. Why then should anyone think that vigor is diminished when attention is paid to beauty? Nothing attains its natural strength without art, and beauty always accompanies art.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, IX, 4

- 11 Many people admire what is bad, but no one condemns what is good.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, XII, 10

- 12 Beauty, unlike greatness, we regard as absolute and as a quality; "more beautiful" is the relative. Yet even the term "beautiful" may be attached to something which in a given relation may appear ugly: the beauty of man, for example, is ugliness when compared with that of the gods; "the most beautiful of monkeys," we may quote, "is ugly in comparison with any other type." Nonetheless, a thing is beautiful in itself; as related to something else it is either more or less beautiful.

Similarly, an object is great in itself, and its greatness is due, not to any external, but to its own participation in the Absolute Great.

Are we actually to eliminate the beautiful on the pretext that there is a more beautiful? No more than must we eliminate the great because of the greater; the greater can obviously have no existence whatever apart from the great, just as the more beautiful can have no existence without the beautiful.

Plotinus, *Sixth Ennead*, III, 11

- 13 Reason stands in different relations to the productions of art and to moral actions. In matters of art, reason is directed to a particular end, which is something devised by reason, while in moral matters, it is directed to the general end of all human life. Now a particular end is ordered to the general end. Since therefore sin is a departure from the order to the end . . . sin may occur in two ways in a production of art. First, by a departure from the particular end intended by the artist, and this sin will be proper to the art; for instance, if an artist produce a bad thing while intending to produce something good, or produce something good while intending to produce something bad. Secondly, by a departure from the general end of human life, and then he will be said to sin if he intend to produce a bad work, and does so in effect, so that another is thus deceived. But this sin is not proper

to the artist as such, but as a man. Consequently for the former sin the artist is blamed as an artist, while for the latter he is blamed as a man. On the other hand, in moral matters, where we take into consideration the order of reason to the general end of human life, sin and evil are always due to a departure from the order of reason to the general end of human life. Therefore man is blamed for such a sin both as man and as a moral being. Hence the Philosopher [Aristotle] says that "in art, he who sins voluntarily is preferable"; but in prudence, as in the moral virtues, which prudence directs, he is less preferable.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 21, 2

- 14 Here is a wonder: we have many more poets than judges and interpreters of poetry. It is easier to create it than to understand it. On a certain low level it can be judged by precepts and by art. But the good, supreme, divine poetry is above the rules and reason.

Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 37, Of Cato the Younger

- 15 When I want to judge someone, I ask him how satisfied he is with himself, to what extent he is pleased with his words or his work. I want to get away from those fine excuses: "I did it in play . . . I was not an hour at it; I have not looked at it since." Well, then, I say, let us put these pieces aside, give me something that represents you fully, by which you would like to be measured. And then, what do you think is finest in your work? Is it this part or that? Is it the charm, or the matter, or the originality, or the judgment, or the knowledge? For I notice generally that people are as mistaken in judging their own work as that of others, not only because of the affection that is involved, but also because they have not the capacity to know and distinguish it for what it is. The work, by its own power and fortune, may second the workman beyond his inventiveness and knowledge and outstrip him. For my part, I do not judge the value of any other work less clearly than my own; and I place the *Essays* now low, now high, very inconsistently and uncertainly.

There are many books that are useful by reason of their subjects, from which the author derives no commendation; and there are good books, like good works, which shame the workman.

Montaigne, *Essays*, III, 8, Of the Art of Discussion

- 16 Though men in learned tongues do tie themselves to the ancient measures, yet in modern languages it seemeth to me as free to make new measures of verses as of dances: for a dance is a measured pace, as a verse is a measured speech. In these things the sense is better judge than the art.

Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Bk. II, XVI, 5

- 17 There is a certain standard of grace and beauty which consists in a certain relation between our nature, such as it is, weak or strong, and the thing which pleases us.

Whatever is formed according to this standard pleases us, be it house, song, discourse, verse, prose, woman, birds, rivers, trees, rooms, dress, etc. Whatever is not made according to this standard displeases those who have good taste.

And as there is a perfect relation between a song and a house which are made after a good model, because they are like this good model, though each after its kind; even so there is a perfect relation between things made after a bad model. Not that the bad model is unique, for there are many; but each bad sonnet, for example, on whatever false model it is formed, is just like a woman dressed after that model.

