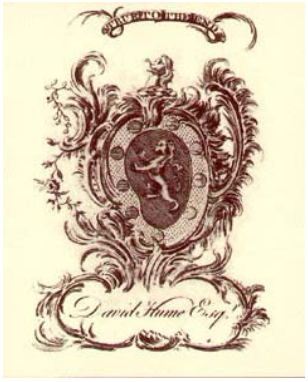

Hume's Tragic Emotions
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Hume opens his essay "Of Tragedy" with these remarks:

> It seems an unaccountable pleasure, which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy. The more they are touched and affected, the more are they delighted with the spectacle ... The whole art of the poet is employed, in rouzing and supporting the compassion and indignation, the anxiety and resentment of his audience. They are pleased in proportion as they are afflicted, and never are so happy as when they employ tears, sobs, and cries, to give vent to their sorrow, and relieve their heart, swoln with the tenderest sympathy and compassion.[1]

The task he sets himself is to explain this seemingly problematic pleasure.

Hume's problem is not merely to account for the pleasurable nature of the experience of a well-written tragedy or even for the pleasure a spectator of a well-written tragedy receives from passions that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy. His conception of the problem is more specific than this. The problem, as Hume understands it, is to explain a pleasure which still retains all the features and outward symptoms of distress and sorrow, for example, but which lacks any of the unpleasurableness intrinsic to the experience of these emotions when they are aroused by real, rather than artistically represented, tragic incidents. So it would not be enough for Hume to indicate a source of pleasure in the experience of a well-written tragedy, or a pleasure which stems from the arousal of passions that are in themselves disagreeable and which compensates for the pain or unpleasantness suffered in undergoing such passions. He must attempt to explain how a negative emotion is transformed into a positive emotion, rather than merely add a specified pleasure to the negative emotion. He thus acquiesced in the standard eighteenth century assumption that the experience is purely pleasurable, but correctly rejected the stock eighteenth century solution, provided by Du Bos, for example. However, Hume also intensified the problem, since the experience of a well-written tragedy is, for Hume, not only one in which there is no unpleasantness, but one that is extraordinarily

pleasurable—extraordinarily pleasurable at the very moments at which the spectator experiences the negative emotions. He must therefore explain how an experience which involves the arousal of negative emotions can be as supremely pleasurable as he takes it to be.

The problem that Hume sets himself is therefore that of accounting for the intense pleasure, unqualified by pain ("one uniform and strong enjoyment"), of a spectator of a well-written tragedy in whom negative emotions have been aroused in response to the tragic nature of what is represented in the play. His solution is in fact perfectly fitted to the problem as he sees it, exploiting each feature of the experience that he construes as unqualifiedly pleasurable to explain the absence of unpleasantness and the intensity of the pleasure. Since the experience is of a well-written tragedy, it is the experience of (i) a particular kind of artistic representation, an imitation, in Hume's language; (ii) a well-written representation; and (iii) a tragic representation. The first feature, according to Hume, ensures that the experience is pleasurable (in a certain respect), for "imitation is always of itself agreeable" (*Essays*, 220). The second feature not only adds to the pleasurable nature of the experience but, according to Hume, insofar as it swells the pleasure, it increases the likelihood that pleasure will be the "predominant" emotion in the experience, thus allowing it to capture the force or impulse of any contrary, subordinate emotion in the experience. And the third feature, according to Hume, ensures that the spectator experiences powerful negative emotions, so that the predominant emotion of pleasure is much greater than it would be in the case of an equally well-written play with an uninteresting subject which does not engage the spectator's negative emotions.

