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SCIENCE AND AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

SCIENCE
AND AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

A STUDY

IN TAINE'S CRITICAL METHOD

by

SHOLOM J. KAHN

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FOREWORD

Some authors fade away altogether; some date; some age; some remain indomitably alive. I could not tell to which category Hippolyte Taine should be consigned. He was part of my youth, that is to say of a world before two floods. Once his awe-struck rebellious child, I was afraid his figure, still so vivid in my mind, would turn to dust at the touch of younger hands. I read Sholom J. Kahn's thorough and sensitive study, first with misgivings, then with eagerness, and at the end with gratitude. He has not destroyed the Taine I revered, nor the Taine I combated. Training the light of a new generation upon a personality at the same time painfully definite and yet elusive, he has helped me recover my own past.

But this work is not intended for a wistful vanishing generation. It has its dramatic interest, and its lessons, for young men of today. The appeal of Taine is first of all historical: he is the perfect intellectual representative of his period. Sainte-Beuve was older, a repentant survivor of early romanticism; the blend of scholarship, aestheticism, sentiment, and irony in Renan remained unique. Taine is 'Second Empire' through and through; as much as the Exposition of 1867, the grand avenues hacked out by Haussmann, Garnier's Opera—and Hortense Schneider, for he too contributed to *La Vie Parisienne*.

History is not of the dead: history is 'the presence of the past'. Taine is with us still: not wholly for our good. With austere dignity, he expressed the materialistic philosophy which, today more than ever, is guiding the two giants of the modern world, the Soviet Union and the United States. Many of us still believe with him that 'vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar'; many are still asserting, in more confused terms, that culture is conditioned, and perhaps even determined, by 'race, environment, and time'; many are still attempting to catch the spirit of art in the coarse mesh of a 'realistic' doctrine. There is a Taine lurking in the heart of every critic.

We have much to learn from Taine, especially by wrestling with him. His logic, his lucidity—two rare forms of intellectual courage—his erudition, are a constant challenge. Taine cannot be shrugged away. I once compared him with an instrument at the same time robust and sensitive, but 'untrue': *un grand esprit faux*. I do not recant. But a sensitive instrument, once you have measured its aberration, can be used to good scientific purpose; it is a coarse instrument, even if roughly accurate, that is of little avail for searching and delicate work.

Back of Taine's assertiveness, we can descry a depth of anguish and despair. Like Baudelaire and Flaubert, he belonged to a generation of wounded romanticists. Science—for he thought of himself as a scientist—was his refuge; his tower, not of ivory, but of grey steel. The fastness turned into a jail: he tried to be a Euclid, a Spinoza, a Darwin, and he was first of all a soul in prison. Without any compromise with romance or melodrama, Dr. Kahn gives us glimpses of the haggard face behind the bars.

This is a study that Taine himself would have enjoyed, for it is respectful and sympathetic as well as rigorous and fearless. A Tainean of nearly sixty years' standing is proud to be its sponsor.

ALBERT GUÉRARD

Brandeis University

PREFACE

JUDGED in terms of sheer literary accomplishment and influence, the career of Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), leader of the Naturalist movement in French criticism, should repay close attention. As recently as 1911, one of his American critics could write: 'Taine nearly solved the problem of art and so of poetry.' The author of the famous *History of English Literature*, *Lectures on Art*, *On Intelligence*, and *The Origins of Contemporary France*—as well as of justly popular travel books and essays on Balzac, La Fontaine, Livy, Saint-Simon, Racine, Stendhal, and a host of others—demands that we take his philosophy seriously, since it bore such opulent fruit. His ideas helped shape the novels of Zola, and the criticism of Brandes and Parrington, among many others; two generations of writers and scholars in Europe and America were more or less under his spell.

Yet our purpose in this study is not primarily historical. It derives, rather, from the fact that the critic today seems to be confronted with two incompatible goals. On the one hand, he is expected to be an analyst, both textual and historical: the greenest undergraduate is aware of the need for careful *explications des textes*; for recognition of mythical and symbolic significances, of levels of meaning, of ironic and other complexities of structure; and for knowledge of social and intellectual backgrounds. These are commonplaces of literary study in our universities, and they all point in the direction of scholarship which prides itself on the most scrupulous *objectivity*. On the other hand, the responsible, sensitive student of literature and the arts, now more than ever, finds it impossible to escape the need for *value judgments*. Greatness and mediocrity are ever with us, and the precariousness with which civilizations hang in the balance today makes possession of a soundly based, relatively stable, tradition in the humanities seem infinitely precious. Since survival itself is involved, the question of what should be preserved becomes increasingly urgent. Hence the turmoil in critical theory.

Typical among recent statements of the problem is Cleanth Brooks' essay on 'Criticism, History, and Critical Relativism', in *The Well Wrought Urn*. Without denying the relevance of historical study, Mr. Brooks complains that 'we have gone to school to the anthropologists and the cultural historians assiduously, and we have learned their lesson almost too well' (p. 197). He reviews the opinions of F. A. Pottle, Yvor Winters, John Crowe Ransom, and others on the issue; and defends his own critical practice, in which 'the specific view taken in the particular poem, and . . . how the attitude of the poem was made to inform the poem' (p. 205) is the centre of interest, and in which 'the judgments are very frankly treated as if they were universal judgments' (p. 199). It is precisely because the issue of scientific analysis versus aesthetic and moral judgment is still so very much alive that we turn with such interest to the works of Taine.

Our present essay has a two-fold purpose: first, an exposition and discussion of Taine's theories, and some of his practice, as a critic of literature and art; and second, a more general consideration of the chief issues raised by his central problem and enterprise, namely, the attempt to approach the analysis and judgment of works of art historically, and thus to provide an objective basis for criticism.

Though this is not an attempt at a personal biography of Taine, the essential facts are included: Part One, by a detailed examination of his early ideas, as revealed especially in his student notebooks, attempts to demonstrate the unity of his intellectual development; and biographical notes to a 'Selected Bibliography' carry the story forward through 1871.

Since attention is restricted chiefly to Taine's writings on literature and art, the discussion ends, rather abruptly, with the Franco-Prussian war, about the time when he published his *Notes on England* in 1871, at the age of 43. Two more decades of important writings were to follow, but the monumental historical opus, entitled *The Origins of Contemporary France*, which absorbed his energies almost entirely during those years, raises a host of non-aesthetic issues with which we have not been concerned. However, as Ferdinand Brunetière and others have pointed out, this last period really witnessed the application of the same tools of analysis, formerly applied to works of art, to a new subject-matter: from a methodological point of view, very little, if any-

thing, was added. And the previous two decades, beginning with the *Essay on the Fables of La Fontaine* (1853) and continuing through the publication of his important psychological work *On Intelligence* in 1870, present us with a body of critical writing of rare quality and remarkable unity of plan and execution. As we shall see, *On Intelligence* was the logical culmination and expression of doctrines already contained in the *History of English Literature* (1863) and *Lectures on Art* (1865–1869), and, with the completion of that work, the essential story had been told: philosophically, what followed was anti-climax.

The critical exposition of Taine's theory of criticism is accomplished chiefly in Part Two: Analysis and Criticism, and in Chapter XII ('From Analysis to Judgment'). The reader who lacks an interest in metaphysical and logical issues may prefer to read Chapter II last. Discussion of the more general problem of the relations between science and aesthetic judgment has required consideration of the issues raised by the so-called 'new criticism' (Chapter X) and of the philosophic issues involved in 'type analysis' (Chapter XI); many readers will prefer to begin with these chapters. We have found that, despite Taine's limitations as a person, scientist, and philosopher, study of his critical writings provides an excellent introduction to most of the central problems of historical and comparative methods in the study of literature and art.

For guidance in the preparation of this study, I am especially indebted, among my teachers at Columbia University, to Professor Irwin Edman, whose courses in the Philosophy of Art and Criticism first suggested the topic; to Professor John H. Randall, Jr., in whose teaching I have found an example of clear and historically grounded thinking; to Professor James Gutmann, for his suggestions and unfailing personal encouragement; and to Professor Wilbur M. Frohock, Department of Romance Languages, whose knowledge of French literary criticism was put so generously at my disposal. I am conscious of having profited, at various stages in the writing, from suggestions and criticisms by the following: Professors Ernest Nagel, Susanne K. Langer, Horace L. Friess, Charles Frankel, and John R. Everett, Department of Philosophy; Professor Emery Neff, Department of English; and Professor Jean-Albert Bédé, Department of Romance Languages—at Columbia University; and to Dr. Ben-Ami Scharfstein, and Messrs. David Zesmer, Ralph Cohen, Alfred J.

Kahn, T. H. Fujimara, and Knut Behr. Professors Albert L. Guérard, Brandeis University, and René Wellek, Yale University, have also given me the benefit of their criticisms. I am grateful to Miss Evelyn Boyce, of the Columbia University Press, for helpful suggestions.

The Hebrew University

Jerusalem, 1952

PART ONE

★

THE PROBLEM IN TAINE

CHAPTER I

SCIENCE VERSUS CRITICISM?

Analysis Versus Judgment?

TAINE began his triple career as thinker, critic, and historian just about a century ago—yet he seems our contemporary. His grapplings with the problem of relating scientific analysis to aesthetic judgment are dramatized for us by an obvious fact of his biography. Thus, the *Lectures on Art*, which he delivered as Professor of Aesthetics and the History of Art in the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, were written over a period of half a decade, and the two more strictly theoretical parts were separated by an interval of two years. The first in the series (*The Philosophy of Art*, based on lectures delivered during the winter of 1864) was an attempt at a *scientifically objective* statement 'On the Nature of the Work of Art', and 'On the Production of the Work of Art', and stressed opposition to dogmatism and the need for sympathy for all schools of art; but *The Ideal in Art* (based on lectures delivered during the winter of 1866) seemed to contradict these earlier lectures by stressing the need for *judgment* and setting up clearly defined scales of aesthetic value in terms of 'The Degree of Importance of the Character', 'The Degree of Beneficence in the Character', and 'The Converging Degree of Effects'.

It is partly on the basis of the supposed harmony or conflict between these two sets of lectures that critics of Taine have described his philosophy either as a unique synthesis or as an unresolved dualism; the latter, usually unfavourable, charge appears as a claim for a radical change of heart around the year 1865, or as an accusation of logical contradiction, vacillation, or eclecticism.[1] Part of our task, therefore, must be to sketch the story of Taine's intellectual development in so far as it relates to this issue (Chapter II).

However, the biographical question, though it has its own intrinsic interest, concerns us here only in so far as it throws light on the larger problem of the relations between science and criticism, between analysis and judgment. *If* Taine succeeded in combining the two processes, *how* did he do so, and what hints can we glean from his solution that may be applicable today? If he failed, what were the reasons? What specific categories did he attempt to apply? How do these need to be modified in the light of more recent knowledge? Like Taine, we are still under the spell of science, though somewhat more disenchanted. Perhaps those who cherish the humanities today may hope to find, in some of the answers to the above questions, a framework within which their own personal, aesthetic, and social values can be reconciled with the demands of scientific method.

The Problem in Our Century

Before plunging deeper into Taine, it should be useful and chastening to glance at the problem from a long-range historical perspective. It is surely no accident that so many during the last century (1850–1950) have stressed the relativism of standards and been wary of pronouncing critical judgments, since it has been a period of unprecedentedly rapid and profound changes, social, political, economic, technological, cultural, and intellectual.[2] The key-note of our century has been evolution and growth, and the feeling of rapidly accelerating development has tended to knock the props out from under conventional and traditional forms and criteria in literature and art. Our 'naturalistic temper'[3] has been most fully embodied in that searching habit of mind characteristic of the scientist, who, even when he does reach conclusions, considers his judgments to be tentative hypotheses subject to change. These, and other, cultural factors have naturally led to multiplied 'isms' and critical schools.

So profoundly have these changes penetrated what Joseph Wood Krutch once called 'the modern temper' that the very nature and function of criticism—indeed, its very possibility—has been subject to much scrutiny. Still confronted by endless 'criticisms of criticism', of which this study must perforce be another, we seem now to have entered a final stage of disintegration, characterized by 'Criticism of Criticism of Criticism'[4]—and should be about ready to come back to our senses! A fairly recent attempt at synthesis, *The Arts and the Art of Criticism*, by

Theodore M. Greene, may prove helpful in this regard. He defines the three major aspects of criticism as the historical, the re-creative, and the judicial, each of which has been stressed by an important European school, the modern, romantic, and neo-classic in turn.[5] What is so often forgotten in the heat of controversy is that every critic really worth his salt has *combined* awareness of traditions and careful reading with judgments of aesthetic worth. In truly great criticism (almost as rare as great poetry) these three functions are usually inextricably interwoven.

Nevertheless, even a cursory review of the history of criticism will reveal that the issue with which we are here concerned has been perennial. The historical or scientific approach, where it has been imaginatively used, may be seen as a more fully developed form of the romantic attempt at *re-creation of experience* by means of the work of art; thus, the science versus judgment problem has its ancestry in the Romantic versus Classic controversy of the early nineteenth century, in which the neo-classic, judicial type of criticism was under attack. And the history of that controversy, in turn, goes as far back as the ancient Greeks, via the intricate complexities of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions.

In the nineteenth century, the conflict took the dual form of the individual versus society and of the natural versus the supernatural. We begin to find in the Romantic movement an emphasis on the individual's private experience and ego-drives which leads naturally to an interest in psychology and a relativism in values; at the same time, appearing as the obverse of the same medal, the individual is confronted with the problem of finding his proper relation to the social environment and turns to history for his answers. Man-and-his-World thus became the prime subjects of scientific study, and it was in this sense that the Naturalism which Taine represents was the spiritual child of Romanticism.[6]

Opposition to Naturalism, in the name of moral values, metaphysics, and religion, has never disappeared, but instead has been gaining momentum and influence in the last half-century. The process began early in France, in part as a result of the disillusion which followed her defeat by Prussian arms in 1870; it came to a head in the well-known 'Manifesto of the Five', written by former disciples of Zola who criticized his *La Terre* as 'a corner of nature seen through a morbid *sensorium*' (1887); and anti-Naturalism was the dominant mood of France during the last decade of the century. Its inception in America can be dated best, perhaps,

from the publication by Irving Babbitt in 1912 of his highly controversial work on *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*; World War I gave impetus to anti-Naturalism, spear-headed by T. S. Eliot's poetry (*The Waste Land*, 1922) and by his criticism.[7] Norman Foerster summarized the aims of this movement as follows in 1930: 'The need of standards in life, in art, in criticism is more and more apparent, and naturalism has failed to provide standards. . . . Science gives us natural knowledge, not human objectives.'[8] A second World War, together with its destructive prologue and aftermath, has further sharpened the critical controversy between the relativists and those who stress the need for standards. It is against this background that we must analyze and evaluate the works of Taine, 'easily the most eminent of those who have attempted to make criticism scientific.'[9]

Biographical and Historical Explanations

Though our concern is primarily with the philosophical issue, it may further broaden our perspective if we mention briefly some of the biographical explanations which have been given of the supposed dualism in Taine. Applying Taine's own classification, we find that such analyses tend to stress the conflicts either in their subject's personality ('race') or in his socio-historical environment ('milieu' and 'moment').

Typical of the psychological analyses is a penetrating essay by Émile Zola, Taine's contemporary and literary disciple.[10] Describing him as one might a character in a novel, Zola noted that physically Taine was far from being big and forceful, unlike the writers and artists most admired in his criticism. On this basis, and on the internal evidence of Taine's style ('a strange fruit, with a peculiar flavour'),[11] Zola sensed a contradiction in Taine, between a would-be poet or artist and 'a dry and matter-of-fact man, a mathematician of thought, who creates a most singular effect when placed beside the lavish poet of whom I have just spoken.'[12]

Such an analysis would seem to be especially pertinent, in view of the fact that Taine thought of his own writings as so much 'applied psychology', but it is relevant here only in so far as it affected his practice as a critic. Obviously the critic's personality is involved in his judgments concerning the personalities of others, and, if the psychological method in criticism is valid at all, no critic can expect to escape its application to himself.[13] More

serious than the argument *ad hominem*, however, would be the question, not of Taine's individual personality nor of the psychological method in general, but of Taine's particular position as a psychologist and of its specific relations to his theory of criticism. The latter questions will be given due consideration in a later connection (Chapter IX).

The socio-historical critics are equally suggestive, though they too lead us into issues not directly related to our central theme. From a twentieth-century perspective especially, which includes the facts of two World Wars and continuing struggle between East and West in Europe, it is easy to see why Taine was so keenly aware of the national issue. For him, France was situated intellectually, as well as geographically, at a point mid-way between the extremes of England and Germany. Thus, for Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, 'Taine assumes an intermediate position between realism and idealism, in accordance with his general attitude between empiricism and rationalism. He is a realist in principle, since he defines art as the imitation of nature; but he is also an idealist when he adds that the object of this imitation is to express the essence of things by means of their "essential characteristic".'[14] Taine's realism is accounted for by his interest in the English tradition, though it also had its roots in the French 'idéologues'[15]; his idealism drew him to German metaphysics, especially Hegel. Whether there remained in Taine 'an ineradicable taint of duality', or whether he succeeded, as he thought he had, in maintaining 'a Spinozian or Hegelian view of the universe' and thus bridging what he considered to be the gap between England and Germany, is an issue on which Lévy-Bruhl's judgment is not decisive.[16]

As has already been suggested, Taine's works mirror conflicts internal to France as well as those involved in her relations with her neighbours. Thus, Edmund Wilson, in a work concerned with the writing of history, treats Taine under the heading, 'Decline of the Revolutionary Tradition', and points out that 'there was little moral inspiration for Taine in the France of the Second Empire'.[12] Paul Janet, fairly typical of the semi-official, conservative philosophy under Louis-Napoleon, saw Taine as a positivist wearing the cloak of idealism and engaged in a fruitless attempt to reconcile Hegel and Condillac; his conclusion was that 'in this we find the very negation of all metaphysics, and, I believe I may add, also of all morality.'[18]

Writing under the Third Republic and then witnessing the anti-Naturalist reaction, Ferdinand Brunetière was more sympathetic in his judgment, though he too recognized the moral conflict. Himself a convert to Roman Catholicism (1900) who had been deeply influenced by Darwinian ideas, he claimed that Taine had 'employed forty years of uninterrupted labour . . . to reinstate in eclecticism the principle he had most bitterly derided . . . the principle, that is, of the subordination of criticism and history to morality'.[19] Brunetière stressed the search for objective critical judgments in Taine's writings and saw his career as one of development rather than contradiction: '. . . he raised himself progressively to a viewpoint which was more general, higher, and more fruitful.'[20] Having sought his solutions in 'the experience of humanity' and steadily enlarged his horizon to include problems of psychology, literature, art, and social morality, Taine never quite returned to the God of his fathers[21]—as Brunetière would have had him do, and as so many were claiming they had, around the turn of the century.