Nothing makes us understand better the ridiculousness of a false sonnet than to consider nature and the standard and, then, to imagine a woman or a house made according to that standard.

Pascal, *Pensées*, I, 32

- 18 Men consider all things as made for themselves, and call the nature of a thing, good, evil, sound, putrid, or corrupt, just as they are affected by it. For example, if the motion by which the nerves are affected by means of objects represented to the eye conduces to well-being, the objects by which it is caused are called beautiful; while those exciting a contrary motion are called deformed. Those things, too, which stimulate the senses through the nostrils are called sweet-smelling or thiinking; those which act through the taste are called sweet or bitter, full-flavoured or insipid; those which act through the touch, hard or soft, heavy or light; those, lastly, which act through the ears are said to make a noise, sound, or harmony, the last having caused men to lose their senses to such a degree that they have believed that God even is delighted with it. Indeed, philosophers may be found who have persuaded themselves that the celestial motions beget a harmony. All these things sufficiently show that every one judges things by the constitution of his brain, or rather accepts the affections of his imagination in the place of things. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, as we may observe in passing, that all those controversies which we see have arisen amongst men, so that at last scepticism has been the result. For although human bodies agree in many things, they differ in more, and therefore that which to one person is good will appear to another evil, that which to one is well arranged to another is confused, that which pleases one will displease another, and so on in other cases which I pass by both because we cannot notice them at length here, and because they are within the experience of every one. For every one has heard the expressions: So many heads, so many ways of thinking; Every one is

satisfied with his own way of thinking; Differences of brains are not less common than differences of taste;—all which maxims show that men decide upon matters according to the constitution of their brains, and imagine rather than understand things.

Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, Appendix

- 19 Each Poet of inferior size
On you shall rail and criticize. . . .
So, Nat'ralists observe, a Flea
Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey,
And these have smaller Fleas to bite 'em,
And so proceed *ad infinitum*:
Thus ev'ry Poet in his Kind,
Is bit by him that comes behind.
Swift, *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*

- 20 Some have conceived it would be very expedient for the public good of learning that every true critic, as soon as he had finished his task assigned, should immediately deliver himself up to rats-baue, or hemp, or leap from some convenient altitude; and that no man's pretensions to so illustrious a character should by any means be received before that operation were performed.

Swift, *Tale of a Tub*, III

- 21 These reasonings will furnish us with an adequate definition of a true critic: that he is a discoverer and collector of writers' faults. Which may be farther put beyond dispute by the following demonstration:—That whoever will examine the writings in all kinds, wherewith this ancient sect has honoured the world, shall immediately find, from the whole thread and tenor of them, that the ideas of the authors have been altogether conversant and taken up with the faults, and blemishes, and oversights, and mistakes of other writers; and, let the subject treated on be whatever it will, their imaginations are so entirely possessed and replete with the defects of other pens, that the very quintessence of what is bad does of necessity distil into their own; by which means the whole appears to be nothing else but an abstract of the criticisms themselves have made.

Swift, *Tale of a Tub*, III

- 22 'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But of the two less dangerous is the offense
To tire our patience than mislead our sense.
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
Ten courses wrong for one who writes amiss;
A fool might once himself alone expose,
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.
Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, I, 1

- 23 Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night;

Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims
bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their spring.
Still with itself compared, his text peruse;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.
Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, I, 124

- 24 But most by numbers judge a poet's song,
And smooth or rough with them is right or wrong.
In the bright Muse though thousand charms con-
spire,
Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire,
Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,
Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the music there.
These equal syllables alone require,
Though oft the ear the open vowels tire,
While expletives their feeble aid do join,
And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:
While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"
In the next line, it "whispers through the trees";
If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with
"sleep";
Then, at the last and only couplet fraught
With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,
A needless Alexandrine ends the song
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length
along.
Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and
know
What's roundly smooth or languishingly slow;
And praise the easy vigor of a line
Where Denham's strength and Waller's sweetness
join.
True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers
flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent
roar.
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to
throw,
The line too labors, and the words move slow;
Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the
main.

Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, II, 337

- 25 Ah, ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,
Nor in the critic let the man be lost!
Good nature and good sense must ever join;
To err is human, to forgive divine.
Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, II, 522
- 26 The world have paid too great a compliment to

critics, and have imagined them men of much greater profundity than they really are. From this complacency, the critics have been emboldened to assume a dictatorial power, and have so far succeeded, that they are now become the masters, and have the assurance to give laws to those authors from whose predecessors they originally received them.