What exactly is Hume's solution? It turns upon assigning a crucial role to the way in which the painful events in a tragedy are represented. First, the manner of representation of a painful scene in a *well-written* tragedy is highly agreeable. Second, the satisfaction derived from the manner of representation—the beauty of language, the selection and arrangement of incidents, and the fact and manner of imitation of human life—is much stronger than the disagreeableness and uneasiness the spectator feels when he experiences grief, sorrow, pity, terror, indignation, or whatever at the events represented in the play. Third, this delight in the manner of representation not only overpowers and effaces the uneasiness, disagreeableness, distress of the negative emotions aroused by the melancholy spectacle presented in the work, but converts "the whole impulse" or "spirit and vehemence" of these passions into pleasure, thus increasing the delightful nature of the experience. In other words: there are two kinds of emotion involved in the aesthetic experience of a well-written tragedy: the emotion caused by the *manner* of representation and the emotion caused by *what* is

represented. These emotions are *opposites*: the one is pleasurable, the other unpleasurable. The emotion aroused by the manner of representation is the *predominant* emotion; by its greater strength it appropriates the passion of the *subordinate* emotions aroused by the tragic incidents of the play and converts it into pleasure; and so the delight experienced by the spectator is magnified—it is given greater force by harnessing to itself the strength of the subordinate emotions it has transformed. So a pleasurable tragic imitation "softens" a negative emotion "*by an infusion of a new feeling*" (of pleasure), "not merely by weakening or diminishing" the negative emotion (*Essays*, 221). (Fontenelle, and also Du Bos, thought that the spectator's awareness that he is responding to a representation, not reality, softens his negative emotion by diminishing its negative hedonic quality, and *by reduction* converts it into a pleasure. Hume substitutes *redirection* for reduction.)

I believe that Hume's solution to his problem lacks any plausibility. But before I attempt to show this, let me correct a minor feature of Hume's view—a feature that is harmlessly wrong. Despite its distinguished ancestry, it is certainly untrue that "imitation is always of itself agreeable." Whether we understand the idea of an imitation in the specific sense in which a play was for Aristotle an imitation of an action presented in the form of action or in the more general sense in which an imitation is any artistic representation or even any item that has been designed to resemble something else, it is untrue that imitation is of itself agreeable. But it is quite unnecessary for Hume to make this claim. For, in the first place, it is only an addition to the considerable pleasure of the (non-imitative) manner of representation of a well-written tragedy, and in the case of non-imitative eloquence this can be sufficient, according to Hume, for the pleasurable emotion to be the predominant emotion. And, secondly, as long as the performance of the tragedy is minimally competent, the *manner* of imitation, rather than the fact of imitation itself, will serve Hume's purpose equally well.

The crucial questions that need to be raised about Hume's solution are these:

(i) Is there (always) an independent pleasure in the manner of representation of the tragic incidents in a well-written tragedy?

(ii) On the supposition that there is such an independent pleasure, is it (always) the predominant emotion in Hume's sense; that is, stronger than the negative emotions experienced by the spectator?

(iii) If pleasure in the manner of representation is stronger than any negative emotion experienced, is it plausible to suppose that it attracts to itself the vehemence of the negative emotion, and accordingly both effaces the unpleasurable element of the experience and increases the pleasurable?