Martha Wolfenstein narrows the socio-historic perspective even further to the specific facts of Taine's changing relations to his environment:

'Taine's philosophy of art revolves around one central problem, the problem of the relation of history to values. The question is whether we can reconcile a universal standard of value with the historical variations of art and taste. Taine began by asserting that it was not possible. . . . Taine could not, however, eliminate all considerations of value. Unacknowledged value-judgments forced their way into his historical studies. Eventually Taine recognized this fact, and confronted the task of formulating and justifying his implicit criteria. But the standard of value which he proceeded to elaborate remained uncoordinated with his earlier historical approach.'[22]

According to this view, the turning point came around 1865: from 1852 to 1864, Taine was an historical relativist, presumably because during those years he was at odds with society and an outsider to academic circles; his recognition of the need for 'justifying his implicit criteria' began in 1865, after the success of his *History of English Literature* and his appointment to the École des Beaux-Arts. Though there may be some validity in this analysis, it exaggerates both the presumed contradiction and the

extent of the change, which was one of emphasis rather than basic philosophy or method.

These varied criticisms of Taine, which could easily be multiplied, have been chosen chiefly to illustrate the charges of dualism, since the general direction of the remainder of this study will be to underscore the unity of his thought. Their variety indicates not only that there is a very real problem, but also that Taine's achievement was both important and complex; otherwise he would long since have been relegated either to the dust heap or to a neat little pigeon-hole in the history of criticism. The extent to which his ideas have served as a call to critical battles *may* be indicative, further, not so much of confusions in Taine as of diversities among his critics: the positivists find him idealist, the idealists find him positivist, and both agree on his 'dualism'. Perhaps it was not Taine, but rather his critics and his decadent environment that were 'tragically torn'.

A Sketch of Taine's Solution

What are the essentials of Taine's attempt at a solution of the problem created by the conflict between science and criticism, whose nature and background have been thus briefly stated? A concise formulation of his scientific goal can be found in notes, written in 1858, for a work 'On Laws in History':

'In other terms, the two great researches are:

'(1) Given an action, seek the psychological state which is its antecedent;

'(2) Given a psychological state, seek the psychological and non-psychological conditions which are its antecedent.'[23]

Included in the connotation of the term 'action', for Taine, were, of course, all the phenomena, 'systems', and 'groups' of facts, as he designates them elsewhere, which are mentioned in the 'Introduction' to the *History of English Literature*: religion, literature, music, art, and philosophy; the family and the state; science, statecraft, agriculture, and industry—in other words, culture, in the broadest, anthropological sense.

In his use of this complex stuff of history, Taine tried to strike a happy medium between the extreme positions of idealism and materialism and to maintain that non-reductive fullness of perspective which has been the goal of naturalists down the ages. Starting and ending in the spirit of Spinoza's proposition

(Proposition VII, Part II, of the *Ethics*) that 'The order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas,' it seemed natural to him that psychology, treated both as effect and as cause, should be his central concern, since he was applying scientific method to the 'moral sciences' or humanities.

The first of the two lines of research mentioned indicates the first step in Taine's studies of literature, art, or history: starting from the cultural, contextual facts (poems, paintings, philosophies, movements, institutions), he sought the psychological 'forces', the 'dominant faculties' of the men who had given them birth. This, in scientific dress, was a continuation of the Romantic critic's attempt at an imaginative recreation of the individual experience which brought forth the work of art ('seek the psychological state which is its antecedent').

The second line of research found its purest expression in Taine's psychological work (*On Intelligence*), which sought the causes of conscious states in their antecedent conditions, namely, the body and its nervous system. Its application to literary and artistic study took him far beyond the early Romantics into all the ramifications of the historical method and led to his familiar formula of 'la race, le milieu, et le moment', which we shall translate as 'race, environment, and time' ('the psychological and non-psychological conditions').

In terms of this framework, Taine insisted repeatedly that his entire enterprise was a kind of 'applied psychology'. The key to his critical practice was a version of the inductive method which stressed the importance of *abstraction*. Starting from particular facts, he tried to rise to a level of generalization concerning those facts which approximated the laws of science.

Finally, and this is central to the point at issue, since both lines of research revealed the essential causes of the works under consideration, they would also thereby reveal the relations of those works to the hierarchy of ideal values, which existed for Taine in reality. As we shall see, this was not a late accretion to his way of thinking, but an essential part of his philosophy and method from the start: the more fully a work of art embodied the nature of things, the more closely did it approach the ideal, and the greater was its value. For criticism, therefore, *the scientific search for causes and the desire for a standard of judgment were ultimately one*. The Romantic was fused with the Classical; scientific (psychological-historical) and judicial criticism met, as in the great example of Aristotle.

This study of Taine's method is divided into three main parts. The first, a sketch of the problem and Taine's intellectual development through 1852, his year as a teacher in the provinces, provides necessary background information and attempts to answer the question of the unity of his thought by probing its origins: most of the essentials of his system are found to have been present in his student notes, written before he reached the age of twenty-four.

The second part shifts from chronology to a logical exposition and critical discussion of the chief categories employed by Taine in his analyses (abstraction, history, psychology, and causation; race, environment, time, and master faculty) and concludes with a brief consideration of the problem of the relations between analysis and value judgments. This last, the central point at issue, is treated in some detail in Part Three, where it is seen to involve philosophic issues which have clustered around the problems of 'type' analysis. After an attempt is made at a functional understanding of this concept and at distinguishing its applications in the arts from those in the sciences, we conclude with a brief appraisal of Taine's strengths and weaknesses and of his permanent contributions to the philosophy and practice of criticism.

NOTES

[1] Thus, for Albert L. Guérard, Taine was 'tragically torn. French Rationalism, German Idealism, English Empiricism, the historical spirit that urged the acceptance of Christianity, the experimental method which suggested the agnostic attitude, all strove for his allegiance. He never was able to harmonize Descartes, Hegel, Bacon, Bossuet, Darwin. . . .' *Literature and Society*, p. 88.

[2] Consider Julian Huxley's summary of scientific developments: '. . . during the last hundred years each decade has seen at least one major change—if we are to choose ten such, let us select photography, the theory of evolution, electro-magnetic theory with its application in the shape of electric light and power, the germ theory of disease, the cinema, radioactivity and the new theories of matter and energy, wireless and television, the internal combustion engine, chemical synthetics, and atomic fission.' *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy*, p. 9.

[3] Irwin Edman's phrase, in *American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow*, pp. 139–152.

[4] See an essay with that title by H. L. Mencken, in *Criticism in America, Its Function and Status*.

[5] *Op. cit.*, Chapter XX, 'The Nature and Criteria of Criticism'.

[6] There is general agreement on this historical point among critics in both camps. Representative of the Romantic-Naturalist point of view is Jacques

Barzun, *Romanticism and the Modern Ego*, pp. 138, 302–305; representative of the neo-humanist point of view is Norman Foerster, *Towards Standards: A Study of the Present Critical Movement in American Letters*, who carries the historical analysis back to the Renaissance (pp. 34, 36, 80).

[7] Climaxed by Eliot's dramatic declaration that he was a royalist in politics, an Anglo-Catholic in religion, and a classicist in literature (1928, in *For Lancelot Andrews*).

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. ix.

[9] Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 341.

[10] 'M. H. Taine, Artiste.'

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 223, S.J.K.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 205, S.J.K. See also Hilda Laura Norman, 'The Personality of Hippolyte Taine', which also stresses the contradictions in his character. On the other hand, K. de Schaepdryver's *Hippolyte Taine: Essai sur l'unité de sa pensée*, finds an overall unity in Taine's personality and ideas, 'a prodigious power of synthesis' [p. 163, S.J.K.].

[13] See, for example, O. Petrovitch's excellent thesis, *H. Taine, Historien Littéraire du XVIIe siècle*, which attributes Taine's anti-classical taste 'to his temperament, to the spirit of his time, to Shakespeare, and above all to Stendhal . . .' [p. 55, S.J.K.]. Like Zola, Petrovitch found that 'Fortunately, beside the man with a system, there is in Taine also an artist with a lively sense of the beauties of literature, the latter correcting and completing the former; and it was by virtue of the latter that his works surpassed his method' [p. 83, S.J.K.].

[14] *History of Modern Philosophy in France*, p. 430.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 422.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 432–434.

[17] *To the Finland Station*, p. 51.

[18] *La Crise philosophique*, p. 52, S.J.K.

[19] *Manual of the History of French Literature*, p. 515.

[20] 'L'Œuvre Critique de Taine', p. 221, S.J.K.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 250–252.

[22] 'The Social Background of Taine's Philosophy of Art', p. 332.

[23] Chevrillon, *Taine*, p. 407, S.J.K.

CHAPTER II

FORMATION OF A METHOD
(1828–1852)

Taine's First Two Decades

By the time Taine enrolled as a student in the Normal School (in November, 1848, at the age of twenty), the main patterns of his character and intellect were already visible. Absorbed in philosophy, aloof from the political events of that hectic year, he succeeded in formulating, during three years of intense study and intellectual activity, all the main outlines of a philosophy which he was to spend the rest of his life developing and demonstrating.[1]

One of his professors, Étienne Vacherot, described him as follows in 1851, during his senior year:

'The most hard-working and distinguished student that I have known at the Normal School. Prodigious learning for his age. An ardour and avidity for knowledge the like of which I have never seen. A spirit remarkable for its rapidity of apprehension, for the finesse, subtlety, and force of its thought. However, he comprehends, understands, judges, and formulates too quickly. He is too fond of formulas and definitions, to which he too often sacrifices reality, without realizing it, to be sure, since he is perfectly sincere. Taine will be a very distinguished professor, but besides and above all a scholar of the first rank, if his health will permit him to complete a long career. He has a great sweetness of character and a very pleasant manner; his resolves are very firm, to the point where no one can influence his thinking. Moreover, he is not of this world. Spinoza's motto will be his: "Live in order to think." Conduct, behaviour excellent. As to morality, I believe this choice and exceptional nature to be a stranger to any other passion except that for the truth. This student is the first, by a great distance, in all the interviews and examinations.'[2]

This description remained true of Taine all his life: whatever unresolved contradictions and conflicts may have been in him were there from the beginning. As a student, he was already a *savant*, with the air of a disillusioned post-Romantic; this function and this mood were not changed, but rather reinforced, by his experiences during the latter half of the century, including the remarkable change of his interests which followed the Franco-Prussian War.[3] When he wrote *La Fontaine*, in 1852, he was frightened by the future; when he wrote his posthumously published *Last Essays*, early in the *fin-de-siècle* decade, he was frightened by the present.[4]

Thus, though we can only afford them a rapid glance, it would be wrong to underestimate the influence on Taine's personality of his first two decades. He was born on 21 April, 1828, at Vouziers, Ardennes, into a respectable professional family of the provinces: his father, Jean Baptiste Antoine Taine, was a country lawyer who found time to cultivate the sciences and literature, having some reputation as a poet in that region; his mother, *née* Marie Virginie Bezanson, was a woman of culture, to whom he remained closely attached all her life.[5] His great-grandfather, Pierre Taine, had been nicknamed 'the philosopher' by his neighbours; his maternal grandfather, Nicolas Bezanson, was a gifted student of philosophy, mathematics, and magnetism,[6] and Hippolyte treasured his books and notes after he died in 1850.[7] One of the mother's brothers, Alexandre Bezanson, who had lived in the United States for some years, taught his nephew the English language at an early age.[8] From his early years in Ardennes, Taine seems to have retained a very strong feeling for nature, for mountains and forests, which is exhibited especially in his travel books.[9]

But Taine's childhood ended, painfully and abruptly, at the age of twelve, when his father died after a lingering illness. The impact of this event is evident in the first chapter of *Étienne Mayran*, an incomplete novel, largely autobiographical, which Taine started to write in 1861.[10] Looking back, twenty years later, Taine headed the first chapter 'The Shock', and claimed that the hero of his story 'saw the least details of that day as if they were present, each one, with the colours of the objects, with the facial expressions of the people and their gestures'.[11] Writing to a friend in 1852, Taine said: 'Will is not lacking; I guess that it will never be lacking; but perhaps there is something shattered in

my mental system; that something is the feeling of trust.'[12] Undoubtedly it was his father's untimely death which first troubled his 'mental system'.

In the autumn of 1841, at the age of thirteen, Taine entered the Mathé *pension* (in Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a central district of Paris), which prepared students for Bourbon College; his mother, two sisters, and maternal grandfather came to live with him soon after. In 1842, he entered Bourbon College, where some of his life-long friendships were begun[13]; among others, there was a young Professor Adolphe Hatzfeld, under whom he studied rhetoric and philosophy, who befriended and guided him.[14] It was at about the age of fifteen that Taine's philosophic reflections first began to take form, beginning with doubts concerning the Christian revelation.[15] The autobiographical 'Introduction' which he wrote, during his senior year at college, for a short treatise 'On Human Destiny', describes this religious crisis.[16]

These are the important facts, chiefly external. A more lively internal picture of the young Taine's emotional life can be found in the fragmentary *Étienne Mayran*, already cited. What seem to be autobiographical details include, besides the death of his father, his trip to Paris; scenes from his life at boarding-school; his first lessons at the piano, the playing of which always remained one of his favourite recreations; a sketch of a rather remarkable history teacher, 'M. Sprengel'; and his first sensations of delight on reading Plato's dialogues. Above all, the reader senses, through Taine's attempt at a fictitious character, his strong sense of isolation and pride, in the face of what seemed like rejection by fate. In Paul Bourget's opinion, Taine never finished the story because 'He had a horror of making a spectacle of himself, quite simply.'[17] This then was the sensitive, serious young man whose later writings were destined to lead one of the central intellectual movements of his age and our own.

A Student of Philosophy in Paris

It is altogether appropriate that a consideration of Taine's method in criticism should begin with its philosophical foundations, since he illustrates so well both the strengths and weaknesses of criticism resulting from the fusion of a consciously held philosophic position with sensitive and penetrating analyses and perceptions.[18] To consider his critical *aperçus* in isolation from their

theoretical backgrounds would be like studying Aristotle's *Poetics* without ever having read his *Metaphysics* and *Ethics*.

Realization of this fact is necessary in order to correct the rather paradoxical nature of Taine's influence and reputation, which, almost against his will, was strongest in fields that are not strictly philosophical.[19] That such had not been Taine's hope and intention is evident from many passages in his correspondence. At the very time when he was steeped in his *History of English Literature*, he frequently found occasion to remind his friends that his first love had been philosophy; in 1856, near the beginning of literary labours which were to take the best part of eight years, he said: 'I believe that I've been foolish to undertake this history of English Literature. That is too long a road by which to arrive at philosophy.'[20] Similarly, in 1864, when the work had been completed, he reaffirmed the primacy of his philosophical thesis:

'. . . do you believe that one would carry on such a trade as mine, if one didn't believe his idea to be true? . . . We have one sole compensation, the inner faith that we have come across some general idea which is very large, very powerful, and which from now on and for a century will govern an entire province of studies and of human knowledge. Otherwise, it would be following a fool's trade to judge Shakespeare for the hundredth time, or to go about the business of collecting such illustrious unknowns as Barrow or Sidney in order to unearth them and arrange them in a row. We have no value, we do not live, we do not work, we do not resist except by grace of our philosophic idea. Now mine is that *all the feelings, all the ideas, all the states of the human soul are products, having their causes and their laws. . .* '[21]

That the original and central source of this 'master idea' of Taine's was the philosophy of Spinoza is underlined in the 'Preface' to the *Essay on Livy*:

'Man, says Spinoza, is not in nature "as an empire within an empire", but as a part within a whole; and the movements of the spiritual automaton which is our being are regulated just as are those of the material world in which it is included.

'Is Spinoza right? Can one employ exact methods in criticism? Will a talent be expressed by a formula? Are the faculties of a man, like the organs of a plant, dependent on one another? Are they measured and produced by a unique law? Given this law, can one

predict their energy and calculate their good and their bad effects in advance? Can one reconstruct them, just as the naturalists reconstruct a fossilized animal? Is there in us a master faculty whose uniform action is imparted differently to our different wheels, and which impresses on our machine a necessary system of foreseen movements?