The critic, rightly considered, is no more than the clerk, whose office it is to transcribe the rules and laws laid down by those great judges whose vast strength of genius hath placed them in the light of legislators, in the several sciences over which they presided. This office was all which the critics of old aspired to; nor did they ever dare to advance a sentence, without supporting it by the authority of the judge from whence it was borrowed.

But in process of time, and in ages of ignorance, the clerk began to invade the power and assume the dignity of his master. The laws of writing were no longer founded on the practice of the author, but on the dictates of the critic. The clerk became the legislator, and those very peremptorily gave laws whose business it was, at first, only to transcribe them.

Hence arose an obvious, and perhaps an unavoidable error; for these critics being men of shallow capacities, very easily mistook mere form for substance. They acted as a judge would, who should adhere to the lifeless letter of law, and reject the spirit. Little circumstances, which were perhaps accidental in a great author, were by these critics considered to constitute his chief merit, and transmitted as essentials to be observed by all his successors. To these encroachments, time and ignorance, the two great supporters of imposture, gave authority; and thus many rules for good writing have been established, which have not the least foundation in truth or nature; and which commonly serve for no other purpose than to curb and restrain genius, in the same manner as it would have restrained the dancing-master, had the many excellent treatises on that art laid it down as an essential rule that every man must dance in chains.

Fielding, *Tom Jones*, V, 1

- 27 This word critic is of Greek derivation, and signifies judgment. Hence I presume some persons who have not understood the original, and have seen the English translation of the primitive, have concluded that it meant judgment in the legal sense, in which it is frequently used as equivalent to condemnation.

I am rather inclined to be of that opinion, as the greatest number of critics hath of late years been found amongst the lawyers. Many of these gentlemen, from despair, perhaps, of ever rising to the bench in Westminster-hall, have placed themselves on the benches at the playhouse, where they

have exerted their judicial capacity, and have given judgment, i.e., condemned without mercy.

Fielding, *Tom Jones*, XI, 1

- 28 The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one's observation. Men of the most confined knowledge are able to remark a difference of taste in the narrow circle of their acquaintance, even where the persons have been educated under the same government, and have early imbibed the same prejudices. But those who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still more surprised at the great inconsistency and contrariety. We are apt to call *barbarous* whatever departs widely from our own taste and apprehension; but soon find the epithet of reproach retorted on us. And the highest arrogance and self-conceit is at last startled, on observing an equal assurance on all sides, and scruples, amidst such a contest of sentiment, to pronounce positively in its own favour.

Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*

- 29 Though it be certain that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external, it must be allowed that there are certain qualities in objects which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings. Now, as these qualities may be found in a small degree, or may be mixed and confounded with each other, it often happens that the taste is not affected with such minute qualities, or is not able to distinguish all the particular flavours, amidst the disorder in which they are presented. Where the organs are so fine as to allow nothing to escape them, and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition, this we call delicacy of taste, whether we employ these terms in the literal or metaphorical sense. Here then the general rules of beauty are of use, being drawn from established models, and from the observation of what pleases or displeases, when presented singly and in a high degree; 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.

Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*

- 30 Though the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely, the same in all men, yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty. The organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles. They either labour under some defect, or are vitiated by some disorder; and by that means excite a sentiment, which may be

pronounced erroneous. When the critic has no delicacy, he judges without any distinction, and is only affected by the grosser and more palpable qualities of the object: the finer touches pass unnoticed and disregarded. Where he is not aided by practice, his verdict is attended with confusion and hesitation. Where no comparison has been employed, the most frivolous beauties, such as rather merit the name of defects, are the object of his admiration. Where he lies under the influence of prejudice, all his natural sentiments are perverted. Where good sense is wanting, he is not qualified to discern the beauties of design and reasoning, which are the highest and most excellent. Under some or other of these imperfections, the generality of men labour; and hence a true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character: strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.

Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*

- 31 Grant me patience, just Heaven!—Of all the cants which are canted in the canting world—though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst—the cant of criticism is the most tormenting!