I shall begin with the second of these questions. But it will be helpful, I believe, to raise first a related question: Is there reason to believe that the negative emotions experienced by the spectator are liable to be less intense than their counterparts in real life; that is, when directed not at a represented reality, but at incidents of a similar kind in reality itself? Now there is in fact a well-known, and recently much discussed, problem in the philosophy of art about the sense in which it is possible to feel an emotion towards a fictional event or character. For either there is no such character (as in the case of Ophelia), or the character is not actually present to the spectator (as in the case of Richard III), or if the character is actually present (as when an actor or actress plays him- or herself), the emotional reaction is not to the character *as really present to the spectator*, but only *as represented to the spectator*. My own view is that the sense in which it is possible to feel an emotion towards a fictional event or character is best elucidated in terms of make-believe, in something like the manner advocated by Kendall Walton.[2] But I shall leave this issue on one side and operate only with an intuitive understanding of the notion. There is, of course, also a problem about the nature of the emotional reactions themselves, rather than their directedness or intentionality—whether they are full-blooded emotions; or whether they consist only of certain elements of the normal experience of these emotions (perhaps only the bodily effects and the feelings of these bodily occurrences, not the hedonic quality); or whether the fictionality of their object—the fact that it is fictional that the spectator is now aware of that object—infects the nature of the emotional reactions, so that just as the fictional object is *imagined* by the spectator, the emotions are only imagined emotions; that is to say, some kind of analogue of emotions proper, perhaps standing to them in much the same relation as visual images stand to visual impressions; or whether they are sometimes one of these possibilities and sometimes another, the spectator's experience thereby being in that respect variable and so possibly having a variable value or appeal. All that is necessary for the present purpose is that we should not *presuppose* that a negative emotion, when experienced in response to the represented content of a work of art, lacks its normal negative hedonic quality: if Hume's solution involves its lacking it, this must be explained, and it must be explained in terms of the emotions occurring

in response to a well-written tragedy. But even with this exiguous basis, there is reason to believe that it is likely that a spectator's emotional reaction to the theatrical representation of a tragic incident will not be as intensely painful as his emotional reaction to a similar incident that he witnesses in real life, for his theatrical experience is one in which he is aware that he is not really witnessing suffering or the loss of valuable life and that there is no question of his acting to prevent or ameliorate what is represented. No matter how much I react with horror to Oedipus' or Gloucester's blinding, I would be much more horrified by the experience in reality of someone tearing out his own eyes or having them forced out by another's heel. But if this is conceded to Hume, there is of course a cost: the less the intensity of a negative emotion undergone by the spectator of a tragedy, the smaller the increment of pleasure if the vehemence of the emotion is taken over by the delight the spectator is supposed to take in the beauty of the representation of the tragic event. At least, there will be this cost if Hume is operating with a univocal notion of the strength of an emotion, the strength of a negative emotion being the degree of unpleasantness involved in experiencing it, and this being identical with the vehemence of the emotion. (That is, if, for Hume, the predominant of two emotions is the stronger of the two, strength = vehemence = degree of pleasure/unpleasure.) As will later become clear, Hume appears to distinguish between the strength of an emotion in the sense of the degree of ease or unease with which it is experienced and the strength of an emotion in the sense of the vehemence of the "movements" of the emotion.

This concession does not of course deliver a positive answer to our second question, since it does not follow from the supposition that a spectator's experience in the theatre is less painful than the corresponding response to a similar happening in reality that it will be less intense than the spectator's aesthetic delight in the manner in which the play represents its unfortunate subject matter. And insofar as I have a grasp of what Hume requires me to compare, I am unable to see the plausibility of Hume's stance. Is the *strength* of the horror and outrage we experience when we witness Gloucester's blinding, or the strength of the sympathy and compassion we experience when Lear enters with Cordelia's dead body, less than the strength of the delight occasioned by the mode of representation of these events? Unless this is so, Hume's explanation will not even get off the ground, except by means of the stipulation that any case to which it does not apply must involve an unassimilated residue of pain, and therefore does not fall within the scope of Hume's problem. And this would immediately raise the question—it is one to which I shall return—whether Hume's conception of the problem is unduly narrow or quite wrong-headed.