'I should like to answer yes, and by means of an example.'[22]

Victor Giraud characterized Taine as 'a Spinozist more sympathetic to experience than his master',[23] and saw the unity of his work as deriving from its foundation in Spinoza's metaphysics. Like so many others in the nineteenth century, Taine found in Spinoza not only an example of rational and scientific method, but also a pantheistic solution of his religious problem, which helps account for the intensity of his devotion to the philosophy of the *Ethics*.[24]

Critique of the Rationalist Tradition: Spinoza and Descartes

However, though Spinoza's philosophy was an early, profound, and persistent influence on Taine's thought, he did not accept it without criticism; such was not his way. Thus, in answer to a letter in which Prévost-Paradol had written: 'I am going to read Spinoza who, it seems to me, is your master . . .', he wrote, on 30 March, 1849: 'He is only halfway my master. I believe that he is wrong on several fundamental questions.'[25] As the author of Taine's *Life and Letters* wrote, referring to the student papers which survive from his second year at the Normal School: '. . . one feels that in that period he was still completely steeped in his readings of Spinoza and Descartes; but one sees his effort to disentangle a personal doctrine and to arrive at new methods'.[26]

These new methods resulted from attempts to combine elements in Spinoza with 'science', used in its broadest sense, to include metaphysics as well as the 'moral sciences' of psychology and history.[27] While still in Bourbon College, Taine had been concerned with method, convinced that the mathematical rationalism of Descartes and Spinoza was sufficient:

'I saw the point towards which I should carry all my research. Moreover, I was in possession of the method; I had studied it out of curiosity and for amusement. Since then I have set to work with ardour; the clouds were scattered; I understood the origin of my errors; I perceived the train of thought and the whole.'[28]

But a year at the Normal School broadened his horizons. Writing on 20 March 1849 he still placed philosophy first, but literature, history, and the sciences were also mentioned: 'All that advances abreast, and I always have a quantity of things on hand; I have made for myself a grand plan of study, and I am reserving these three years at the Normal School in order to realize it in part.'[29] Because of lack of time and the pressures of the academic curriculum, he felt he would have to postpone till after graduation from Normal School much-desired studies in 'the social sciences, political economy, and the physical sciences'.[30] Though he was to have no serious contact with the positivist philosophy until about a decade later, there was a strong scientific bent in the young student already.[31]

Taine's transition to empiricism required both metaphysical and methodological criticisms of the rationalist tradition. The former were expressed in papers on the Spinozist and Cartesian proofs of God's existence (the ontological argument), in which Taine (1) questioned whether a merely logical definition could lead to statements concerning existence or causation; and (2) distinguished between the static nature of Spinoza's Substance and a more dynamic, Hegelian concept of Infinity. On the methodological problem, (3) he came to distinguish sharply between the processes of *perception* and *conception*.[32]

It was in the light of this last distinction, especially, that Taine spent ensuing years hammering out his own conception of scientific method in science and in criticism. Despite these criticisms, however, there was a permanent residue of Spinozism in all his later thinking. Though his concept of science changed, it was to Spinoza (as well as Descartes) that he owed both the precept and an example of the application of a 'scientific' method to moral subject matter. Spinoza's 'intellectual love of God' remained his life-long religion: 'My God has nothing in common with the butcher-God of Christianity, nor the man-God of the philosophers of the second rank.'[33] Spinoza's rigorous determinism, according to which only God is completely free because only He exists from the necessity of His own nature and 'Nothing in the universe is contingent',[34] was surely in the background of Taine's concern with the problem of causation. Last, but not least, he found in Spinoza the first formulation of the postulate which, by synthesizing the best elements of Realism and Idealism, was to provide the cornerstone of his system, namely, that 'The order and

connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas.'[35]

The Problem of Method: From Induction to the Absolute

On the basis of many notebooks preserved from his second year at the Normal School, we see that the problem of method for Taine become that of *induction*, namely, how we pass from our limited perceptions to true conceptions,[36] and ultimately to a grasp of the Absolute. Again, the rationalist tradition was under fire in papers on Descartes and Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.[37] But the methodological issue could not be separated from that of causation: 'Isn't there also needed a *cause* which will make the manifestation pass from the state of power into the state of action? That question is overwhelming, but I do not despair of resolving it.'[38]

Finally, after much questioning, in a notebook headed *Philosophie, dogmatisme*, Taine arrived at the following conclusion:

'. . . If the nature of Being *qua* Being taken in any one of its parts whatsoever is manifested, Being in its entirety is manifested. Because if the essence is manifested, that is a result of the nature of the absolute which is at once essence and manifestation, so that one cannot move without the other. And thus one knows the nature of the absolute, which is the union of the two.

'There the problem is solved.

'I want to do no more than to take account of this inductive procedure in order to know whether it is only a form of deduction.'[39]

How can we arrive *inductively* at real definitions of 'essences'? Starting from perceptions of concrete particulars, we abstract their general traits, as described in the following passage from the *Dogma, Metaphysics* notebook:

'I perceive a thing A; I eliminate all of its determinations; there remains the fact that it *is*. We are not studying here the psychological phenomenon of perception; it is a fact that as soon as we perceive, we affirm a real thing, an existence. Let another object B be perceived; I strip it likewise of all its own particularities; there remains the fact again that it *is*. This reality, which is pure because it is completely abstract, is absolutely identical with that

of A. It is the same. There is therefore only one reality, of which A and B are diverse forms. That is Being, and that is how our idea of Being is born. It springs from each of our perceptions just as from the sight of a circle, of a square, of a triangle, of figures of various extents, springs our idea of extension; just as from the consciousness of my successive acts, springs the notion of the self of which they are the manifestation.'[40]

Thus, Taine thought, he had made the necessary transition from pure deduction to a new method of induction combined with abstraction: 'The proposition *par excellence* would be that which would unite the two qualities of necessity and of reality. It would disentangle an identity at the same time that it would prove an existence.'[41]

Clearly, the development of this conception of method was closely involved with a metaphysical position towards which Taine had been groping. The existential question implied more than 'pure essences' and raised the problem of *raison d'être*; the Absolute would have to be more than a mere logical construct or possibility and represent rather a real 'power' or 'force'.[42] Taine's *goal* remained abstract, but his *point of departure* was now thoroughly empirical: 'We will construct the route by which man passes from a particular perception, to the affirmation of the absolute.'[43]

To construct this route, Taine threaded his way, cautiously and with nice discrimination, among the various systems he had inherited. The metaphysical position at which he finally arrived combined elements of Platonism and Aristotelianism, realism, and nominalism; and Hegel was criticized because, for him, 'All reality is in thought.'[44] As usual, Taine ended with his focus in psychology: 'It is very true that Thought passes from a shrouded totality to a clear totality via the dialectical process. But that is human thought, the thought of a worldly being, which is indeed the image of the world, but not of the movement of all things.'[45] Our ideas may give us a true image of the world, but they are never complete, and they *are* not the world.[46]

At this point, we may recall the question with which Taine had qualified his solution of the problem of deduction in the 'Notes' of the previous year: 'I want to do no more than to take account of this inductive procedure in order to know whether it is only a form of deduction.'[47] His attempt to analyze the element of

'deduction' in inductive method probably survives in an 1849 paper[48] which considers, as an example, the method used in physics. Having observed many falling bodies, on what basis does the physicist proceed to formulate the *law* of gravity? He must assume, if he is not to fall into a Humean scepticism, that 'the same cause always produces the same effects'. It is on the basis of this postulate that 'He has seen the universal within the particular which contains it . . .'[49] and that he makes a hidden deduction, generalizing from his observations.[50] It is the axiom of causality which ultimately makes induction possible.[51]

Thus, despite his criticisms of rationalistic method and idealistic metaphysics, Taine never lost sight of a Spinozistic vision of the universe as unified and knowable; this found expression in the rhapsodic concluding paragraphs of *The Classic Philosophers*, which speak of 'the external axiom', and in the concluding chapter of *On Intelligence*, where this axiom appears as 'the explanatory reason of things'. Based on a proposition of identity, it is the keystone of his metaphysical arch and thus provides the ultimate philosophical justification of his critical method.

The Problem of Freedom: Psychology and History

These, then, were Taine's first rough formulations of his concept of scientific method and of the metaphysical position on which that method was based. As has already been indicated, the two chief areas which he explored, in an attempt to apply and develop his type of criticism, were psychology and history, broadly conceived.[52] Since the search for causes was central to his method, it was natural that he should be led to a kind of determinism. Characteristically, however, this concept in Taine was far from mechanistic, involving rather (in two essays 'On Liberty', from his first and last years at the Normal School) a subtle psychological analysis of the problem of choice.

As might be expected, the first of these, from the period when Spinoza's influence was still fresh, had some of the cocksure combativeness of youth, beginning: 'Every human act is necessary.' But by April, 1851, Taine was more conciliatory in his tone, writing of a 'free necessity' and a fixed or 'regulated freedom' ('liberté réglée'), though the conclusion remained substantially the same.[53]

For Taine, the problem of freedom arose when an individual's various 'tendencies' (habits, instincts, desires, and

ideas, the latter being 'beginnings of acts') conflict, necessitating a choice:

'They are opposed to one another, the tendencies enter into conflict: that is deliberation. Then that fluctuation ceases, a tendency has emerged victorious; my entire being, hitherto divided, is concentrated on one single point, oriented in a single direction. At that moment, my will is determined. . . . Its nature, being general and not restricted, contains within itself possibilities of all sorts. In this sense, it is free.'[54]

But, whatever our sensations of *willing* to choose freely, our choice is determined: 'There is a reason even for a caprice. Within us, as without, everything is a product; exceptions, anomalies, and monstrosities are such as a result of laws as regular as those from which originate the most regular of beings and facts. . . .'[55] This is an approach to freedom which later psychologists have generally accepted: 'There is a reason even for a caprice' might well have been taken as the motto of Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

Taine's concept of freedom was like that of Freud in this respect also: it was no longer the simple one of the rationalists, for whom every being naturally seeks its own good; instead, he had come to realize the large part which irrational motives and tendencies play in determining behaviour. Freedom, however, still had meaning to the extent that choices were made from within, without external constraints: 'There is nothing passive here; there is no other cause for my action besides myself. The more voluntary the action is, the more this is so. . . . It is the pure and perfect exercise of my internal energy, put into motion by an idea.'[56] In this manner, by psychological analysis, Taine attempted to reconcile the idea of cause with that of moral responsibility: 'Thus, from our analysis we arrive at the *raison d'être* and efficacy of morality.'[57] Despite the fact of determinism, or rather *because* of it, we are morally responsible for the results of our own psychologies.[58]

The complexity of Taine's concept of determination in the 'moral sciences' was evident also in his tendency to replace the idea of 'cause' by that of 'condition'. One of his American critics wrote: 'Taine nearly solved the problem of art and so of poetry. Had he simply called his *milieu*, his place and time and race, conditions and not causes . . . he would have achieved the whole

instead of the half success.'[59] As a matter of fact, Taine anticipated this criticism in student notes on 'Philosophy of History'. An 1850 outline ran as follows:

'(1) Recapitulate the dominant elements, or abstract generators known in France, England, Rome, Greece, Italy, Germany, etc. . . .

'(2) Classify the dominant elements: Three chief ones: { race; time; environment.

(given these, one can reconstitute the actual, complete history.)

'(3) Which are the *conditions* for the appearance of a religion, a literature, a philosophy, an art (in general and of a particular kind).'[60]

In 1851, he indicated that he was seeking 'a definition of man' and 'the *conditions* of existence', the latter being, again, race, environment, and time.[61]

History thus became for Taine a kind of social psychology. The 'ideas' which, mediated by individual psychologies, determined the behaviour of nations were not accidental, but were conditioned by external forces of race, environment, and time; and history was the attempt to trace causal sequences in their development through time. Just as we understand the conditions of an individual's freedom when we have studied his psychology, so we understand the conditions of freedom in society from the study of history.

Such a correlation of psychology and history as Taine attempted was based on the assumption that history could be treated as a science, and studied according to the inductive method already sketched. The problem was whether in history, as in the physical sciences, abstraction could be carried to the point of enunciating general laws.[62] That Taine thought such a progress was possible is clear from his opening remarks on the 'general theory of systems':

'A system is an organized being whose soul is a general idea, a general proposition: it is that proposition which one must find. The means is to enumerate the various propositions of the system, to find the general propositions on which they depend, and the most general proposition from which these issue.

'(Ex. M. Ravaisson, exposition of Stoicism.)

'Note that such is the progress of all science; each science studies a single thing, the human body, the animal series, the chemical substance, etc. Its method is to collect the properties and then to reascend to the general definition or proposition; and the philosophy which is the science of the Whole likewise seeks the definition of the Whole.'[63]

Thus, in effect, he was extending the nineteenth-century, optimistic theory of science to philosophy itself.

The history of philosophy too was to be studied by a method which combined induction and abstraction; in this case, the particulars involved were not objects in the natural world, not even cultural patterns, but rather *systems* of ideas whose organic unities were to be traced. In July, 1851, after completion of his studies at the Normal School, Taine wrote the following summary in the margin of the 'History of Philosophy' manuscript:

'One must proceed in the history of Philosophy exactly as in History generally: (1) *Separate the exposition of the systems from their valuation*; (2) Give the formula of the systems; (3) Classify them as in zoology; (4) Find the general laws of their origin; (5) Trace the universal movement of which each system is an instant; (6) *Find the ideal type and ideal development of each school*; (7) Show the action of external forces. In a word, produce a zoology of the human spirit with psychology as the physiological and anatomical principle.'[64]

The italicized parts of this note indicate clearly that the central thesis of Taine's criticism (namely, its attempt at blending the processes of scientific analysis and critical judgment) was not a late development in his thought, as some critics claim,[65] but was there practically from the beginning.

A Year in the Provinces: The Study of Hegel

Philosophy of history naturally suggests the influence of Hegel on Taine, a subject which has been studied with admirable thoroughness and perceptiveness by D. D. Rosca. As we have already seen,[66] Taine had serious reservations when he first read the German thinker. Nevertheless, like so many others in the latter half of the nineteenth century, he was very much intrigued by the latter's systematic metaphysics, which seemed to be an infinitely richer food than Victor Cousin's eclecticism: 'Hegel

is a Spinoza multiplied by Artistotle. This is quite different from the ridiculous metaphysics on which we have been fed.'[67] In the end, though he borrowed from Hegel on many points of detail, we must agree with the well-considered judgment of Rosca, himself an Hegelian, that 'Taine brings Hegel back to Spinoza.'[68]

At what point did Taine first begin to use Hegel? Student papers already cited include frequent references to him, yet Chevrillon quotes a note, dated 2 August, 1850, to the effect that 'I have not yet read Hegel.'[69] What Taine undoubtedly meant was that he had not yet read him through, systematically and critically. Such a reading was to be one of his chief preoccupations, while he was a teacher in the provinces, during the first year after his graduation from the Normal School.

This reading of Hegel took place at a critical turning-point in Taine's career. Despite his brilliant record, his application for 'l'agrégation'[70] had been rejected by some reactionary members of the committee because of his allegiance to the 'heretical' views of Spinoza[71]; from the point of view of an ultra-Catholic old aunt, this had been a 'profession of atheism'.[72] Shipped out to teach at the provincial college of Nevers, he had accepted this fate with his usual stoicism and a great show of cheerfulness, especially to his mother; nevertheless, intellectually he was like a fish out of water: 'Am I beginning to conceal my opinions, to treat people with caution? Prudent as a serpent, strong as a lion!'[73]

This was also the year when the abortive Second Republic of 1848, which had been slowly dying under the rule of Louis-Napoleon, was dealt the final blow by the *Coup d'état*, confirmed by plebiscite on 20 December, 1851.[74] In the educational world, the first result was a split between the sciences and the humanities; the 'agrégation' for philosophy was suppressed that year by H. Fortoul, the Minister of Public Instruction,[75] and Taine began, therefore, without much enthusiasm, to prepare for the fellowship in letters. When the Rector at Nevers insisted that all members of the Faculty sign a statement recognizing the *Coup*, Taine was the only one who refused to sign.[76] On 5 February, 1852, he wrote to Prévost-Paradol expressing his pessimism concerning the political future of France:

'I prefer to speak to you about business. Let us have a proper understanding of our future. You ought to see now that the man

in power [Louis-Napoleon, S.J.K.] has chances of surviving. He relies very ingeniously on the universal suffrage, which will demand of him not liberties, but well-being. He has the clergy and the army; add the name of his uncle [Napoleon Buonaparte, S.J.K.], the fear of socialism, the divided opinions among those of the opposition party. As a result, political life is barred to us for perhaps a decade.

'The sole road is pure science or pure literature. We have to rely on those now.'[77]

On 2 December, 1852, first anniversary of the *Coup*, Taine's prophecy was fulfilled: President Louis-Napoleon was proclaimed Napoleon III, and the Second Empire had been established.

Despite the suppression of philosophy, Taine had hopes that a psychological thesis on 'The Sensations' might be acceptable; these hopes were soon dashed, however, and he was notified on 7 June, 1852, that he could not expect the 'agrégation' that year.[78] This second defeat provided the flame that melted the ice of Taine's stoicism. He took, rather desperately, to rereading Hegel's *Philosophy of History* for distraction, and, discovering Georges Sand's *Compagnons du tour de France*, wrote to Édouard de Suckau (15 June, 1852) that 'my soul is completely in eruption'.[79] He saw at last that his only hope for acceptance lay in more or less complete conformity:

'If I take refuge in the Faculty, it will be by playing up Descartes and Aristotle, by annihilating the atomistic materialists, by preaching spirituality and disguising mortality. Let us think for ourselves, let us do as Leibnitz did, who printed fifteen copies of one of his works and sent them to his friends.'[80]

With some bitterness, he quoted to his mother a cynical sentence from Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*: 'Under an absolute government, the first condition for success is to have neither enthusiasm nor spirit.'[81]

Finally, Taine decided on a French thesis on La Fontaine, which, characteristically, was mentioned after 'something in the field of aesthetics, a theory of the genres'.[82] La Fontaine was one of the classic writers of French tradition, and the subject was literary, though, as we shall see, Taine used it for his own philosophic purposes. For his Latin thesis, *De personis Platonicis*, Taine returned to one of his early loves, the dialogues of Plato.

Spinoza versus Hegel: Paradox and Solution

Despite these difficulties with his academic theses, Taine found time for an intensive study of Hegel. On the whole, this process tended to confirm certain basic tenets of his thought which he originally derived from Spinoza. He found in Hegel the same sort of Universe, determined by formulas of a geometric order of abstraction,[83] and the same assumption of the rationality of the universe which, as we have seen, supplies the key to Taine's entire metaphysics.[84] During this troubled year, he found real consolation and sustenance of spirit in his reading of 'the Germans', by which term he referred chiefly to Hegel, but also to Schelling. They seemed to him then to live in another, and more fruitful, world of ideas, which provided a necessary antidote to the empirical and 'English' habit of mind.[85] Obviously, many elements in the early formulations of Taine's method which have already been sketched—especially the concern with 'notion' or 'concept' (Hegel's *Begriff*), with system and totality, with the 'absolute' (Hegel's equivalent for Spinoza's 'substance'), with freedom as the recognition of inner necessity, and with 'philosophy of history'—indicate areas of profound indebtedness to the German master. At what points, and why, did Taine part company with him?[86] What were the philosophic issues involved?