Stern, *Tristram Shandy*, III, 12

- 32 I mentioned Mallet's tragedy of *Elvira*, which had been acted the preceding winter at Drurylane, and that the Honourable Andrew Erskine, Mr. Dempster, and myself, had joined in writing a pamphlet, entitled, *Critical Strictures*, against it. That the mildness of Dempster's disposition had, however, relented; and he had candidly said, "We have hardly a right to abuse this tragedy: for bad as it is, how vain should either of us be to write one not near so good." Johnson. "Why no, Sir; this is not just reasoning. You may abuse a tragedy, though you cannot write one. You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table. It is not your trade to make tables."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (June 25, 1763)

- 33 Fielding being mentioned, Johnson exclaimed, "he was a blockhead"; and upon my expressing my astonishment at so strange an assertion, he said, "What I mean by his being a blockhead is that he was a barren rascal." Boswell. "Will you not allow, Sir, that he draws very natural pictures of human life?" Johnson. "Why, Sir, it is of very low life. Richardson used to say, that had he not known who Fielding was, he should have believed he was an ostler. Sir, there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's, than in all *Tom Jones*. I, indeed, never read *Joseph Andrews*."

Erskine. "Surely, Sir, Richardson is very tedious."

Johnson. "Why, Sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Apr. 6, 1772)

- 34 Talking on the subject of taste in the arts, he said, that difference of taste was, in truth, difference of skill. *Boswell*. "But, Sir, is there not a quality called taste, which consists merely in perception or in liking? For instance, we find people differ much as to what is the best style of English composition. Some think Swift's the best; others prefer a fuller and grander way of writing." *Johnson*. "Sir, you must first define what you mean by style, before you can judge who has a good taste in style, and who has a bad. The two classes of persons whom you have mentioned don't differ as to good and bad. They both agree that Swift has a good neat style; but one loves a neat style, another loves a style of more splendour. In like manner, one loves a plain coat, another loves a laced coat; but neither will deny that each is good in its kind."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Apr. 19, 1772)

- 35 We talked of the styles of different painters, and how certainly a connoisseur could distinguish them; I asked, if there was as clear a difference of styles in language as in painting, or even as in hand-writing, so that the composition of every individual may be distinguished? *Johnson*. "Yes. Those who have a style of eminent excellence, such as Dryden and Milton, can always be distinguished." I had no doubt of this, but what I wanted to know was, whether there was really a peculiar style to every man whatever, as there is certainly a peculiar hand-writing, a peculiar countenance, not widely different in many, yet always enough to be distinctive. . . . The Bishop thought not; and said, he supposed that many pieces in Dodsley's collection of poems, though all very pretty, had nothing appropriated in their style, and in that particular could not be at all distinguished. *Johnson*. "Why, Sir, I think every man whatever has a peculiar style, which may be discovered by nice examination and comparison with others: but a man must write a great deal to make his style obviously discernible."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Apr. 13, 1778)

- 36 Everyone must allow that a judgement on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgement of taste. One must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste.

Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 2

- 37 So far as the interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable goes, every one says "Hunger is the best sauce; and people with a healthy appetite relish everything, so long as it is something they can eat." Such delight, consequently, gives no indication of taste having anything to say to the choice. Only when men have got all they want can we tell who among the crowd has taste or not.

Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 5

- 38 A principle of taste would mean a fundamental premiss under the condition of which one might subsume the concept of an object, and then, by a syllogism, draw the inference that it is beautiful. That, however, is absolutely impossible. For I must feel the pleasure immediately in the representation of the object, and I cannot be talked into it by any grounds of proof. Thus although critics, as Hume says, are able to reason more plausibly than cooks, they must still share the same fate. For the determining ground of their judgement they are not able to look to the force of demonstrations, but only to the reflection of the subject upon his own state (of pleasure or displeasure), to the exclusion of precepts and rules.

Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 34

- 39 Taste is, in the ultimate analysis, a critical faculty that judges of the rendering of moral ideas in terms of sense (through the intervention of a certain analogy in our reflection on both); and it is this rendering also, and the increased sensibility, founded upon it, for the feeling which these ideas evoke (termed *moral sense*), that are the origin of that pleasure which taste declares valid for mankind in general and not merely for the private feeling of each individual. This makes it clear that the true propaedeutic for laying the foundations of taste is the development of moral ideas and the culture of the moral feeling. For only when sensibility is brought into harmony with moral feeling can genuine taste assume a definite unchangeable form.

Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 60

- 40 Nothing is more common than for scholars to make a ridiculous figure, in regard to a question of beauty, beside cultured men of the world; and technical critics are especially the laughing-stock of connoisseurs. Their opinion, from exaggeration, crudeness, or carelessness guides them generally quite awry, and they can only devise a technical judgment, and not an aesthetical one, embracing the whole work, in which feeling should decide. If they would kindly keep to technicalities, they might still be useful, for the poet in moments of inspiration and readers under his spell are little inclined to consider details. But the spectacle which they afford us is only the more ridiculous inasmuch as we see these crude natures—with whom all labour and trouble only develop at the

most a particular aptitude—when we see them set up their paltry individualities as the representation of universal and complete feeling, and in the sweat of their brow pronounce judgment on beauty.

Schiller, *Simple and Sentimental Poetry*

- 41 *Managers*. Men come to look, to see they most prefer.

If, as they gaze, much is reeled off and spun,
So that the startled crowd gapes all it can,
A multitude you will at once have won;
You then will be a much-loved man.
You can compel the mass by mass alone;
Each in the end will seek out something as his own.

Bring much and you'll bring this or that to everyone
And each will leave contented when the play is done.

If you will give a piece, give it at once in pieces!
Ragout like this your fame increases.
Easy it is to stage, as easy to invent.
What use is it, a whole to fashion and present?
The Public still will pick it all to pieces.

Goethe, *Faust*, Prelude on the Stage, 90

- 42 We find . . . it is true, among all world-historical peoples, poetry, plastic art, science, even philosophy; but not only is there a diversity in style and bearing generally, but still more remarkably in subject-matter; and this is a diversity of the most important kind, affecting the rationality of that subject-matter. It is useless for a pretentious aesthetic criticism to demand that our good pleasure should not be made the rule for the matter—the substantial part of their contents—and to maintain that it is the beautiful form as such, the grandeur of the fancy, and so forth, which fine art aims at, and which must be considered and enjoyed by a liberal taste and cultivated mind. A healthy intellect does not tolerate such abstractions, and cannot assimilate productions of the kind above referred to. Granted that the Indian epopees might be placed on a level with the Homeric, on account of a number of those qualities of form—grandeur of invention and imaginative power, liveliness of images and emotions, and beauty of diction; yet the infinite difference of matter remains; consequently one of substantial importance and involving the interest of reason, which is immediately concerned with the consciousness of the idea of freedom, and its expression in individuals. There is not only a classical form, but a classical order of subject-matter; and in a work of art form and subject-matter are so closely united that the former can only be classical to the extent to which the latter is so. With a fantastical, indeterminate material—and rule is the essence of reason—the form becomes measure-

less and formless, or mean and contracted.

Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, Introduction, 3

- 43 Style is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face. To imitate another man's style is like wearing a mask, which, be it never so fine, is not long in arousing disgust and abhorrence, because it is lifeless; so that even the ugliest living face is better. Hence those who write in Latin and copy the manner of ancient authors may be said to speak through a mask; the reader, it is true, hears what they say, but he cannot observe their physiognomy too; he cannot see their style.

Schopenhauer, *Style*

- 44 The taste for the beautiful, at least as far as female beauty is concerned, is not of a special nature in the human mind; for it differs widely in the different races of man, and is not quite the same even in the different nations of the same race. Judging from the hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be urged that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed as in certain animals, for instance, as in birds. Obviously no animal would be capable of admiring such scenes as the heavens at night, a beautiful landscape, or refined music; but such high tastes are acquired through culture, and depend on complex associations; they are not enjoyed by barbarians or by uneducated persons.