But suppose we make a further concession to Hume and allow that a negative emotion undergone by the spectator is less painful than his delight in the mode of representation is delightful. How should we answer the third question I raised? Is it plausible to suppose that the superior strength of the pleasure derived from the manner of representation allows it to capture the "spirit and vehemence" of the negative emotion, and at one and the same time to efface the painful element of the experience and to increase the pleasurable? And how exactly is the alleged process of conversion or transformation of pain into pleasure in the aesthetic experience of a well-written tragedy supposed to work? Is the spectator supposed to experience a painful negative emotion fleetingly, which is then rapidly converted into pleasure, or is the spectator's ongoing delight in the mode of representation supposed to have the result that although a negative emotion arises it is deprived at birth of the unpleasurableness normally intrinsic to it? Although Hume's text is certainly less than crystal clear, his idea appears to be that the spectator *never experiences* the unpleasantness normally associated with the negative emotion he undergoes in response to the tragic incidents represented to him, his prevailing delight in the manner of the artistic representation lying in wait for the nourishment afforded it by a negative emotion and immediately appropriating the emotion's "impulse" to increase its own delight. But is there in fact any reason to believe that there is a process of transformation at work in the experience of a well-written tragedy, whereby the allegedly predominant emotion of delight swallows up the negative emotion, yielding an especially powerful pleasure? I believe not.

Hume advances two kinds of illustration in support of his theory: (i) other instances where a predominant emotion is given greater force by harnessing to itself the power of a subordinate emotion it has converted into it; and (ii) particular instances where a negative emotion is predominant over the delight in the manner of representation and where, in accordance with the principle Hume is appealing to, an effect takes place contrary to that which occurs in the breast of the spectator of a well-written tragedy, the painfulness of the negative emotion being in this case magnified by the subordinate emotion converted into it (*Essays*, 221-24).

The illustrations of the first kind form a motley assortment, and it would be tiresome to work through all of them. But let me mention three of the supposed instances of his principle. Hume begins with the case of novelty and alleges that, although novelty in itself is agreeable, whether an event excites a positive or a negative emotion, the emotion will be stronger if the event is new or unusual: the subordinate emotion of novelty is converted into the predominant emotion, whatever that

may be. Apart from any other considerations, this is obviously an unhappy illustration of Hume's principle in that the interest in an event that is occasioned by its novelty—Hume refers to that fact that our attention is attracted to what is novel—cannot properly be thought of as an emotion (in the sense in which Hume's tragic negative emotions are emotions), the "spirit and vehemence" of which might be taken over by a stronger emotion.

A second illustration concerns the effect of the arousal of a person's curiosity and impatience about a certain matter on the emotion he will feel when the truth (or falsity) is revealed to him. Hume claims that this effect will be a strengthening of the emotion, as in the case of Othello's jealousy, which receives additional force from the impatience artfully cultivated by the demonic Iago. Here, Hume says, the subordinate passion is readily transformed into the predominant one. But again, although for a different reason, this illustration provides no support for Hume's theory of a spectator's tragic emotions. For the illustration is merely one in which a person's condition at one time increases the strength of his condition at a later time, the earlier condition ceasing at the onset of the later, rather than enduring through the change (perhaps in a transformed shape). The spectator of a well-written tragedy is supposed to be in a pleasant condition into which a negative emotion intrudes, and which conquers the intruding subordinate emotion, removes its unpleasantness, and harnesses its force to increase its own pleasure. The subordinate emotion is excited in the spectator at a time when he is, according to Hume, experiencing pleasure, and its transformed presence swells the spectator's delight. The principle that accounts for the strength of a person's emotion in Hume's second illustration is therefore not of the right kind to explain the nature of a spectator's tragic emotions, for the condition of the tragic spectator is not comparable in the relevant respect.

A third illustration is Hume's application of the proverbial saying that absence makes the heart grow fonder: the lover experiences absence from the loved one with great uneasiness, but an uneasy absence increases the "force and violence" of the love, and love is an agreeable emotion. But this is no more plausible as an illustration of Hume's principle of predominant and subordinate emotions than the others. If the application of the maxim is intended to make the point that absence increases the lover's desire to see the loved one, Hume's principle receives no support from it, for a frustrated desire is not an agreeable emotion. If the lover is supposed to experience a more agreeable emotion of love on return, the illustration is defective for the same reason as the second illustration: the uneasiness of absence ceases when the lovers are reunited. If, finally, the lover is supposed to experience a more pleasurable feeling of love for the loved one *in*

absentia, either the lover experiences this at the same time as the continuing uneasiness (which seems unlikely), or the lover takes refuge from the uneasiness of absence by an especially fond dwelling on the loved one; and neither possibility provides the required support for Hume's principle.