We have already seen, from his 'First Views of Hegel' and notebook on the 'History of Philosophy', that Taine's criticisms of Hegel were both metaphysical and methodological. The metaphysical issue has been illuminated by Henry Alonzo Myers' suggestive work on *The Spinoza–Hegel Paradox: A study of the choice between traditional idealism and systematic pluralism*, which is an analysis of 'the historical puzzle of two philosophers who start with the same premises and come to diametrically opposed conclusions.'[87] Myers documents in some detail Hegel's indebtedness to Spinoza[88] and the large number of basic propositions on which the two agreed.[89] But he also distinguishes their differences, and it is these which should help us to understand what Taine accepted, and what he rejected, in Hegel.

The most essential antitheses between Spinozism and Hegelianism are given as those (1) between formal and final causes; (2) between contemplation and activity; and (3) between 'the eternal concatenation of geometrical forms and the stages of organic growth'.[90] As we have seen, Taine retained Spinoza's

rejection of final causes in nature[91] and learned, probably from Hegel as well as from the physical and moral sciences, the importance of history and time, or dynamism and growth[92]; thus he attempted to maintain a position which, like that of Ernst Cassirer,[93] gave due recognition to the importance of both structure and function, form and history. He could have derived from both Spinoza and Hegel his vision of totality and unity, which was, after all, also the nineteenth-century ideal of science:

'It is at this moment that one feels the birth within of the notion of Nature. By means of this hierarchy of necessities, the world constitutes a unique being, indivisible, of which all beings are members. At the supreme summit of things, at the highest point of the luminous and inaccessible ether, the external axiom pronounces itself, and the prolonged reverberation of that creative formula composes, through its inexhaustible undulations, the immensity of the universe.'[94]

These differences in approach to the nature of reality were associated with a like divergence in theories of causation. Rosca discussed,[95] with nice discrimination, the similarities and differences between Hegel and Taine on the ideas of essence, of substance, and of cause, finding that 'In the main, Taine argues for an idea of causation which is found, to be sure, developed in Hegel's *Logic*, but which is not Hegel's conception of causation.'[96] He differed radically in his interpretation from those who characterized Taine as a positivist: inasmuch as Taine disagreed with Mill on the heterogeneity of cause and effect and the antithesis of thought and existence, he was in the Hegelian (and Spinozist) tradition.[97] But 'Taine confused the idea of internal finality with that of efficient causality . . . contrary to Hegel's cause, which is the internal identity of distinct and irreducible terms, Taine's cause supposes only an identity.'[98] Identifying the concepts of essence, substance, force, law, and cause, 'Taine is a Spinozist, for all his being inspired by Hegel.'[99]

Myers states the antitheses, again, as follows:

'Hegel felt that he had gone beyond Spinoza in three important ways: first, in the realization of freedom in the notion, which is the truth of the necessity appearing in the doctrine of essence; secondly, in the conception of the concrete universal which overcame Spinoza's simple negation of the finite; and thirdly, in the

greater concreteness of the notion in respect to the doctrine of essence.'[100]

Spinoza and Hegel were agreed in seeking, not abstractness, but concreteness, each in his special way. However, Taine wanted, as we have seen, not possibilities, but existences; not 'as Hegel says, the Idea in process, . . . but indeed Being (absolute) made manifest (absolutely)'.[101] He believed in the existence of something like Hegel's 'concrete universal', but he was not content to spin out 'an arbitrary hierarchy of logical generalities'[102]; instead, he thought, universals were to be found in nature, as ideal *types* or species of existence. His 'concreteness' was not one merely of a coherent *system*, lacking in internal contradiction, but rather that of essential characteristics which *corresponded* with reality. Whereas Spinoza and Hegel, desiring concreteness, remained with their geometrical abstractions and 'bloodless categories', Taine hoped to start from particulars, or at least our perceptions of them, and, by a *process* of abstraction, work towards the universals without leaving the concreteness of the initial perceptions behind. With him, 'abstraction' was both a *noun* and a *verb*.[103]

The methodological points on which Taine parted company with Hegel were the latter's use of *Begriff* (concept or notion) and his distinction between Reason (*Vernunft*) and Understanding (*Verstand*).[104] He did so because in his version of induction, the same function which Hegel had assigned to *Vernunft* could be performed by the scientific method of abstraction, going from the individual instance to the generalization, from the particular to the universal—granted, of course, the 'external axiom' of causality.[105]

'Intelligibility, according to the master, means internal identity of dissimilar terms, identity of ever richer determinations, conciliation of contraries, nay even of contradictories, synthesis of the universal and the individual; intelligibility, according to the disciple, signifies absolute elimination of one of the terms and exclusive affirmation of the other, sacrifice of that which is particular, individual, to the advantage of that which is general, universal.'[106]

In this way, perhaps at some sacrifice of subtlety as a critic, Taine kept the problems of philosophy and art from being relegated to a unique realm, distinct from that of science and therefore requiring

a separate method for study and a separate faculty of the soul for comprehension.[107] In this respect, he was not only attempting to answer a challenge of his own generation, but perhaps has a message for ours.

Taine Returns to Paris: A Critic with a Method

This year in the provinces resulted in important clarifications of Taine's position, despite a *milieu* of political crisis and personal reverses. An acid comment on his painful experiences, in a letter to his sister Sophie, was characteristic: 'Ah! how much nastiness and how many consecrated platitudes have I seen since two years ago! It would be distressing, if it were not ridiculous.'[108] When a third offer from the Ministry turned out to be of an even lower calibre than the first two, indicating clearly that his services were no longer in demand, he returned to Paris from Poitiers, after a brief visit to the old homestead in Vouziers, and settled down to the literary career for which he was so eminently suited.

The foregoing analysis of the philosophical foundations of Taine's thought has had the intrinsic interest inherent in the spectacle of any sensitive mind's struggles for understanding; and has helped prepare the stage for further critical discussion of his method. Above all, it should correct the impression created by many students who have been so taken by exaggerations of evolutionism that they have failed to perceive the organic unity which underlay Taine's complexities and seeming contradictions.

Generally speaking, no radical innovations were introduced by Taine in the decades of fruitful criticism which began with his return to Paris. All the chief elements of his philosophy had already been explored: considered *en masse*, they constituted a unified and powerful system, whose utility (and limitations) as a critical tool must, in the last analysis, be judged by the works which it produced. The method of abstraction, and the formula of race, environment, and time; history and psychology, with their concepts of development and master faculty; the recognition of ideal types and 'the eternal axiom' of causality—we have encountered them all, in their formative stages; and, despite minor refinements and changes in emphasis, Taine never changed his essential position on these central points.[109]

NOTES

[1]Chevrillon, *Taine* (hereafter referred to as 'Chevrillon'), especially Part Two: 'Trois Années de Pensée', pp. 51–155.

[2] *H. Taine, Sa Vie et sa correspondance* (*Life and Letters*, hereafter referred to as '*V. & C.*'), I, 123–124.

The passages quoted from the following works have been translated by the present author: Chevrillon; *V. & C.*; Taine, *La Fontaine*, *Les Philosophes classiques*, *Essai sur Tite-Live*, *Essais de critique et d'histoire*, *Nouveaux Essais*, and *Étienne Mayran*; Giraud, *Essai sur Taine* and 'La philosophie de Taine'; and Rosca, *L'Influence de Hegel sur Taine*. In all *other* cases the initials 'S.J.K' have been added to indicate translation.

[3] Schaepdryver, *Hippolyte Taine*, pp. 97, 113.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[5] *V. & C.*, I, 8–9.

[6] *V. & C.*, I, 7–8.

[7] *V. & C.*, I, 161.

[8] *V. & C.*, I, 10.

[9] Giraud, *Essai sur Taine*, p. 2.

[10] Published posthumously, with a Preface by Paul Bourget, Paris, 1910.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[12] *V. & C.*, I, 310, to Édouard de Suckau.

[13] Among his fellow students were Émile Planat (called 'Marcelin'), founder of *La Vie Parisienne*; Charles Crosnier de Varigny; Lucien Anatole Prévost-Paradol; Cornélis de Witt; Émile Durier; and Émile Saigey (*V. & C.*, I, 13–14).

[14] *V. & C.*, I, 14.

[15] Giraud, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–14.

[16] *V. & C.*, I, 20–26.

[17] *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

[18] George Saintsbury makes this the core of his criticism of Taine: 'Hippolyte Taine *was* a critic, though too often (not always) a "black horseman" of criticism. He was a great aesthetician, he was a brilliant literary historian—that is to say, what should be a critic on the greatest scale. . . . Taine is, therefore, the capital example of the harm which may be done by what is called "philosophy" in criticism. If he had resisted this tendency, and had allowed himself simply to receive and assimilate the facts, he might have been one of the great critics of the world' (*A History of Criticism*, III, pp. 440–441). But he would not have been Taine!

[19] Writing in 1928, D. D. Rosca pointed out that 'one must admit that one recognizes the trace of his influence a little everywhere: in literary criticism above all, in psychology, in sociology, in history, in literature properly speaking, and even in philosophy in the strict sense of the word, though here it is less considerable than in the other domains' (*L'Influence de Hegel sur Taine*, p. 23). The popularity of such works as the *History of English Literature* and the *Lectures on Art* was so great, and the impact of his doctrines through such media as Zola's novels and other works of naturalistic creation and criticism was so widespread, that the philosopher has almost been lost to sight, at least in English-speaking countries.

[20] *V. & C.*, II, 129, to Édouard de Suckau.

[21] *V. & C.*, II, 304–305, to Cornélis de Witt, our italics.

[22] *Essai sur Tite-Live*, pp. vii–viii.

[23] 'La philosophie de Taine', in *Hippolyte Taine: Études et Documents*, p. 75. This essay, which stressed Taine's indebtedness to Spinoza, was shown to Taine in 1891, shortly before his death; he responded with an approving letter (*ibid.*, pp. 81–83).

[24] Appendix A, 'Bourbon College'.

[25] *V. & C.*, I, 67, Note 2, and 75.

[26] *V. & C.*, I, 115.

[27] Chevrillon, p. 50, Note.

[28] From the Introduction to 'On Human Destiny', *V. & C.*, I, 25.

[29] *V. & C.*, I, 56.

[30] *V. & C.*, I, 57.

[31] Appendix B, 'The Question of Taine's Positivism'.

[32] Appendix A, 'Criticisms of Spinoza and Descartes'.

[33] *V. & C.*, I, 83.

[34] *Ethics*, Proposition XXIX, Part I.

[35] *Ibid.*, Proposition VII, Part II.

[36] Appendix A, 'Perception and Conception'.

[37] Appendix A, 'Criticisms of Descartes and Aristotle'.

[38] *V. & C.*, I, 117, our italics.

[39] *V. & C.*, I, 117.

[40] Chevrillon, p. 94.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[42] Appendix A, 'Introduction and the Absolute'.

[43] Chevrillon, p. 98.

[44] Appendix A, 'Metaphysical Systems'.

[45] Chevrillon, p. 393.

[46] Cf. Soren Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel in the course of which he makes the following distinction: '. . . *first*, a logical system is possible; *second*, an existential system is impossible'. ('Logical and Existential Systems', p. 640.)

[47] This chapter, Note 39.

[48] Discussed by Chevrillon, pp. 101–107.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[50] Cf. Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, especially Part Six: 'Postulates of Scientific Inference'.

[51] Appendix A, 'The "Eternal Axiom"'.

[52] See the conclusion to our Chapter I, and Chapter V, *passim*.

[53] Chevrillon, p. 113.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[58] As we shall see in his essay on Mill (Part I, Section XI: this essay can be found in Book V of any standard edition of the *History of English Literature*, where it was reprinted), Taine felt that one virtue of his inductive method was that it left some room for an element of 'chance', which would seem to be a breach in the armour of determinism. However, 'chance', like 'free will', was

for him not a metaphysical, but a psychological, fact, the product of the inherent limitations of our knowledge. As Rosca put it: 'Chance, according to Taine, does not correspond therefore to anything which might be materially undetermined. In this sense, it expresses merely an actual state of our knowledge, a state which could be provisional.' (*Op. cit.*, p. 79.) Here Taine seems to anticipate later developments in the logic of 'indeterminism'.

[59] Francis B. Gummere, 'Whitman and Taine', p. 138.

[60] Chevrillon, p. 399, our italics.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 400, our italics.

[62] Appendix A, 'Historical and Natural Science'.

[63] *V. & C.*, I, 362.

[64] *V. & C.*, I, 120, Note 4, our italics.

[65] See our Chapter I, 'Biographical and Historical Explanations', especially Note 22.

[66] Appendix A, 'Induction and the Absolute' and 'Metaphysical Systems'.

[67] *V. & C.*, I, 154, 16 November, 1851.

[68] *Op. cit.*, p. 413.

[69] *Op. cit.*, p. 99, Note.

[70] Admission to the degree of 'Fellow' after oral examination. Somewhat equivalent to the American matriculation for a doctorate, preparatory to the writing of a thesis, it is absolutely necessary for advancement in the French academic world, because all appointments are centrally controlled.

[71] *V. & C.*, I, 124–130.

[72] *V. & C.*, I, 194.

[73] *V. & C.*, I, 137, from Nevers, 15 October, 1851.

[74] Taine's ironic reaction, in a letter to Édouard de Suckau; 'I had completely decided to go and give private lessons in Paris. You and I could still (in view of the purity of our morals) have established a boarding school for young ladies' (9 December, shortly after the *Coup* on 2 December; *V. & C.*, I, 167).

[75] *V. & C.*, I, 187, 1 January, 1852. 'The administration of Minister Fortoul, from 1851 to 1856, has remained famous for its reactionary character. An oath of personal allegiance to the President or Emperor was exacted of every educator: whoever refused to take it was debarred from teaching. Villemain, Cousin, Guizot were put on the retired list. Michelet, Quinet, Mickiewicz lost their professorships at the Collège de France. Many others—Berthelemy, Saint-Hilaire, Vacherot, Jules Simon, Barni, Challemel-Lacour were summarily dismissed. Philosophy in the lycées was reduced to formal logic. Contemporary history was excluded. The course of studies was "bifurcated": students were required to choose, when much too young for such a decision, between two branches, the one exclusively scientific, the other exclusively literary. Minister Rouland, not a very competent man either, corrected some of the mistakes of his predecessor (1856–63)' (Albert Léon Guérard, *French Civilization in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 237).

[76] Letter to Suckau, 22 December, 1851 (*V. & C.*, I, 178).

[77] *V. & C.*, I, 205.

[78] Appendix A, 'Taine's Doctoral Theses'. On 30 March, 1852, Taine had been dismissed from his philosophical post at Nevers and transferred to the chair of rhetoric in the lycée at Poitiers (see Fortoul's letter, *V. & C.*, I, 250–251).

[79] *V. & C.*, I, 272.

[80] *V. & C.*, I, 282.

[81] *V. & C.*, I, 285.

[82] *V. & C.*, I, 289.

[83] Lacombe: 'Spinoza had trained his spirit to the conception of an absolute determinism, by giving it the idea of a world which might be derived from a geometric formula and might display itself in inevitable corollaries. Hegel confirmed and particularized that conception for him' (quoted by Rosca, *op. cit.*, p. 39).

[84] 'In brief, Taine affirms, with Hegel, the correspondence between being and thought which Spinoza expressed in the clear and precise proposition: "Ordo et connexio idearum idem est ac ordo et connexio rerum"' (Rosca, *op. cit.*, p. 105).

[85] 'They are, in relation to us, what England was in relation to France in the time of Voltaire. I find there enough ideas to supply the needs of an entire century, and if it were not for my anxieties on the subject of the examination for a fellowship in literature which I am going to attempt next year, I should find peace and a sufficient occupation in the company of these great thoughts' (*V. & C.*, I, 225–226). In a similar manner, Coleridge had imported the ideas of German metaphysicians to Great Britain a generation earlier.

[86] Appendix A, 'The Disillusion with Hegel'.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. v.

[88] 'From all these points, it is evident that the road to Hegel is shorter through Spinoza than it is through any other philosopher, not excepting Kant' (*ibid.*, p. 44).

[89] Chapters II, III, and IV. Some of the propositions in question are listed in the 'Preface' (*ibid.*, p. vii).

[90] *Ibid.*, pp. v–vi.

[91] See Appendix A, 'Taine's Doctoral Theses'.

[92] See Appendix A, 'Criticisms of Spinoza and Descartes'.

[93] 'On the one hand, he (Cassirer) tries to introduce a unity into a mass of divergent currents of thought by constructing a synthesis in terms of a characteristic "style" or "ideal type" of thinking. On the other, he finds unification in terms of the new problems forced on men—forced primarily, in his interpretation, by the advance of scientific knowledge and the new conceptions of truth to which that advance leads. . . . The first can be called, in his own terms, a "substantial" or "structural" conception; the second is "functional".' (John Herman Randall, Jr., 'Cassirer's Theory of History as Illustrated in His Treatment of Renaissance Thought', pp. 726–727.)

[94] Conclusion of *The Classic Philosophers*.

[95] *Op. cit.*, Chapter III, 'Théorie de l'essence ou des causes'.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 421.

[97] *Ibid.*, pp. 248–257. Cf. Appendix B.

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 426. Cf. Appendix A, 'The "Eternal Axiom"' and 'Taine's "Abstraction" vs. Hegel's "Begriff"'.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 427.

[100] *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

[101] Appendix A, 'Induction and the Absolute', Note 53.

[102] Appendix A, 'Criticisms of Descartes and Aristotle', Note 45.