Darwin, *Descent of Man*, I, 3

- 45 The senses of man and of the lower animals seem to be so constituted that brilliant colours and certain forms, as well as harmonious and rhythmical sounds, give pleasure and are called beautiful; but why this should be so we know not. It is certainly not true that there is in the mind of man any universal standard of beauty with respect to the human body. It is, however, possible that certain tastes may in the course of time become inherited, though there is no evidence in favour of this belief; and if so, each race would possess its own innate ideal standard of beauty. It has been argued that ugliness consists in an approach to the structure of the lower animals, and no doubt this is partly true with the more civilised nations, in which intellect is highly appreciated; but this explanation will hardly apply to all forms of ugliness. The men of each race prefer what they are accustomed to; they cannot endure any great change; but they like variety, and admire each characteristic carried to a moderate extreme. Men accustomed to a nearly oval face, to straight and regular features, and to bright colours, admire, as we Europeans know, these points when strongly developed. On the other hand, men accustomed to a broad face, with high cheek-bones, a depressed nose, and a black skin, admire these peculiarities when strongly marked. No doubt charac-

ters of all kinds may be too much developed for beauty. Hence a perfect beauty, which implies many characters modified in a particular manner, will be in every race a prodigy. As the great anatomist Bichat long ago said, if every one were cast in the same mould, there would be no such thing as beauty. If all our women were to become as beautiful as the Venus de' Medici, we should for a time be charmed; but we should soon wish for variety; and as soon as we had obtained variety, we should wish to see certain characters a little exaggerated beyond the then existing common standard.

Darwin, *Descent of Man*, III, 19

- 46 Taste is not only a part and an index of morality—it is the only morality. The first, and last, and closest trial question to any living creature is, "What do you like?" Tell me what you like, and I'll tell you what you are.

Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, II

- 47 It is noticeable that the word *curiosity*, which in other languages is used in a good sense, to mean, as a high and fine quality of man's nature, just this disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake,—it is noticeable, I say, that this word has in our language no sense of the kind, no sense but a rather bad and disparaging one. But criticism, real criticism, is essentially the exercise of this very quality. It obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best, without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever.

Arnold, *Function of Criticism at the Present Time*

- 48 Constantly in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticizing it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or a poem may count

to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings, and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal.

Arnold, *Study of Poetry*

- 49 Over immense departments of our thought we are still, all of us, in the savage state. Similarity operates in us, but abstraction has not taken place. We know what the present case is like, we know what it reminds us of, we have an intuition of the right course to take, if it be a practical matter. But analytic thought has made no tracks, and we cannot justify ourselves to others. In ethical, psychological, and aesthetic matters, to give a clear reason for one's judgment is universally recognized as a mark of rare genius. The helplessness of uneducated people to account for their likes and dislikes is often ludicrous. Ask the first Irish girl why she likes this country better or worse than her home, and see how much she can tell you. But if you ask your most educated friend why he prefers Titian to Paul Veronese, you will hardly get more of a reply; and you will probably get absolutely none if you inquire why Beethoven reminds him of Michelangelo, or how it comes that a bare figure with unduly flexed joints, by the latter, can so suggest the moral tragedy of life. His thought obeys a *nexus*, but cannot name it. And so it is with all those judgments of *experts*, which even though unmotivated are so valuable.

William James, *Psychology*, XXII

- 50 I remember seeing an English couple sit for more than an hour on a piercing February day in the Academy at Venice before the celebrated *Assumption* by Titian; and when I, after being chased from room to room by the cold, concluded to get into the sunshine as fast as possible and let the pictures go, but before leaving drew reverently near to them to learn with what superior forms of susceptibility they might be endowed, all I overheard was the woman's voice murmuring: "What a *deprecatory* expression her face wears! What *self-abnegation*! How *unworthy* she feels of the honor she is receiving!" Their honest hearts had been kept warm all the time by a glow of spurious sentiment that would have fairly made old Titian sick. Mr. Ruskin somewhere makes the (for him terrible) admission that religious people as a rule care little for pictures, and that when they do care for them they generally prefer the worst ones to the best. Yes! in every art, in every science, there is the

keen perception of certain relations being *right* or not, and there is the emotional flush and thrill consequent thereupon. And these are two things, not one. In the former of them it is that experts and masters are at home. The latter accompaniments are bodily commotions that they may hardly feel, but that may be experienced in their fullness by *crétins* and philistines in whom the critical judgment is at its lowest ebb.

William James, *Psychology*, XXV

- 51 In my own experience of the appreciation of poetry I have always found that the less I knew about the poet and his work, before I began to read it, the better.

T. S. Eliot, *Dante*

- 52 Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is

even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius.

T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

- 53 No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, nor merely historical, criticism.

T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

- 54 A musical education is necessary for musical judgment. What most people relish is hardly music; it is rather a drowsy revery relieved by nervous thrills.

Santayana, *Life of Reason*, IV, 4