So much for the illustrations of the first kind.

Hume's illustrations of the second kind—ones where a negative emotion is predominant over the delight occasioned by the manner of representation, the painfulness of the negative emotion being magnified by the subordinate emotion of delight converted into it—are no more successful. It is true—to take the first of these illustrations—that it would not be (in Hume's words) "a good expedient for comforting an afflicted parent, to exaggerate, with all the force of elocution, the irreparable loss, which he has met with by the death of a favourite child ... The more power of imagination and expression you here employ, the more you encrease his despair and affliction" (*Essays*, 223). But the reason for this is unlikely to be that the parent's grief converts the force of his delight in the manner in which the loss he has suffered is recounted to him into the predominant emotion, for he is unlikely to derive any satisfaction from the mode of representation. The explanation is more likely to be that the narration focuses the parent's mind on the nature and magnitude of the loss, the vivid realisation of what has been lost causing the parent's grief to well up.

The same objection applies to the case of Verres, whose shame, confusion and terror (and so his pain and uneasiness) increased, we are to believe, "in proportion to the noble eloquence and vehemence of CICERO" (*Essays*, 223): it is unlikely that Verres, as Hume asserts, derived pleasure from the "beauties" of Cicero's eloquence, the pleasure being less strong than the negative emotions aroused in him, which therefore (according to Hume's principle) gained in strength. And the example of Lord Clarendon, who hurried over the death of Charles I in his history of the civil war, is no better, for Hume needs to show not only that a contemporary reader of Clarendon's history would be liable to feel more painfully about Charles' death than a later reader, but that the contemporary would have derived pleasure from Clarendon's prose if it had included the circumstances of Charles' execution, and this pleasure would have magnified the contemporary's distress over Charles' fate.

My answer to the third question I have directed at Hume's account is therefore that Hume fails to make plausible his claim that the spectator's predominant emotion of delight in the manner of representation attracts to itself the vehemence of the negative emotions he undergoes and accordingly both erases the unpleasurable element of the experience and increases the pleasurable. But this

question is based on the assumption that the spectator derives pleasure from the manner of representation and that this emotion is stronger than any negative emotion aroused in him in virtue of what is represented. And it is now time to turn to my first question, which was whether there is (always) an independent pleasure that the spectator derives from the manner of representation of the tragic incidents in a well-written tragedy.

What is it for a tragedy to be well-written? One way in which the idea can be understood is that the tragedy is written in such a manner that it is a source of delight independent of its suitability to arouse the desired negative emotions in the spectator. Another is that it is written in such a way that it is highly effective in encouraging the spectator to imagine the make-believe world it represents and to respond to its tragic incidents with the right negative emotions. Now Hume's explanation of the pleasurable nature of the spectator's experience of negative emotions directed at the represented tragedy requires the first interpretation of the concept of a well-written tragedy. For if the tragedy is well-written only in the second sense—or if this is the only sense in which the spectator experiences the tragedy as being well-written—the spectator's admiration for the playwright's artistry is not available as an explanation of the transformation of the spectator's negative emotions into delight. The spectator delights in the writer's artistry inasmuch as he appreciates the writer's ability to engage his emotions with the plight of the play's tragic characters. But this delight is conditional upon the spectator's *valuing* the experience of the negative emotions aroused in him and could not be adduced without circularity as the explanation of the delightfulness of the experience. Hence, the first interpretation of the idea of a well-written tragedy is the only one available to Hume. But now his account is open to the objection that it posits in the spectator a pleasure that, although possible, is unlikely to have a widespread occurrence, and certainly will be absent from the experience of many a willing and moved spectator of a tragedy. When a spectator of a tragedy finds himself reacting to what is represented with negative emotions, if he prescinds from the play's power to evoke these emotions in him, he is not required to find in himself an independent delight in the manner of representation, on pain of not valuing his experience of the play.