[103] Myers associates the distinction between abstract and concrete with Spinoza's distinction between the true and the false infinite (*op. cit.*, pp. 38–39): 'the false infinite is allied with abstraction' (p. 39). Taine's student speculations on the infinite, however, had not accepted Spinoza's distinction, but had retained the derivation of infinity from experience, *precisely through the process of abstraction*, described as follows: 'I have all the materials now for the idea of the infinite, because I have the proposition: every dimension is divisible into (further) dimensions. Now in this proposition the attribute contains the subject, so that it necessarily possesses the property of providing the occasion for a proposition of the same nature. . . . We do not perceive here the infinite in itself: no spirit can exhaust the terms of an infinite series. But we perceive the causes of the infinite. Knowing the essence of the series, that is to say, the necessity which each term contains of producing another, we arrive at the infinite as a conclusion therefrom, that is to say, at the impossibility where that essence is of having a term which does not produce a subsequent one.' (Chevrillon, *op. cit.*, p. 110, Note.)

[104] Appendix A, 'Taine's "Abstraction" versus Hegel's "Begriff"'.

[105] Consider, for example, Taine's criticism of Mill's version of scientific method, which contrasted what he called the 'English' and the 'German' methods (Rosca, *op. cit.*, p. 315): the latter (meaning particularly that of Hegel), though it had to be made more precise, had the virtue of recognizing the importance of general laws; thus mere 'experience' was not enough, and induction had to be clarified by processes of abstraction and deduction. Applied to history, these are the means by which we gain insights into particular facts. On the one hand, the historian must base his generalizations on the labours of the monographer, the collector of specimens; on the other hand, the historian must be able to decide which specimens are significant and decisive (*ibid.*, p. 317, quoting *Derniers Essais*, pp. 167–168 and 159–160). Despite affinities with Hegel, this gives the matter quite a different emphasis.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

[107] In 1864, after having completed the *History of English Literature*, Taine reiterated, in a letter to Cornélis de Witt (17 May, 1864), that his own 'master idea' had been to break down this distinction between the sciences and the humanities (see this chapter, Note 21). We shall turn, presently, to the labours of that decade to see in what fashion Taine realized this idea in practice.

[108] *V. & C.*, I, 304.

[109] Our principle of organization, beginning in Part Two, will be logical, rather than strictly chronological, with the emphasis placed on the major problems which Taine's system presents for a philosophy of criticism. However, the reader interested in the main facts concerning Taine's later biography and publications will find them summarized in the 'Selected Bibliography of Taine's Works, With Biographical Notes' (Bibliography A).

PART TWO

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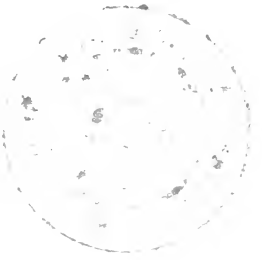
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM



CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

'*The Classic Philosophers*'

By 1856, four years after his return to Paris from Poitiers, Taine's literary reputation was already a considerable one. He was the author of three successful books: a doctoral *Essay on the Fables of La Fontaine*, which was already in its second edition; an *Essay on Livy*, which, after some opposition, had been awarded a prize by the French Academy and had finally been published; and a travel book, *Voyage to the Pyrenees*, which had proven to be exceptionally popular and had firmly established a friendly relationship with the publishing house of Hachette. His critical essays had been appearing in the *Revue de l'Instruction publique* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* since early in 1855, and had attracted much favourable attention. This success emboldened him to write a volume on *The Classic Philosophers of the 19th Century in France* which was both a critique of prevailing trends and a bold manifesto exemplifying and expounding his own naturalistic philosophy of criticism.

Sainte-Beuve wrote well when he characterized this book as 'a *tour de force*, and a serious one'.[1] Neither the method nor the fundamental ideas were substantially different from those which Taine had developed as a student in Normal School; indeed, Sainte-Beuve began his first article on Taine—occasioned by publication of *The Classic Philosophers* and summarizing Taine's production to date—by applying to the young critic his own method and indicating how typically he represented that particular academic *milieu*. The older man, both impressed and somewhat taken aback by this 'scientific' prodigy, remarked that most students, fresh from the Ph.D. mill, are like that: 'one had one's method, one's order of battle. . . .'[2]

Basically, the book was an essay on method, and its central theme was the importance of *analysis* as a means of applying scientific method to philosophy as well as, by implication, to literature and the arts: 'To experiment, to analyze the ideas and judgments acquired by means of experience—method is nothing more than that.'[3] Analysis was the great need of the hour, the necessary procedure which followers of Victor Cousin's eclecticism had neglected; supplemented by synthetic methods of 'construction' and utilizing to the full man's powers of abstraction, it would enable philosophy in France to achieve that balanced view which represented Taine's conception of true science.

Taine had long been aware of the possibilities of two kinds of method. A passage, later suppressed, near the beginning of the original text of *La Fontaine*, considered possible ways of coming to understand the nature of poetic fables: 'We can . . . towards this end use two methods: the very short one of construction, establishing first the nature of poetry, will infer therefrom what the poetic fable ought to be; the other very long one of analysis, decomposing the fables of the poet, will deduce thereby what poetry is.'[4] One was deductive, proceeding from the universal to the particular; the other was inductive, proceeding from the particular to the universal. Though the issue had been implicit in Taine's writings from the first, it was crystallized in the chapters 'On Method', at the end of *The Classic Philosophers*, which first appeared as articles entitled 'Analysis' and 'System'. There he dramatized the two emphases by associating them with two personality types: M. Pierre, a precise person whose favourite haunts are the Botanical Gardens and Medical School, is the spokesman for analysis; M. Paul, whose eyes are 'full of penetration and ardour' and whose words are 'elevated and passionate',[5] is a reader of Spinoza and Hegel and an advocate of system and synthesis. These represent two aspects of Taine's own personality and interests, and presumably the ideal critic, for him, would be one who combined the best features of both.

The Method of Analysis

The first step in M. Pierre's method of analysis, which Taine refers back to Condillac's *Langue des calculs*, is translation of 'signs'—i.e., words and other symbols—into 'distinct facts': 'In this translation I see two steps. The first is the exact translation: it is the one which the doctrine of Condillac expounds; the second

is the complete translation: it is the one provided by the progress of observation.'[6] Here we see two elements of Taine's method: a nominalism combined with induction. 'Exact translation' represents the nominalist element in Taine; 'complete translation', however, implies a theory of induction, with which he had long been concerned; what finally emerged was closest to the intermediate conceptualist position (Chapter XI).

M. Pierre goes on to show that such a concept as 'vital force' in physiology can be analyzed, first, into two orders of *facts* ('a principal fact, the process of destruction and renewal which is called life; subordinate facts, the functions and the structure which render these functions possible . . .'),[7] and second, into a *necessary relation* which attaches the subordinate facts to the principal one; thus, 'We have purged our spirit of a metaphysical being.'[8] A similar analysis can be made of such terms as 'function', 'nature', 'law', 'individual', and 'perfection', and of statements in the so-called 'moral sciences', such as: 'It was the destiny of Rome to conquer the universe.'[9]

From the analysis of words we pass to the analysis of things: 'We imitate the algebraists: after having transformed the problem into a precise equation, we translate the unknowns in the equation by known quantities.'[10] This inductive phase of the process, revealing the full complexity of phenomena, and going beyond what is simply clear to what is fruitful of fresh insights, requires the creation of new instruments of observation, such as the microscope, and modification of the objects observed, as in controlled experiments.[11]

How is this second step, the use of inductive method, to be applied in the moral sciences and to literature? The two new 'scientific' instruments and tools of analysis to be used are the new history and the new psychology, whose use Taine illustrates by considering briefly Rabelais' *Pantagruel* and Dürer's *Passion*. We multiply our knowledge of the relevant facts concerning the man and his times and seek out the important, necessary relations involved. At the centre of these, we discover, is a certain psychology: 'Art, literature, philosophy, family, society, government, every establishment or external event necessitates and discloses a mass of habits and of internal events. The outside expresses the inside, history makes psychology manifest, the face reveals the soul.'[12] Psychology has become, as it were, the 'thermometer' of history, accomplishing two purposes: first, by penetrating

beneath the surface of historical events, it has stimulated the imagination; second, inasmuch as it is on the way to becoming a science itself, it will in turn render history, and thus criticism which is aware of history, itself truly scientific.

'Analysis stops here; you know wherein it consists: to translate words into facts; that is its definition; exact translation, complete translation; those are its two parts. In exact translation, one brings words which are obscure, vague, abstract, and of a complicated and doubtful meaning, back to the facts, portions of facts, analogies or combinations of facts which they signify. In order to do this one places the word in the particular, unique, and determined state of things under which it can be born; thus one causes it to be reborn; and by repeating this operation several times, on distinct and similar examples, one finally has unravelled the circumstance to which it corresponds. That is the first step.'[13] This reads like a description of what a good deal of modern logic, and especially the new science of semantics, attempts to do.

'In the second step of complete translation, one adds to the knowledge of each fact noted the knowledge of the unknowns which surround it. In order to do this, one modifies the observed object or one replaces the observing instrument.'[14] M. Pierre concludes by picturing this latter, inductive process as a never-to-be-completed book: 'Your successors will read twenty more pages and render your translation more complete. Their sons will advance still further, and so on. The book is endless.'[15]

However, his more imaginative friend is not satisfied with such an inconclusive conclusion. He rises and says: *Peut-être.* Maybe!

The Method of Synthesis

M. Paul, taking up the discussion in Taine's concluding chapter, goes on to consider the metaphysical issue which any process of analysis raises. 'We murder to dissect.' The living reality requires more than a description of so-called 'facts' and their relations: 'Each group of facts has its cause; each cause is a fact.'[16] With this discussion of causation, Taine enters into the deductive phase of his method: cause is defined as 'A fact from which one could *deduce* the nature, the relations, and the mutations of the others.'[17]

The example which M. Paul develops at some length in order to illustrate the centrality of causation is a biological one: the process of nutrition, essential to life, which he reduces to the

polar, subordinate processes of destruction and repair. The point is that, by seeing nutrition as the cause of an entire group of facts, we simplify our reasoning, without thereby departing from the facts, though we temporarily ignore them. This group of facts 'is composed only of consequences. I no longer have any need to notice it, I will find it again by reasoning when necessary. It is five hundred facts reduced to a single one. In subsequent researches, I shall have to pay attention only to the summary and generative fact.'[18] This 'summary and generative fact' is not a Platonic Idea, however, but a natural type or universal, derived by abstraction from scientific observation and analysis.

Taine's tendency was to retain deductive habits derived from his rationalistic heritage and attempt to fuse them with induction in his own special way. Thus, M. Paul's analysis of nutrition includes a number of extremely general propositions (such as 'nutrition is a cause') and then proceeds to 'verify' them by considering various sets of facts (such as 'the relations and the nature of the operations and of the organs').[19] His claim is that the former and the latter are so related that from the former 'one can deduce' the latter. But this is exactly the point at issue. Does not our very understanding of nutrition consist of these sets of facts? Deduction is used here in a sense quite different from that involved in the syllogistic reasoning of formal logic.

M. Paul then, somewhat tentatively, develops a theory which, by analogy from biology to psychology, is of central importance to Taine's theory and practice of criticism, namely, that the type or species, 'a fixed and limited form, which endures from generation to generation', functions as a cause: 'How to know whether it is an effect or a cause? By admitting, hypothetically, that it is an effect, then by verifying or refuting that hypothesis through experience. If the function determines the type, one ought to deduce from the function the existence, variations, and persistence of the type. If the former is lacking, the latter ought to be lacking. If the former varies, the latter ought to vary. If the former persists, the latter ought to persist. If not, the latter is independent of the former.'[20] A preliminary examination of some of the evidence—such as the persistence of vestigial organs which no longer perform a function—reveals that probably the species 'is not a derived and dependent thing, but independent and primitive'. However, at this point Taine backtracks somewhat: 'I am sketching a method, I am not advancing a theory. Consider

this idea, not as something established, but as a beacon.'[21] The discussion here is, of course, pre-Darwinian (1856).

M. Paul's methodological point is that, presumably without ever leaving the region of fact and without bringing in any metaphysical 'entities', he had arrived at a 'unique formula, generative definition, whence will be derived, through a system of progressive deductions, the orderly multitude of other facts'.[22] This had been accomplished by the process of abstraction with which we are already familiar (Chapter II, 'The Problem of Method'): 'A group having been formed, we extricate some general fact from it by means of *abstraction*. We concede *hypothetically* that it is the cause of the others. Knowing the properties of the causes, we *verify* whether it has them; if it doesn't have them, we will try the hypothesis and the verification on its neighbours, until we find the cause. Reuniting a group of causes or generative facts, we seek to find by the same procedure which one engenders the others. . . . Abstraction, hypothesis, verification, these are the three steps of the method. No more are needed, and they are all needed.'[23] Furthermore, M. Paul claims—and this is the important consequence for Taine's philosophy of criticism—whenever you use this method, 'you discover a hierarchy of necessities; there is such in the moral world as in the physical world. A civilization, a people, an age, has a definition, and all their characteristics or their details are nothing but the sequel and developments.'[24] The example of Rome is used to illustrate this point, more or less repeating material from the *Essay on Livy* (final chapter of Part One).

At this juncture, M. Paul has passed beyond analysis of method and the idea of cause to speculations which may give us pause. Some elements in his construction—which may result perhaps from his method, perhaps from a tendency to apply that method too glibly—seem of questionable validity to the present-day reader. For example, his summary of the Roman type uses the notion of phrenology—then a popular theory, of course—to find an example of a 'cause': 'A dry and plain spirit, which is probably *the effect of the original structure of the brain*, a persevering and powerful circumstance, which created the necessity in this people for thinking of its interest and of acting together, produced and strengthened beyond measure the egoistical and political faculty.'[25] Two elements of the famous formula ('race' and 'milieu') are here invoked, but our ideas of race and heredity

especially have, of course, become much more sophisticated in the course of the last century (Chapter VII, 'Biological Heredity').

Further, Taine's deductive habit has led him, on the basis of the metaphysics which he derived primarily from Spinoza and Hegel, to a vision of the unity of all things which is more of an article of faith than a 'fact' he has proven. Thus, 'Little by little the pyramid of causes takes shape, and the scattered facts receive from the philosophic architecture their links and positions.'[26] The alternative of a pluralism of causal series is one which he does not consider (Chapter X, 'The Problem of Causation'). Instead, in almost rhapsodic terms—to the extent that Taine's logically neat prose can achieve rhapsody—M. Paul pictures a situation in which continued study of civilizations will enable us to arrive at 'the master faculty' of each nation scientifically, unlike 'the metaphysicians' who 'attempt to define it at the first try and without passing through experience'.[27]

The conclusion of M. Paul's discussion is an apotheosis of the nineteenth-century ideal of science, in the spirit of Spinoza.[28] It is a vision of unity which has something of the sublime about it, and it is difficult not to share something of Taine's enthusiasm. However, enthusiasm is not a strictly scientific virtue, and 'the eternal axiom' is more of a rationalist postulate than a scientific fact. Conscious himself that he had, perhaps, stepped out of his scientific rôle, Taine concludes on a humorous note: 'It was late; my two friends dismissed me, and I went to sleep. Dear reader, you have wanted to do the same for the last two hours.'[29]

Analysis and synthesis; induction and deduction; the idea of cause; history and psychology; abstraction, hypothesis, and verification; formulas, types, real definitions, and master faculties; race and *milieu*; the hierarchy of necessities and the overriding unity of 'the eternal axiom'—these are the chief elements in Taine's first considerable essays 'On Method', and they are all concepts which we have already encountered, in more or less developed forms, during his years at the Normal School. Forming a highly unified pattern, they received various emphases in turn in the many essays on method which Taine was to write, on various occasions, during the decade which followed.

NOTES

[1] *Causeries*, XIII, p. 279. The year in which this volume appeared (1857), bearing its original title of *Les Philosophes français du XIXme siècle*, was an especially exciting one in the history of French literature, witnessing the publication, among others, of such works as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and Michelet's *L'Insecte*. Sainte-Beuve, in his article on 'Madame Bovary' (*Causeries*, XIII, pp. 346–363, 4 mai 1857) summarized the advent of a new era in the following famous words: 'This work, as a whole, obviously carries the stamp of the hour in which it has appeared. Begun, as one must suppose, a few years ago, its coming at this moment is in the nick of time. It is truly a book to be read while going from a performance where one has listened to the plain, sharp dialogue of a comedy by Alexander Dumas *fils* or applauded *Les Faux Bonshommes*, between two articles by Taine. Because in many places, and under various forms, I believe that I can recognize new literary signposts: science, spirit of observation, maturity, force, a bit of toughness. These are the characteristics which seem to affect the leaders of the new generations. Son and brother of distinguished doctors, M. Gustave Flaubert holds the pen as others hold the scalpel. Anatomists and physiologists, I find you everywhere!' (p. 363, S. J. K.).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 252, S. J. K.

[3] Taine, *Les Philosophes classiques*, p. 176.

[4] Quoted by Rosca, *L'Influence de Hegel sur Taine*, p. 341.

[5] *Les Philosophes classiques*, pp. 345, 349.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 324.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 326.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 327.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 328–331.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 333.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 337.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 340.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 342–343.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 343–344.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 350.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 351, our italics.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 354.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 351.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 358. Cf. Mill's canons of induction (*A System of Logic*, Book III, Chapter VIII).

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 361.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 362.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 363, Taine's italics.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 364.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 366, our italics.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 367.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 369.

[28] Quoted above, Chapter II, p. 28.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 371.

CHAPTER IV

CRITIQUE OF ABSTRACTION

The Ambiguity of Abstraction

THE key to Taine's attempt, in *The Classic Philosophers*, at a balance between analytic and synthetic methods lay in the concept of *abstraction*: it is through that process—together with the more obviously scientific methods of hypothesis and verification—that we come to understand causes and arrive at 'summary and generative' facts. One naturally asks: 'What are the virtues and dangers of abstraction in criticism?'

