

# Introduction to Philosophy

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## Art and Aesthetic Judgment: The Standards of Taste

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

### Reading

- David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*.

### Background

See the reading for a fine introduction to this material.

### Questions

1. What reasons does Hume give to defend his claim that “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them”? But if this is true, how can Hume then go on to claim that there are “standards of taste”, “rules of art”, or “general principles of approbation or blame” applicable to judging works of art? In other words: if beauty is subjective, then how can there be standards of beauty? What are the five (or maybe six) components of the “true standard of taste and beauty”? Why are these components necessary?
2. What role do reason, “good sense”, and “the best arguments” play in Hume’s theory? Given Hume’s emphasis on the primacy of the sentiments and emotions in art, does this make any sense? If two experts disagree over the merits of a particular work of art, are there any reasons that they could appeal to in trying to mediate their conflict?
3. In the final analysis, do you agree with Hume that aesthetic theory can only describe the workings of the mind when assessing beauty? Is his defense of this position strong and compelling? Why or why not?