I now want to make good a claim I made earlier, but did not elucidate, to the effect that Hume appears to operate with two different, although related, notions of the strength of an emotion: (i) the degree of ease or unease with which it is experienced, and (ii) the vehemence of the "movements" of the emotion. Throughout the essay Hume refers to the "movements" of the various emotions, some of these movements being delightful, some painful. Hume maintains that when an emotion

transforms a weaker concurrent emotion of the opposite sign, the following two things happen: (i) the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the weaker emotion is erased by "something stronger of an opposite kind," and (ii) the entire "impulse" or "spirit and vehemence" or "movement" of the weaker emotion is transformed into the hedonic quality of the stronger emotion, thus increasing its strength (*Essays*, 220). It is likely that he had in mind the movements of the Cartesian "animal spirits," the alleged cause of the passions, but it would not matter if he was thinking of less subtle movements in the body, such as those that figure in the James-Lange theory of the emotions.[3] Whatever the exact nature of these movements is supposed to be, Hume appears to have thought that the nature of the hedonic sign with which an emotion is experienced is a function of the nature of the movements of this kind that take place when the emotion is undergone, and the degree of pleasure or pain is determined by the magnitude of the commotion. Only in this way, I suggest, can we make sense of Hume's notion of emotional transformation: the more powerful movement imposes its own *manner* of movement on the weaker but without diminishing its energy, so that the manner of movement of the fusion of the two emotions is of the same kind as that of the predominant emotion but of greater magnitude than the predominant emotion in its pure state.[4] But in the absence of an articulated theory of pleasure—one that specifies the conditions under which the "movements" that occur in a subject's body when an emotion is undergone will be experienced with pleasure, or on the other hand pain—Hume's thought must be unconvincing. For, apart from any other considerations, it is certainly *possible* to experience two emotions concurrently (admiration and envy, say), one positive and the other negative, one stronger than the other, the "predominant" emotion *not* effacing, overpowering and converting the weaker emotion: it is not a *sufficient* condition for the Humean transformation of concurrent emotions that one is stronger than the other. What is it, therefore, that is distinctive of the condition of the spectator of a well-written tragedy in virtue of which emotional fusion (allegedly) takes place? Is it supposed to be impossible for a spectator of a well-written tragedy to undergo the two emotions in Hume's account—delight in the manner of representation and distress in virtue of what is represented—and for the predominant emotion of delight to fail to convert the current of the negative emotion to its own course? Hume has no answer to these questions and his doctrine of the conversion of the "movements" of one emotion into those of another is only a piece of vague a priori speculation, introduced to underpin his account of the tragic spectator's problematic experience of negative emotions, which is alleged to be both painless and highly pleasurable.