Taine's own answer to this question may be best approached in his own lucid and succinct summation[1] of the central argument of *The Classic Philosophers*:

'If the reader will deign to reread the exposition of the causes which guided its founders, he will find two: the need to subordinate science to morality, and the taste for abstract words. . . .

'This preference for morality finally reshaped the philosophy of M. Cousin completely. Thus transformed, it refuted scepticism, as an immoral doctrine, by means of an *equivocation*; reduced psychology to the study of reason and liberty, the only faculties which have a connection with morality; defined reason and liberty in such a manner as to serve morality; prescribed to art the function of expressing moral beauty; established God as guardian of morality, and based the immortality of the soul on its providing a sanction for morality. Thus engrossed, it suppressed the philosophic philosophy, leaving in their entirety the ancient objections, repeating the ancient demonstrations, obliterating the questions of science, reducing science to an oratorical machine serving the needs of education and government.

'This preference for morality mustered all of M. Jouffroy's studies around the "problem of human destiny". It perverted his

response by an involuntary *equivocation*,[2] and arrested it on the threshold, because of a theological prejudice from which he never escaped.

'This taste for *abstraction* persuaded M. de Biran to transform forces, simple qualities or abstract analogies, into substances, to consider the will as the soul, to change extension into an appearance, and to revive Leibnitz's monads.

'This taste for *abstraction*, after having led M. Cousin into pantheism, reduced his philosophy to a heap of inexact phrases, of lame reasonings and of obvious *equivocations*, so that when the love of the seventeenth century had taught him a simple style, at a later stage, his doctrines no longer had any other support than public prejudice, his glory as a philosopher, and his genius as an orator.

'This taste for *abstraction*, after having led M. Jouffroy astray among M. de Biran's monads, led him to consider the faculties as real things, actual objects of psychology; to imprison psychology in a question of scholastic and useless words; to express the facts by vague notations, inexact in themselves and laden with errors.'[3]

The remainder of this concluding chapter stressed the impact of these two 'dominant traits' on Taine's chief concern, the relation of science to the humanities, or 'moral sciences'. The result of the tendencies towards abstractions and towards the subordination of science to morals had been an isolated and impotent philosophy. Instead of leading in the search for knowledge, the 'spiritualists' had remained divorced from the positive sciences, progress in which at that time was being made by leaps and bounds. In this respect, Taine contrasted them to the 'idéologues' of the eighteenth century, who had been the spiritual sons—as well as, in some respects, the leaders—of Newtonian science. He pictured a pendulum-swing from one extreme to the other: with Laromiguière, *analysis* had ceased to be a discovery, and in the chaos and servitude of the Napoleonic Era, 'it was an honour, a virtue, a refuge, and a rebellion to dream'. However, 'for the first time in the world, dreaming was metaphysics'.[4] Dreams and *abstractions* were the chief passions of the Romantic period ('our renaissance'): 'Everywhere one saw metaphor and abstraction, poetry and philosophy, dream and formula, intermingled. . . . Plays and novels became manuals of science. . . .'[5] Not only did poets become philosophers and saviours of humanity, but philosophers put their theories into novels, odes, prayers, and ecstasies.[6]

It was in such an atmosphere that Cousin's eclecticism was born, and it was because it met the needs of a public so nurtured that it succeeded.

In view of the great emphasis which Taine has placed here, both on the dangers of *abstraction* and on the equivocations or *ambiguities* of which he finds Jouffroy and Cousin guilty, it is curious to note his own tendency to use the word 'abstraction' *ambiguously*. Thus, in the early chapters, it is clearly being used as a term of negative criticism, whereas in the concluding chapter (M. Paul's discussion) and elsewhere it is made an important, indeed the central, part of his critical method. How can we resolve this seeming contradiction? Is the word being used differently in each context?

Abstraction as Weakness

If we look both before and after the writing of *The Classic Philosophers*, we shall find that these conflicting attitudes towards abstraction represent two emphases in what Taine considered to be a unitary method. A few years previous, during the period when he had been writing his *La Fontaine* and *Livy*, he had himself stressed the importance of abstraction from particulars in literature and history. Thus, on the first page of the first edition of *La Fontaine* he announced that his goal was 'to find the universal traits of beauty' by 'collecting the particular beauties of each fable'.[7] An application of this method to literary study took the form of *résumés*, as was evident in the advice he sent to his sister Sophie from Nevers: 'This is the manner of study which Sophie needs: Sum up her author.—Sum up her summary.—Sum up her second summary in four or five lines.'[8] This advice was repeated a year later from Paris: '. . . you would need to make summaries for your history. . . . That would serve at once as an acquirement of memory and of reasoning. . . .Tell me if you are making the tabular summaries of which I have spoken to you.'[9] This was more than the pedagogy of the *précis* for Taine: it was an essential part of his concept of scientific method.

Taine's critique of abstraction can be understood as part of his general attempt to counteract some of the tendencies of a classical training and a rationalistic heritage in philosophy. His desire to make the transition from a deductive to an inductive method is brought out with special clarity in the revisions for the third edition of *La Fontaine*, which were made in 1861, the same year

in which the essay on Mill was written. Thus, the 'Theory of the Poetic Fable', which had been the opening chapter of the original thesis, was placed near the end of the third edition; Chapter VI of the original, headed 'The Conditions of Beauty—Summary', was omitted and replaced by the present 'Conclusion', in which ideas concerning race, environment, and 'great men'—similar to those in the *History of English Literature*, on which he was then working—were expressed; and a chapter on 'The Gallic Spirit' was added.[10]

As Rosca has pointed out, the first version of *La Fontaine* is a better indication of Taine's early method, in some of its aspects, than the final one we now read.[11] Though he emphasized the importance of induction and abstraction from particulars on a theoretical level, his actual practice, on many occasions, was rather to start with a thesis (or 'hypo-thesis'?) and then to seek the facts which proved his point. Merely moving the generalizations concerning poetic fables, more or less mechanically, from the beginning of *La Fontaine* and placing them at the end did not, of course, constitute a real shift from deduction to induction.

However, this concern for concrete particulars and inductive method did not arise merely as a result of Taine's study of Mill, but was rather a product of his youthful Romanticism and his taste in literature and art. For example, he criticized Livy's portrait of Fabius Maximus, who is presented as a model of reason and virtue, as follows:

'These eulogies make one distrustful. That a person should be steady and prudent, by all means. Yet he is not prudence and virtue. He is a man, not a quality; his nature gives a special turn to his discretion. An abstract being is a mutilated being, and that which is incomplete is not living. The imagination feels that something is lacking from the portrait.[12]

A similar reaction against abstraction was at the heart of his criticisms of the 'oratorical genius' (in Livy and others) and of the neo-classic movement in general.

The generally Romantic drift of Taine's taste at this time is especially clear in his letters to his old professor, Adolphe Hatzfeld. In one, which referred to the *La Fontaine* and his definition of beauty there, he favoured the particular over the general, setting himself in opposition 'to pure ideas, to general types, to cold allegories'.[13] Though he emphasized that art seeks the *characteristic*, he did not mean by that mere local colour; rather, he set

the characters of Shakespeare beside those of Racine and Corneille: '. . . they are true and living; they are complex and real beings, not ideas.'[14] He found the same truth in Rembrandt's paintings: 'This is poignant, it is life itself, but condensed, assembled. . . . Art is *a general idea becoming as particular as possible.*'[15] Somehow, the well-chosen, significant detail comes alive, sums up a universe, somewhat like a scientific formula, and it is this characteristic, particular detail ('le petit fait') which is lacking in Livy. Taine was not interested in mere abstract types (ideals) but in particulars (reals): 'Literature which depicts the particular reality, instead of depicting the ideal and the general, has an unlimited future. Each change in society will renew it. In fifty years, we can have another Beyle and another Balzac.'[16] When Prof. Hatzfeld disagreed with his judgment, Taine restated his position, and fell back on the *de gustibus* argument: 'Our imaginations are differently constructed; I see red, he sees blue, and with that the discussion is finished.' At this point, since he was defending the moderns, he did not seem to favour a fixed standard of judgment; or perhaps this was simply his way of avoiding continued debate and difference of opinion with the teacher he revered.

During this period, Taine had made the acquaintance of Stendhal's novels (*The Red and the Black*, *The Charterhouse of Parma*) and had been profoundly impressed—reading the former thirty and more times!—particularly because he saw exemplified in them his psychological approach to literature.[18] Against the charge of obscurity, so often levelled at modern art, he claimed, in true Romantic fashion, that the goal of art is not to be clear but to create beauty.[19] Writing to Prévost-Paradol, in the midst of the conflict in the French Academy over the *Essay on Livy*, he laid down the battle gage: 'Let us strive against the philistines.' Without contradicting this Romantic position, he wrote to William Guizot: 'I am on that point [that the artist should not seek to please the masses, S.J.K.] much more aristocratic than you, in matters of science as in matters of art.'[21] He felt that it was the job of the critics to make the public aware of *the best*, both new and old, and he recognized that new beauties, when they first make their appearance, often seem strange and unclear. In brief, Taine managed, then and later, to maintain a remarkably sane balance between awareness of new developments in literature and of the need for standards derived from the old, between the Romantic and the Classic, the particular and the universal.

Defence of Abstraction: the Essay on Mill

The positive side of abstraction was most fully developed in the essay on Mill (1861), which belongs to the period following *The Classic Philosophers*. Again, Taine finds it desirable to put his argument in the form of a dialogue; this time the scene is laid at Oxford, and Taine (assuming here the personality of M. Paul) engages in a friendly discussion with a fictitious young Englishman who speaks for British Empiricism.

A brief introduction sets the stage and introduces John Stuart Mill as the great, original English thinker of the century, an ally of 'Locke and Comte in the first rank; then Hume and Newton'.[22] The essay itself is divided into two parts headed: 'Experience' and 'Abstraction', corresponding roughly to the two essays 'On Method' discussed in the previous chapter.

The first part is a clear exposition by the young Englishman of Mill's *System of Logic*, so sympathetic in its tone that Mill wrote to Taine soon after its appearance 'that it would not be possible to give in a few pages a more exact and complete notion of the contents of his work, considered as a body of philosophic teaching'.[23] The key to Mill's thought is stated in a form which reminds us of Taine's own essay on analysis: 'In all forms and all degrees of knowledge, he has recognized only the knowledge of facts, and of their relations.'[24] He then goes on to show how Mill applies this principle to his theories of definitions, proof, axioms, and induction.

Mill's theory of induction is presented as his 'masterpiece', and its discussion leads naturally into his notion of causation. Cause and effect are names for sequences of phenomena, whose connections we discover by means of the famous four canons: the methods of agreement, of difference, of residues, and of concomitant variations. 'These are the only ways by which we can penetrate into nature. . . . And they all employ the same artifice, that is to say, *elimination*; for, in fact, induction is nothing else.'[25] Nor does Taine overlook the importance of deduction in Mill's thought, paying special attention to those sections in which he had explored its rôle in the sciences of life: physiology and history. A footnote refers to Mill's chapter on 'The Physical, or Concrete Deductive Method, as applied to Sociology' (Book VI, Chapter IX) and concludes: 'A whole book is devoted to the logic of the moral sciences; I know no better treatise on the subject.'[26]

The second part, headed 'Abstraction', consists of Taine's criticism of Mill's system. A brief colloquy begins when Taine remarks concerning the 'English mind': 'The religious and the positive spirit dwell there side by side, but separate. This produces an odd medley, and I confess that I prefer the way in which the Germans have reconciled science with faith.—But their philosophy is but badly written poetry.—Perhaps so.—But what they call reason, or intuition of principles, is only the faculty of building up hypotheses.—Perhaps so.—But the systems which they have constructed have not held their ground before experience.—I do not defend what they have done.—But their absolute, their subject, their object, and the rest, are but big words.—I do not defend their style.—What, then, do you defend?—Their idea of Causation.—You believe with them that causes are discovered by a revelation of the reason?—By no means.—You believe with us that our knowledge of causes is based on simple experience?—Still less.—You think, then, that there is a faculty, other than experience and reason, capable of discovering causes?—Yes.—You think there is an intermediate course between intuition and observation, capable of arriving at principles, as it is affirmed that the first is, capable of arriving at truths, as we find that the second is?—Yes.—What is it? *Abstraction.* Let us return to your original idea; I will endeavour to show in what I think it incomplete, and how you seem to me to mutilate the human mind.'[27]

Taine accepts Mill's basic principle that we can know only 'events and the relations between them', that we must build our knowledge by 'adding fact to fact. But when this is done, a new operation begins, the most fertile of all, which consists in reducing these complex into simple facts. A splendid faculty appears, the source of language, the interpreter of nature, the parent of religions and philosophies, the only genuine distinction, which according to its degree, separates man from the brute, and great from little men. I mean Abstraction, which is the power of isolating the elements of facts, and of considering them one by one.'[28] He then repeats some of M. Paul's arguments 'On Method', and asserts that 'There are . . . fruitful judgments, which, however, are not the results of experience: there are essential propositions, which, however, are not merely verbal. . . .'[29] Finally, he applies this concept to a critique of Mill's theories of definitions, proof, axioms, and induction.[30]

Taine makes clear that, in stressing the importance of abstraction, he does not mean to deny the necessity of experience. Rather: 'There are two operations, experience and abstraction; there are two kingdoms, that of complex facts, and that of simple elements. The first is the effect, the second is the cause. The first is contained in the second, and is deduced from it, as a consequent from its principle. The two are equivalent, they are one and the same thing considered under two aspects. This magnificent moving universe, this tumultuous chaos of mutually dependent events, this incessant life, infinitely varied and multiplied, may be all reduced to a few elements and their relations. Our whole efforts result in passing from one to the other, from the complex to the simple, from facts to laws, from experiences to formulae.'[31] The concluding sections of this essay amount, in fact, to a defence of metaphysics, in general, and an empirical metaphysics, in particular: '. . . however limited the field of a mind be, it contains absolute truths; that is, such that there is no object from which they could be absent. And this must necessarily be so; for the more general a fact is, the fewer objects need we examine to meet with it. If it is universal, we meet with it everywhere; if it is absolute, we cannot escape meeting it. That is why, in spite of the narrowness of our experience, metaphysics, I mean the search for first causes, is possible, but on condition that we remain at a great height, that we do not descend into details, that we consider only the most simple elements of existence, and the most general tendencies of nature.'[32] What follows contains many echoes of Hegel (including a footnote quoting the phrase, 'Die aufgehobene Quantität'), but concludes by speaking of the possibility of sketching 'a system of metaphysics without encroaching on the positive sciences. . . .'[33]

Taine Replies to Critics of 'Abstraction'

As has already been noted,[34] Taine conceived the peculiar function of French philosophy as that of a mediator between the extremes of the British and the Germans: 'We have extended the English ideas in the eighteenth century; and now we can, in the nineteenth, add precision to German ideas. Our business is to restrain, to correct, to complete the two types of mind, one by the other, to combine them together, to express their ideas in a style generally understood, and thus to produce from them the universal mind.'[35] This point was also developed in prefaces which

appeared before publication of the essay on Mill. When Taine published his volume of collected *Critical and Historical Essays* in January, 1858, he wrote a preface to answer some of the points which had been raised during a year in which the philosophy of method expounded in *The Classic Philosophers* had been subject to much criticism. A footnote concerning this criticism made special mention of 'M. Sainte-Beuve, M. Guillaume Guizot, M. Gustave Planche, M. Prévost-Paradol, M. Weiss'; chief among these, of course, was Sainte-Beuve, whose two *Causeries de Lundi*[36] had been largely sympathetic but had taken Taine to task for the very tendency towards 'abstraction' with which we are now concerned.

After a brief restatement of his critical method (in which the ideas of organic unity, master faculty, and causation were stressed), Taine's Preface attempted a summary statement of the chief objection to his method, namely, that it failed to do justice to the complexities and nuances of personality, experience, and works of art, and that Taine's 'formulas' tended to reduce and hence mutilate the objects to which they were applied. In Sainte-Beuve's articles this had taken the form of a contrast between Montaigne's discursive manner 'of going straight on before him at random and trusting to the chances of accidental encounters' and Taine's logical manner and persistent search for general laws[37]; animadversions concerning his 'reductions' of La Fontaine[38] and Livy, which, however, accepted the 'formulas' as literary *aperçus* rather than scientific statements[39]; and scattered objections to the effect that Taine had failed to do justice to the individual, that 'the *how* of creation or of formation, the mystery escapes', that one cannot pronounce 'the last word concerning a spirit, concerning a living nature!'[40]

In answering these objections, Taine did two things. First, he paid a tribute to the critical genius of Sainte-Beuve, whom he considered his 'master'. He had already addressed him as such in a letter sent to the older man together with a copy of *The Classic Philosophers*;[41] now his 1858 Preface included an acute and eloquent summary of Sainte-Beuve's method, but ended by disavowing any vain attempt to imitate him.[42]

Second, Taine made a sharp distinction between 'descriptive' and 'philosophic' criticism, corresponding roughly to Greene's 're-creative' criticism, on the one hand, and his 'historical' and 'judicial' types, on the other (Taine obviously was trying to achieve a fusion of the latter two): 'That is a conclusive argument against

a critic who seeks to depict, but not against a critic who tries to philosophize.'[43] That Taine was not unaware of the virtues of a true 'painter' in literature, art, and history has already been sufficiently emphasized; the term 'peintre', and the contrast between abstraction and concreteness, had recurred frequently in Part Two of the *Essay on Livy*,[44] and the same contrast had been used to indicate Victor Cousin's limitations as a biographer, his failure to use 'the little facts' and 'the magic words' which make a character come alive: 'It must be that the imagination of the painter does not resemble that of the orator at all.'[45]

However, Taine's purpose was a different one. The object of his philosophic criticism was to go beyond analysis and re-creative description and achieve true understanding, to ask, and attempt to answer, the question: *Pourquoi? Why?*[46] Repeating his familiar analogy between the critic and the anatomist, he insisted that both must be concerned with finding 'the original spiritual form whence all the important qualities are inferred of themselves',[47] with causes rather than accidents, and with causes hierarchically arranged in the order of their importance. He cited Aristotle to the effect that 'the universal is the sole object of science', and added the possibility that, by means of such criticism, 'perhaps one will be able to predict'.[48]

Finally, Taine made an eloquent, and rather humble, plea for consideration of the method on its own merits, rather than in terms of his merits or demerits as a person or writer. The enterprise itself was surely inspiring: 'This spectacle seems to me to be a noble one; method is the instrument which provides it; that instrument, invented by Aristotle and Hegel, deserves only that one should defend it; I have only to beg pardon for the workman.'[49] (Despite his differences with Hegel on metaphysical issues, he cited him here as the chief modern example and exponent of a philosophical method, both in history and aesthetics.)

The Preface to the second edition of *The Classic Philosophers* (January, 1860) was written after two years of ill health which had interrupted (or slowed down) the writing of the *History of English Literature* (see our 'Selected Bibliography'). Not unnaturally, therefore, it began with reminiscences concerning Taine's first experience in the Latin Quarter eight years ago (1852) and the conversations and issues out of which the book grew.[50] This Preface, like the essay on Mill, stressed not analysis, but synthesis, the idea of *cause*, which Taine equated with the ideas of substance,

essence, nature, and force. He proposed here, as in the later essay, that the French seek out the middle way between the spiritualists and the positivists, summed up in the Spinozist position: '. . . if one should prove that the order of the causes is identical with the order of the facts, one should refute them all at the same time.'[51] The function of analysis would be to get behind the metaphors of language by making more precise our knowledge of real causes: 'By measuring the tenth parts of a second, one calculates the distance of stars from the earth. By presenting the idea of cause in a precise way, one can renovate one's idea of the Universe.'[52] Taine was re-emphasizing the necessity of completing science by metaphysical analysis 'which brings these laws and these types back to some universal formula'.[53]

'*False*' *and* '*True*' *Abstractions*

In sum, the seeming contradictions in Taine's use of abstraction are superficial. He made, consistently, what amounted to a distinction between 'false abstractions' and 'true abstractions'. When he criticized Livy and Cousin for their abstractness, he was referring to the former, which involved a loss of the qualities of life and reality. Thus, in 1856, when he wrote *The Classic Philosophers*, Taine felt that the 'official' philosophy of eclecticism was played out, a sterile 'faith' and not a means to discovery. The younger generation was turning from false abstractions (that is, empty words) to *facts*,[54] and not even the scientifically grounded systems of men like Ampere and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire seemed more than tentative. The taste for analysis was returning, and the 'vague aspirations' and 'large words' of Hugo and Lamartine already seemed dated, of another generation. The model for the future would be 'the greatest psychologist of the century, Henri Beyle', master of the 'precise little phrases'.[55] However, Taine was not given to prophecy; he preferred rather to point a direction, and that was the direction of positive science, whose progress was slow but sure: 'Before knowing a truth, one must traverse ten errors.'[56] Though its truths were more laboriously acquired than those of the Romantic idealists, they were carved in stone.

On the other hand, when Taine wrote a defence of abstraction in his criticism of Mill he was referring to the kind of abstraction which he thought was a necessary part of scientific method. He was defending the possibility of metaphysics and a philosophical approach to criticism.

NOTES

[1] In the chapter headed 'Pourquoi l'éclecticisme a-t-il réussi?' (Why Did Eclecticism Succeed?). Since this is clearly marked 'Conclusion', the two chapters 'On Method' must be thought of as a kind of appendix.

[2] 'The double meaning of the word *destiny*.'—Taine's note.

[3] *Les Philosophes classiques*, pp. 290–293, our italics.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 297.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 300.

[7] Quoted by Rosca, *L'Influence de Hegel sur Taine*, p. 338.

[8] *V. & C.*, I, 157 (18 November, 1851).

[9] *V. & C.*, I, 321–322 (January, 1853) and 323.

[10] Rosca, *op. cit.*, pp. 339–340, Note 3.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 341, 346.

[12] *Essai sur Tite-Live*, p. 226.

[13] *V. & C.*, II, 44.

[14] *V. & C.*, II, 44.

[15] *V. & C.*, II, 46–47, Taine's italics.

[16] *V. & C.*, II, 48.

[17] *V. & C.*, II, 72 (2 July, 1854).

[18] *V. & C.*, II, 63–67.

[19] *V. & C.*, II, 65.

[20] *V. & C.*, II, 59.

[21] *V. & C.*, II, 62.

[22] *History of English Literature*, II, 575.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 572, Note, quoting from Taine's Preface to the book edition: *Le Positivisme anglais*, 1864. Mill added the following criticism: 'But I think you are wrong in regarding the views I adopt as especially English. They were so in the first half of the eighteenth century, from the time of Locke to that of the reaction against Hume. . . . When I wrote my book, I stood almost alone in my opinions . . .' (*ibid.*).

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 580.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 593.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 599, Note 2.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 605, our italics.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 606.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 607.

[30] Taine's development of his theory of abstraction involves him in a number of concepts which require further elucidation and criticism, but which have already been encountered in Chapter II: (1) The concept of 'real definitions' of 'essences' (Chapter II, 20, and Appendix A, 'Criticisms of Descartes and Aristotle'). (2) A theory of proof as concerned with causes and laws: 'Syllogism does not proceed from the particular to the particular, as Mill says, nor from the general to the particular, as the ordinary logicians teach, but from the abstract to the concrete; that is to say, from cause to effect' (*History of English Literature*, II, 610; cf. our Chapter II, 44). (3) A theory of axioms as all involving, by means of analysis and abstraction, the basic axiom of identity (Chapter II, 21, and Appendix A, 'The "External Axiom"'). (4) A theory of

induction as proceeding by means of isolation of relevant facts and elimination of irrelevant ones (Chapter II, 19). To consider all the problems these concepts present, however, would require too long a digression from the subject of this chapter.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 612–613.

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 616–617.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 617.

[34] Chapter I, 7.

[35] *History of English Literature*, II, 617.

[36] Vol. XIII, 9 and 16 March, 1857, one of which has already been cited (Chapter III, 39).

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 261, 262, 272.

[41] The letter described Sainte-Beuve as 'Inventor of a critical method, the finest of psychologists, the most loving and most delicate painter of life' (*V. & C.*, II, 148).

[42] *Essais*, p. 74. Ernst Cassirer saw Taine as having, rather, *formulated* and *developed* Sainte-Beuve's method: 'But what Sainte-Beuve practised with an easy virtuosity and an insurpassible gift of sympathy, has only been shaped by his great pupil, Hippolyte Taine, into a firm and rigorous method. Taine was the first to introduce a firm scheme which could thenceforth hold good for all studies of cultural history' (*Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie*, p. 10, S.J.K.).

[43] *Ibid.*, p. v.

[44] 'History Considered as an Art' (especially Chapter II, on 'The Characters in Livy', and the section on 'Narrations' in Chapter III).

[45] *Les Philosophes classiques*, pp. 117.

[46] *Essais*, p. viii.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. ix.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. xii.

[50] *Les Philosophes classiques*, pp. iii–v.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. vii.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. viii.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. ix.

[54] '. . . Humboldt himself has only made a catalogue of acquired facts' (*Les Philosophes classiques*, p. 311).

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 312.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY AND PSYCHOLOGY

'*On Laws in History*'

THE two new tools of analysis which Taine hailed in his chapters 'On Method' and developed most thoroughly were history and psychology; they indicated the kinds of abstractions which he considered were, or could be, truly scientific. In notes 'On Laws in History',[1] written in 1858 after the *Critical and Historical Essays* had appeared and during the slack period of his labours on the *History of English Literature*, he attempted to sharpen the distinctions necessary for use of these tools, and, as a result, his general idea of abstraction was made more specific.

As always in Taine, there is a dual process involved: from effect to cause (induction) and from cause to effect (deduction). The former is subdivided into two kinds, according as the 'groups' under consideration are particular (works of literature and religion, forms of society and the family) or general (abstract laws, taken from the particulars); the latter (deduction) involves the scientific procedure of prediction. The idea of relations, or 'couples', is central: 'In other words, to form particular relations, to extract from them general relations, and, establishing the actual presence of the first term, to predict the arrival of the second.'[2]

These relationships, especially in the 'moral sciences', always involve a psychological element, which itself functions as both cause and effect. Thus, the historian's task is twofold: (1)'. . . to seek, for each kind of group, the kind of feelings and faculties which are its antecedents. (I have done it for history, poetry, philosophy, in *Livy*, *La Fontaine*, *The Classic Philosophers*, and, as yet only in part, for religion, society, here and there).'[3] (2) These faculties and sentiments in turn have their *causes*, or conditions—

Taine uses the words interchangeably—which may be either psychological or physiological.

From these notes, which anticipate the essential doctrine of the 'Introduction' to the *History of English Literature*, we can gather, first, the central position which psychology takes in Taine's philosophy of history; and second, the extent to which he conceived his enterprise to be a philosophical one: in whatever field he studied, he was especially concerned with the *species* or *type*. The transition from particulars to universals, via the process of abstraction, was his perennial problem; and this chapter will consider some of the forms which it took in his writings on history.

History as Science and Art

Taine's prize *Essay on Livy* (1853) was a dissertation on historical method, as well as an application of that method to the ancient Roman. The two parts of the book consider history, first as a science, and then as an art, and in the discussion of both these aspects of history the relations between particular facts and philosophic generalizations are crucial.

The first chapter (on 'Criticism') opens by striking this keynote: 'A science contains particular facts which it establishes, and general facts which it coordinates; history clarifies and collects, by means of criticism, the truths of detail; by means of the philosophic spirit, it shapes and sets in order the truths of the whole.'[4] Criticism, like science, begins in a passion for 'the whole truth, nothing but the truth'.[5] But it cannot rest content with scattered facts; obviously, the past can never be fully reconstructed, and the choice of details must be determined by some principles. Niebuhr's *History of Rome* (1811–1830) was one of the first to stress the concept of development, in the spirit of Vico. Taine cites from Niebuhr a comparison of the work of an historian to that of a 'naturalist' reconstructing fossils,[6] and derives from him an emphasis on 'the grand traits', all that we can hope to recover from the past: 'Across the distance, we only discover the large masses and vast movements of the ancient ages. The particular facts have perished; the general facts hold good, and the critic makes a philosopher of himself in order to remain an historian.'[7]

'Abstraction', again, is the key to Taine's exposition of 'La Philosophie dans l'Histoire' (Chapter IV). Just as Newton could see the law of gravity in the fall of an apple, so the historian gathers his facts in order to search for the laws which underlie

them.[8] 'At first sight, each group of facts has its cause'[9]; the essential point of a revolution or war can sometimes be summed up in a single phrase or formula. But the mind is not completely satisfied with such minor *aperçus*: 'The partial causes suppose the universal causes', until finally there emerges a 'dominant idea' which expresses 'the genius of the people'.[10] Livy's notion of Roman history was inadequate, since it was primarily that of an oratorical spirit writing history; he neglected such factors as the climate, the soil, and social institutions.[11] Modern historians have done better in this respect[12]: 'In order to teach better, one must choose better.'[13]

The historian-artist, like the historian-scientist, attempts to strike a balance between the particular and the general. The special gift of imagination enables him to penetrate to the very soul of events: 'Let us, therefore, transform the abstractions and arguments into emotions and images.' But this is not accomplished by addition of external ornamentation; rather, 'perfect science of itself produces faultless art'. This will be true because, essentially, the scientist and the poet are concerned with the same fundamental human reality. 'Thus, the historian creates portraits while seeking for causes, and, because he wishes to teach, he pleases.'[14] The artist's truest style will be the product of his profoundest reflections, so that 'description, narration, style, expression, all the elements of art are produced by science'. Because of this correspondence of content and form, Livy's oratorical bent will be found to have influenced his art as it did his science. 'The same causes applied to similar objects have produced the same effects.'[15]

Thus, it followed that Livy's method of presenting the characters in his history was through their discourse, rather than their thoughts or actions (Chapter II, Part Two); but 'Eloquence is not imagination, and, if one wishes to be a painter, it is dangerous to be an orator.'[16] This fault was least evident in his treatments of the great figures, like Hannibal and Scipio, with whom the oratorical method was most appropriate. The same criticism is applied to Livy's use of narrative, because, as Aristotle pointed out, 'action depends on character'.[17] The oratorical method is not without its virtues, since it focusses on the reasoning and psychology which motivate the action. But it tends to be swept away by its own eloquence and wander from objective truth, especially when it is written in the vein of high tragedy, instead

of more realistic drama.[18] In brief, the abstractions of the artist, like those of the scientist—and the historian is both—must conform to Taine's conception of *true*, as against false, abstractions.

As a natural consequence of his method, this analysis provided Taine with the criterion he needed for determining, in the fashion the announcement of the competition by the French Academy had required, 'what rank he (Livy) occupies among the great models of antiquity'.[19] Livy was at the opposite extreme from the moderns, who sometimes tend to make of history a mere string of anecdotes: 'The moderns devote themselves too much to science and particular details; Livy, to art and general traits.'[20] But the full implications of this judgment should become clearer when we consider more fully the relations between analysis and judgment in Taine (Part Three).

Suffice it to say, for the present, that the same issues were very much in evidence in the *Critical and Historical Essays* which Taine wrote during 1855–1857 and published early in 1858. For example, in his essays on Michelet he describes the critic as 'the naturalist of the soul',[21] and, praising Michelet's *History of France* chiefly as a kind of epic poem, he finds it lacking in scientific rigour: 'True, history is an art, but it is also a science.'[22]

Notable in this volume of essays is a critical relativism which seems to belie Taine's use of a scale of values in the 'Conclusion' of *Livy*. Thus, in the essay on 'Philosophie Religieuse', he writes: 'Let us then separate science from poetry and practical morality, as we have separated it from religion . . .'[23] and the article on 'Madame de la Fayette' stresses the fact that each age is unique and produces works appropriate to its special needs. But such remarks are not to be taken as denying the importance of either science or judgment in criticism of literature. The first is intended to prevent the *abuse*, not the *use*, of science—to expose the fallacy of those who, like the figures treated in *The Classic Philosophers*, seek in religion a substitute for science, saying: 'My dream is pleasant, therefore it is true.'[24] The second is intended to assert the freedom of the modern artist in creating new forms of his own and to strike a happy balance in the perennial struggle of the Ancients versus the Moderns: 'History should be respectful and art should be original. We should admire what we have and what we lack; we should do things differently from our ancestors and praise that which our ancestors have done.'[25] The article on 'M. Troplong et M. de Montalembert' makes clear that what

Taine is objecting to is the kind of 'history' whose sole purpose is to bolster up the writer's particular *bias*, whether it be democratic or aristocratic. His relativism[26] does not deny the possibility of a hierarchy of values—a point of view, so to speak, from which points of view themselves may be judged.

'*Introduction*' to '*History of English Literature*'

The classic statement of Taine's philosophy of history, as of the historical method in the criticism of literature generally, is the deservedly famous 'Introduction' to the *History of English Literature.* This essay, which first appeared as an article on 'History, Its Present and Future' (December, 1863), has a double importance. First, it summed up an important movement in modern thought, as its opening words indicate: 'History has been transformed, within a hundred years in Germany, within sixty years in France, and that by the study of their literatures.'[27] Second, it was one of the earliest, and is still one of the clearest, statements of the historical approach to the study of literature.

What Taine clarified here, and attempted to exemplify in his pioneering *History*, was the relations between science and imagination—more specifically, the social sciences and the humanities—which have their focus in a psychology of history. He begins by saying that 'you study the document only in order to know the man'[28]; and the document is, of course, the literary text—or the painting, or work of sculpture, in other connections. 'This is the first step in history: it was made in Europe at the new birth of imagination, toward the close of the last century, by Lessing and Walter Scott; a little later in France, by Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry, Michelet, and others.'[29]

Taine soon passes to his main concern, which is psychology: 'When you consider with your eyes the visible man, what do you look for? The man invisible. The words which enter your ears, the gestures, the motions of his head, the clothes he wears, visible acts and deeds of every kind, are expressions merely; somewhat is revealed beneath them, and that is a soul.'[30] Referring to Herder, Otfried Müller, and Goethe as the pioneers of that method, he cites two recent works—Carlyle's *Cromwell* and Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal*—as models of its use, and Sainte-Beuve as its greatest exponent.[31]

However, a third level of analysis is indicated—recalling the distinction Taine made in the 'Preface' to the first edition of the

Essays, which he wrote in answer to Sainte-Beuve's criticisms—namely, the level of philosophy: 'Is Psychology only a series of observations? No; here as elsewhere we must search out the causes after we have collected the facts. No matter if the facts be physical or moral, they all have their causes; there is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar; and every complex phenomenon arises from other more simple phenomena on which it depends.'[32] In its context —and its critics are very fond of quoting it *out* of context[33] —the remark about 'vice and virtue' here makes eminently good sense.