I hope that I have now given reason to reject Hume's solution of the problem he set himself to resolve. But I must discharge a promise I made earlier, which was to return to the question whether Hume's conception of the problem presented by the tragic spectator's emotional response is unduly narrow or indeed wrong-headed. Hume attempts to explain the intense and unqualifiedly pleasurable experience of a spectator of a well-written tragedy who responds to the tragic nature of the incidents represented in the play with negative emotions. But his conception suffers from two related defects. First, it limits the problem to the experience of spectators who are not pained by the represented suffering and misfortune of the tragedy's sympathetic characters. Second, it applies only to spectators who undergo negative emotions without in any way suffering, which seems impossible if unpleasantness is intrinsic to the experience of these emotions and these emotions are experienced in a full-blooded form in response to what is represented. For Hume, what I have called a negative emotion is one that is such that if it is the *only* emotion experienced by someone on a certain occasion, then necessarily it is experienced as unpleasant. This is what Hume means by saying that such an emotion is *in itself* "disagreeable and uneasy." Now it might be possible to question whether every emotion cited by Hume as being in itself unpleasant and aroused in the breast of a delighted spectator of a well-written tragedy is really a negative emotion. Is it intrinsic to the isolated experience of grief, sorrow, terror, anxiety, resentment, compassion and indignation that it is, in Hume's language, "uneasy"? But I shall not pursue this tack. For insofar as any emotion is not a negative emotion there is no apparent difficulty in the idea that it should be experienced with pleasure when aroused by the tragic incidents in a play. And in any case it is plausible that most, if not all, of the emotions Hume mentions *are* in themselves disagreeable, and all that Hume needs for his problem is that at least one of these emotions is a negative emotion and is sometimes experienced by spectators of a well-written tragedy. But the concession that negative emotions *are* aroused in the tragic spectator's breast serves only to highlight the difficulty for Hume's conception of the problem. For, if it is intrinsic to the experience of an emotion when suffered in isolation that it is disagreeable, a natural explanation of this fact is that it is intrinsic to the *concept* of that kind of emotion that it is undergone with some degree of pain or unease. But that would make it *impossible* for Hume's tragic spectator to undergo such an emotion without in any way suffering, unless the emotion were to be experienced in some suitably watered down form, involving only the bodily sensations characteristic of the emotion, for example. And if the spectator is not to be credited with only a diminished form of the emotion, lacking its constitutive hedonic quality—if the spectator is

allowed to undergo the emotion in its full-blooded form—it is necessary to reformulate the problem of tragedy and to reject Hume's conception of the problem. In particular, the problem should not be restricted to the experience of spectators who are not pained by the represented suffering and misfortune of the play's tragic characters, but should cover the experience of spectators who find scenes in the tragedy distressing or the entire play disquieting or harrowing.

There are two obvious ways in which the problem might be reformulated. Both of these reformulations deviate from Hume's understanding of the issue, one more radically than the other. First, it might be suggested that the problem is to account for the fact that a spectator of a tragedy can respond with a negative emotion (which is experienced as "disagreeable and uneasy") and *at the same time* derive pleasure from the arousal of the emotion. Second, it might be suggested that the problem is that of explaining why it is that spectators find it intrinsically rewarding to undergo an experience which involves the arousal of negative emotions. The main difference between the two suggestions is that whereas the first builds into the problem the fact that a spectator experiences pleasure at the very moment he suffers the negative emotion—indeed, he derives pleasure *from* experiencing the negative emotion—the second assumes only that the spectator's experience of the tragedy is, all told, intrinsically rewarding to him. In other words, the second suggestion neither restricts itself to pleasure nor focuses upon just the moment at which the spectator reacts with a negative emotion. Now each reformulation of the problem deprives the phenomenon to be explained of the apparently paradoxical quality assigned to it by Hume. For whereas there seems to be an inherent difficulty in the idea that someone should experience a negative emotion as pleasurable and in no respect disagreeable, there is no inherent difficulty in the idea that someone should derive pleasure from his experience of a negative emotion or should find intrinsically rewarding an experience that involves his undergoing a negative emotion. All that is required is, in the first case, an indication of the nature of the pleasure supplied by the experience of a negative emotion and, in the second case, an indication of the reason for which the person finds the experience intrinsically rewarding; and it does not even appear to be problematic to suppose that explanations of the required kinds are available.

But if this is so, which is the proper reformulation of Hume's problem? The answer is that this is an unnecessary choice, for each of the suggested problems is genuine and neither recommends itself unequivocally as the natural heir to the problem Hume posed. However, it is the second problem that is of greater significance in *the philosophy of art*, since the concept of artistic value is, I believe, to be

elucidated in terms of the more general idea of an experience's being in some way intrinsically rewarding, rather than the more specific idea of pleasure.[5]

Be that as it may, how should the questions bequeathed by these reformulations of Hume's problem be answered? How is it possible for a spectator to derive pleasure from the arousal of a negative emotion directed at what the work of art represents? And what explains the fact that a spectator can find intrinsically rewarding an experience that involves his undergoing a negative emotion directed at the represented content of the work of art?

Before I answer these questions it is necessary to clarify them. As I have just formulated them, they make no reference to the specific notion of tragedy with which Aristotle, Schiller and Hegel, for example, were concerned, according to which a tragedy is a dramatic representation of a certain kind. It is clear that Hume's own problem, although focused upon tragic drama, was not thought of by him as being restricted to that art form, and his solution to the problem, apart from the inessential use of the agreeableness of "imitation," would apply to *all* cases in which someone responds to a work of art he values with a negative emotion, since it exploits only (i) delight in the manner of representation, (ii) the arousal of negative emotion (no matter of what kind) by what is represented, and (iii) transformation of the weaker into the stronger emotion. Accordingly, the various attempts to delineate the features that have been thought to be *distinctive* of tragedy, or essential to its supposedly distinctive effect or its highest artistic value, do not figure in Hume's essay and play no role in his account of the seemingly problematic pleasure of the spectator. For example, Aristotle, unlike Hume, identified two specific emotions, each defined as being essentially painful, as the distinctively tragic ones—pity (at the sorrow of others) and, inseparable from it, fear (that we might feel sorrow ourselves)—and he claimed that the tragic *pleasure* is that of pity and fear, believing that by arousing pity and fear tragedy achieves an alleviating relief of pitiful and fearful emotional dispositions. Schiller, on the other hand, maintained that the principal object of the art of tragedy is the pleasure of *pity* (compassion, not pity *and* fear), and he identified this pleasure as the satisfaction or gratification the spectator experiences from his enhanced consciousness of the possibility of the perfect freedom of the will possessed by human beings in their character as moral agents. Now it is immaterial to my present purpose whether or not the questions I have proposed are restricted to tragic drama. But it is necessary to fix upon *some* interpretation of these questions, and it will be simpler to allow them the widest scope, so that they apply to all representational

works of art whose representational content is an appropriate object of a negative emotion.

What, then, is the answer to these questions? The answer is that they have no answer, that is to say, neither of them has a single answer. For there is more than one way in which a negative emotion directed at the represented content of a work of art can be a source of pleasure and more than one reason for finding an experience of a work of art that involves undergoing negative emotions directed at the unhappiness or misfortune of the work's characters intrinsically rewarding. And it should be obvious, I believe, that this is the right answer and that there is no reason to expect there to be a unitary explanation in either case, but especially in the case of the second problem. For given the diversity both of spectators and representational works of art which elicit a negative emotional response to their representational content, there are many possible explanations of each of the facts that are to be accounted for. The explanations do not need to confine themselves to the features *in common* to the class of experiences they concern, but can reach into the different psychologies of their subjects and also the different natures of the objects to which these subjects react with forms of suffering in aesthetic responses that they find intrinsically rewarding. The proper methodology is therefore a case by case, or at least type by type, examination.

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1. David Hume, "Of Tragedy," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, rev. ed., ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), 216 (hereafter cited as *Essays*).
2. Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy* 75, no. 1 (January 1978).
3. Hume mentions the animal spirits on the first page of bk. 2 of the *Treatise*; equates emotion with movement of spirits in pt. 2, sec. 8; and speaks of the spirits being excited in his treatment of emotional conversion in pt. 3, secs. 4 and 5, and in the appendix (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge [Oxford, 1960], 631 [hereafter cited as "T"]).
4. When, in the *Treatise*, 2.3.4, Hume enunciates his doctrine that a predominant emotion "swallows up the inferior, and converts it into itself," he immediately proceeds to say that "[t]he spirits, when once excited, easily receive a change in their direction" (T 420).
5. See my "Belief and Sincerity in Poetry," *Pleasure, Preference and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge, 1983), 153ff.