Note, again, the abstracting tendency of Taine's thought. Starting with the particular documents of literature, he has moved inductively, by gradual stages, to the greatest generality of a synthetic idea: 'Here lie the grand causes, for they are the universal and permanent causes, present at every moment and in every case, everywhere and always acting, indestructible, and finally infallibly supreme, since the accidents which thwart them, being limited and partial, end by yielding to the dull and incessant repetition of their efforts; in such a manner that the general structure of things, and the grand features of events, are their work; and religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families, are in fact only the imprints stamped by their seal.' As in the previous chapter, we find that, at the heart of Taine's method, lies his belief in the existence of general causes and natural types, in the possibility of true abstractions: 'There is, then, a system in human sentiments and ideas: and this system has for its motive power certain general traits, certain characteristics of the intellect and the heart common to men of one race, age, or country.'[34]

Back of the 'elementary moral state', which acts as a permanent force, are the three general contributing causes of Taine's famous formula: *race*, *milieu*, *moment* (race, environment, time). Each of these will be given further consideration in later chapters; the point to be emphasized here is the fact that, out of the complex interplay of these forces, a type of *psychology* results: 'Man, forced to accommodate himself to circumstances, contracts a temperament and a character corresponding to them. . . .'[35] 'Beside the permanent impulse and the given surroundings, there is the acquired momentum. When the national character and surrounding circumstances operate, it is not upon a *tabula rasa*, but on a

ground on which marks are already impressed.'[36] The operations of these three causes result in the great germinal ideas which characterize entire centuries and epochs: 'A certain dominant idea has had sway; men, for two, for five hundred years, have taken to themselves a certain ideal model of man: in the middle ages, the knight and the monk; in our classic age, the courtier, the man who speaks well. This creative and universal idea is displayed over the whole field of action and thought. . . .'[37]

Thus far, Taine has been going inductively from effects to causes, but at this point the process of generalization has, for him at least, reached the level of a law: 'Here as elsewhere we have but a mechanical problem; the total effect is a result, depending entirely on the magnitude and direction of the producing causes. The only difference which separates these moral problems from physical ones is, that the magnitude and direction cannot be valued or computed in the first as in the second.'[38] This is the point at which, in the physical sciences, deductions are made, on the basis of formulas, for purposes of prediction and verification. Despite the lack of exact measurement—a lack which has been supplied, to some extent, since the time of Taine, by improved statistical techniques—*if* we want to predict, 'it is upon an examination of these forces that we must ground our prophecy',[39] since these causes exhaust all the *possible* factors which could be involved.

Having reached this high level of abstraction, Taine proceeds to enunciate a number of general laws of history:

(1) The first might be stated as the law of *proportional influences*. 'So, if we arrange the psychological map of the events and sensations of a human civilization, we find first of all five or six well-defined provinces—religion, art, philosophy, the state, the family, the industries; then in each of these provinces natural departments; and in each of these, smaller territories, until we arrive at the numberless details of life such as may be observed within and around us every day.'[40] Now, supposing that the 'elementary moral state' of a civilization undergoes modification, 'it is clear that all the groups into which it enters, will be modified proportionately'.[41]

(2) This first law is true because of a further law of *mutual dependence*: 'A civilization forms a body, and its parts are connected with each other like the parts of an organic body.' Just as the palaeontologist can reconstruct the entire skeleton from a few

fossilized bones, so the historian of a civilization, 'studying some particular part of it, sees in advance and half predicts the character of the rest'.[42]

(3) On the most philosophical level, we 'begin to search for the general laws which regulate, not events only, but classes of events, not such and such religion or literature, but a group of literatures or religions'. And Taine is confident we shall find that each large movement of civilization finds its 'sufficient and necessary condition' in some 'moral disposition, or a combination of moral dispositions'—i.e., in a psychological state.[43]

Though Taine has defined his problem with great eloquence and clarity, he is under no illusion concerning the ease of its solution. True, writing in 1863, he claims that 'History now attempts, or rather is very near attempting this method of research',[44] and works by Montesquieu, Renan, Mommsen, and Tocqueville are cited to give substance to this claim. But he is writing as a pioneer; proposing a method and goal, not boasting of a *fait accompli*: 'History must search now-a-days for these rules of human growth; with the special psychology of each special formation it must occupy itself; the finished picture of these characteristic conditions it must now labour to compose. No task is more delicate or more difficult. . . .' Emphasizing that 'history in its elements is a psychological problem', he indicates that, though each personality type involved 'has its moral history and its special structure', much analysis would be necessary to reveal that structure, and 'barely yet has such a method been rudely sketched'.[45] Sainte-Beuve, 'the German critics', and especially Stendhal are cited as examples of what might be done.

Finally, this conception of literary study, though it has been decried as reducing literature to the rôle of a 'mere' social document, actually exalts its subject as the most adequate mirror of life: 'In this light, a great poem, a fine novel, the confessions of a superior man, are more instructive than a heap of historians with their histories. I would give fifty volumes of charters and a hundred volumes of state papers for the memoirs of Cellini, the epistles of St. Paul, the Table-talk of Luther, or the comedies of Aristophanes. In this consists the importance of literary works: they are instructive because they are beautiful; their utility grows with their perfection; and if they furnish documents it is because they are monuments.'[46]

Indeed, it is in the very relations between literature and life

that Taine finds his ultimate criteria for criticism. Again, the key to his judgments lies in a fusion of the particular and the general: representation of 'sentiments' gives a work the life of art; representation of 'important' or universal sentiments increases its stature. 'It is then chiefly by the study of literatures that one may construct a moral history, and advance toward the knowledge of psychological laws, from which events spring.'[47]

'*Macaulay*' *and* '*Carlyle*'

The 'Introduction', summarizing so well the method and spirit of Taine's masterpiece and thus standing as the high-water mark of his philosophy of criticism, was the crystallization of ideas which were ever-present in his writings.[48] For example, one of the first essays written for the *History* was the one on Macaulay, first published in April, 1856, and reprinted with the heading: 'Criticism and History'.

At this early date, we find Taine writing a clear description of what we have been calling the process of 'true abstraction': 'If he rises to general considerations he mounts step by step through all the grades of generalization, without omitting one; he feels his way every instant; he neither adds nor subtracts from facts; he desires at the cost of every precaution and research to arrive at the precise truth. He knows an infinity of details of every kind; he owns a great number of philosophic ideas of every species: but his erudition is as well tempered as his philosophy. . . .'[49] A passage on Addison is described as a 'double series of inductions',[50] and an analysis of Macaulay's 'oratorical genius' places due emphasis on 'decisive specimens' in proof.[51] Thus, Macaulay is presented as an Englishman who combined his native sense of fact with a French 'spirit of harmony'.[52] His virtues of universality, unity, development, and interest are all in the French vein, but they do not negate his sense of detail and complexity: 'It is not enough to see some causes; we must see a great many of them. Every event has a multitude. Is it enough for me, if I wish to understand the action of Marlborough or of James, to be reminded of a disposition or a quality which explains it? No; for, since it has for a cause a whole situation and a whole character, I must see at one glance and in abstract the whole character and situation which produced it. *Genius concentrates. It is measured by the number of recollections and ideas which it assembles in one point.* That which Macaulay has assembled is enormous.'[53]

The essay on Carlyle, which appears in the *History* under the heading of 'Philosophy and History', was written shortly before the companion essay on Mill and also stresses the importance of 'abstraction'. The facts of Carlyle's biography, as well as the nature of his thought, led Taine to contrast him with Macaulay, stressing his affinities with the Germans, rather than the French. An entire section (V) of the part on his 'Style and Mind' is a short essay on method, developing the familiar concepts of the group and the type.

At the expense of verification and proof, Carlyle proceeded by intuition: this 'power of discovering general ideas'[54] had been the special contribution of Germany during the fruitful years from 1780 to 1830, and it was Carlyle's vocation to translate some of that contribution into English. Two names (Goethe and Hegel) and two key ideas (*Entwickelung* and *Begriff*) are especially mentioned.[55] When this method is carried to excess, 'we must have recourse either to hypothesis or abstraction, invent arbitrary explanations, or be lost in vague ones . . . the two vices which have corrupted German thought'.[56] ('Arbitrary' and 'vague' are the words to be underlined here, since Taine repeatedly stresses the importance of both 'hypothesis' and 'abstraction' himself.) Taine argues for a balance between, in this case, 'the gravity of the Puritans' and 'the gaiety of Voltaire': 'Goethe, the master of all modern minds, knew well how to appreciate both.'[57] At this point, since he is trying to explain a German mind from England to a French reading public, Taine takes the extreme relativist position—as he had in some of the *Essays*[58]: 'The best fruit of criticism is to detach ourselves from ourselves . . . and perhaps one day free ourselves from every system.'[59] Again, with special reference to Carlyle's *Cromwell*, he stresses the centrality of psychology: 'To explain a revolution, is to write a partial psychology. . . .'[60]

Freedom in History?

If Taine's philosophy of history has placed psychology and the notion of causation at its centre, what provision, if any, has been made for freedom of the will? This question had been so frequently raised that, when the second edition of the *Essays* appeared, Taine found it necessary to write a second 'Preface' to clarify the issue. Giraud notes that, when this second version was printed as an article in the *Journal des Débats*

(29 March, 1866), the editor of that journal observed 'that Taine makes a number of concessions there to the partisans of freedom'.[61] Were there such concessions? If so, how important were they?

In contrast to previous prefaces, which stressed the ideas of causation and of unity (see our Chapter IV, 'Taine Replies to Critics of "Abstraction"'), this one began by making a sharp distinction between a *method* and a *system*: 'Several critics have honoured me, some by opposing, some by approving of what they like to call my system. My claim has never gone so far as to say that I have a system: I am trying at most to follow a method. A system is an explication of the whole, and implies a job completed; a method is a way of working and implies a job to be done. I have wanted to work in a certain direction and manner, nothing more.'[62]

Perhaps one of the points the editor of the *Journal* had in mind as a 'concession to liberty' was really a change in terminology. The first 'Preface' asked the question *Why?* and spoke of *causes*; the second version began by seeking, not causes, but '*dependencies and conditions*'.[63] With greater patience and in greater detail than the first, the second 'Preface' takes the critical reader through the steps of classification and abstraction which lead to the central fact of a certain '*psychological state*'.[64] Passing from the individual to society, Taine develops here pretty much the same philosophy of history as that of the 'Introduction' to the *History*. He does not stop with 'dependencies' (cf. 'the law of mutual dependence'), but goes on to state his theory of causation.[65] History considers relationships in their temporal aspects: 'One step remains to be taken. Until now, the conjunction of *simultaneous* things only has been in question; now, we are concerned with the conjunction of *successive* things. The reader was able to verify that moral things have their *dependencies*, like physical things; at present he must verify the fact that, like physical things, they have their *conditions*.'[66] Since, as Taine claims, the historical conditions we study in this fashion are 'sufficient and necessary', they are in effect the same causes of which he had previously written: a cause might be defined as 'a necessary and sufficient condition'. Furthermore, these 'dependencies' and 'conditions' are not empty abstractions but 'living forces' which together form 'the choir invisible of which the old poets speak, which moves through things and by which the eternal universe throbs'.[67] The terms and order of

argument have been somewhat modified, but the doctrine and spirit are unchanged.

The remainder of this second 'Preface' takes up a series of possible objections and develops the parallels between the moral and other natural sciences at much greater length than did the first. To the opponent of determinism who claims that he has reduced men to machines: 'He forgets what an individual soul is, just as not long ago he forgot what an historical force is; he separates the word from the thing. . . .'[68] The individual is involved with society and gains, rather than loses, hope and power by realizing his relations to history. Just as we have increased our control over nature through science, so 'an analogous discovery in the moral sciences should furnish to men the means of predicting and modifying the events of history to a certain degree'.[69] Only when we know the chain of causation can we break into it creatively and effectively and experience true freedom.

Here begins a series of references and analogies, all designed to buttress Taine's general point of view and provide scientific proof for his key concepts, including: (1) Mill's *System of Logic*, especially his 'Theory of Induction'; (2) the theories of the connection of characters in organisms found in Cuvier and Richard Owen; (3) the theory of organic balance found in Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire; (4) the rule of the subordination of characters, so important in botany and zoology; (5) the theories of analogy and unity of composition, found in Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and developed by Richard Owen; finally, (6) Darwin's principle of natural selection.[70] Both the moral and the biological sciences deal with life, heredity, and environment; in both we find 'natural groups . . . of individuals constructed according to a common type, divisible into families, genera, and species'; and, in both, 'each state of the organized being has as its double condition the preceding state and the general tendency of the type'.

The 1866 'Preface' ends with Taine's usual rhapsody to the future: 'This is the opportunity which is open to him; it has no limits; in such a domain, all of a man's efforts can carry him forward only one or two steps; he observes one little corner, then another; from time to time he stops to indicate the road which seems to him to be the shortest and surest. That is all that I am trying to do; the liveliest pleasure of a labouring spirit lies in the thought of the work which others will do afterwards.'[72] A true pathfinder, especially in his advocacy of historical method, he

achieved this modest purpose and did succeed in finding many collaborators and followers. As Sainte-Beuve wrote, in his essay on 'Taine's "History of English Literature"': 'Indeed, whatever those who were content with the old vague conditions may say, M. Taine has done much to advance literary analysis; those who now study a great foreign writer will no longer set to work in the old way nor so lightly as before the publication of M. Taine's book.'[73]

NOTES

[1] Referred to in Chapter I, 'A Sketch of Taine's Solution'.
[2] Chevrillon, *Taine*, p. 406.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 406–407.
[4] *Essai sur Tite-Live*, p. 29.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 122. This is one of Taine's favourite metaphors (for example, *History of English Literature*, I, 21).
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 124.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 127–128.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 162.
[12] Chapter VI, Part One: Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Ortolan, Michelet, Creutzer, Ganz, and Hegel are mentioned.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 190–191.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 219. Cf. our Chapter IV, Note 45.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 289.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. i.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 359.
[21] *Essais*, p. 127.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 255–6.
[26] 'In order to judge the ancients, one must take the ancient point of view' (*Ibid.*, p. 262).
[27] *History of English Literature*, I, 1. (A recent treatment of this movement is Emery Neff's *The Poetry of History: The Contribution of Literature and Literary Scholarship to the Writing of History Since Voltaire.*)
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[33] For example, Jacques Barzun's declaration, which distorts Taine's meaning, that 'genius is *not* a substance like tin or lead' (*Race: A Study in Modern Superstition*, p. 131). Taine called genius, not a *substance*, but a *product*, i.e., the result of causes (cf. Guérard, *Literature and Society*, p. 33).
[34] *History of English Literature*, I, 9.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.
[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] See Chapter II, 'The Problem of Freedom: Psychology and History'.
[49] *History of English Literature*, II, 495.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 497.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 500.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 510.
[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 511–512, our italics.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 543.
[55] Giacomo Barzelotti places special stress on Taine's affinities with, and indebtedness to, Goethe (*La Philosophie de H. Taine*, pp. 36 ff.).
[56] *History of English Literature*, II, 545–546.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 559.
[58] See this chapter, pp. 63–64.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 560.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 564.
[61] *Essai sur Taine*, p. 187.
[62] *Essais*, p. xiii.
[63] *Ibid.*, Taine's italics.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. xiv, Taine's italics.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. xvii ff.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. xviii, our italics.
[67] *Ibid.*, pp. xix–xx.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. xxii.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. xxiii. See our Chapter II, 'The Problem of Freedom . . .'.
[70] *Ibid.*, pp. xxiii–xxvii.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.
[73] *Essays by Sainte-Beuve*, p. 240.

CHAPTER VI

NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF ART

Early Essays in Aesthetics

ANALYSIS, synthesis, abstraction, history, and psychology—these are all *general* tools of method which, as the 'Introduction' to the *History* made clear, could be applied to the state, the family, industry, religion, and philosophy, as well as to works of literature and art. The *special* features of Taine's applications of these tools to aesthetics must next be considered, using the term 'art' loosely, as he did, to apply to literature and all the other arts, but especially to painting and sculpture.

Having completed a masterly application of his method in the *History of English Literature*, Taine next turned his attention to the visual arts, beginning with his *Voyage in Italy* (1864) and continuing through the various *Lectures on Art* which he delivered as Professor of Aesthetics and the History of Art at the École des Beaux Arts from the winter of 1864–1865 through that of 1868–1869. The 'documents' involved are now different, but the methods applied to them are unchanged in any essentials.

Here too Taine begins inductively, with particular works, and abstracts from them their general laws: 'The principal point of this method consists in recognizing that a work of art is not isolated, and, consequently, that it is necessary to study the conditions out of which it proceeds and by which it is explained.'[1] He groups his specimens according to their patterns of relationships, in a scale of rising generality: works of a particular artist; works of the school to which he belongs; the total situation of contemporary society out of which these works have emerged. This process, compared to 'analysis' in the sciences, 'consists in discovering, by numerous comparisons and progressive eliminations, traits common to all works of art . . .'.[2] The goal is an

aesthetic system which 'differs from the ancient, inasmuch as it is historic, and not dogmatic; that is to say, it imposes no precepts, but ascertains and verifies laws'.[3] Finally, the stage of philosophic synthesis is reached: the proof of experience is completed by that of reason, which 'consists in showing this dependence[4] to be not only rigorous in point of fact, but, again, that it is so through necessity'.[5]

Before considering the details of Taine's *Philosophy of Art*, we may recall briefly his previous attempts in that direction. There were the usual student papers,[6] and the *La Fontaine* was really 'an essay on Beauty',[7] the original summary chapter of which had been headed: 'The Conditions of Beauty'. The 'Conclusion' which was written for the 1861 revisions contained what was substantially a capsule statement of the position taken five years later in the *Lectures on Art*:

'I wanted to display the complete formation of a poetic work and to try to find by means of an example wherein beauty consists and how it is born.

'A race is found which has received its character from the climate, the soil, the elements, and the great events which it underwent at its origin. This character has adapted it and reduced it to the cultivation of a certain spirit as well as to the conception of a certain beauty. That is the national soil, very good for certain plants, but very bad for others, unable to bring to maturity the seeds of the neighbouring country, but capable of giving to its own an exquisite sap and a perfect efflorescence, when the course of the centuries brings about the temperature which they need. Thus were born La Fontaine in France in the seventeenth century, Shakespeare in England during the Renaissance, Goethe in the Germany of our day.

'For genius is nothing but a power developed, and no power can develop completely, except in the country where it finds itself naturally and completely at home, where education nourishes it, where example makes it strong, where character sustains it, where the public challenges it. . . . The more perfect a poet, the more national he is. The more he penetrates into his art, the more he has penetrated into the genius of his age and of his race. Because of this correspondence among the work of art, the country, and the age, a great artist is a public man. By it one can take his measure and assign him his rank. By it he pleases more or less

men and his work remains alive for a more or less extensive period.'[8]

Art as Imitation and Expression

A theory of art which stresses its 'public' or social function usually conceives of the work of art as an imitation of reality. But artistic 'reality' is an elusive quality, and the tendency in modern aesthetics has been rather to stress the expressive rôle of art. Iredell Jenkins, in a suggestive analysis, attempts to relate the realistic and idealistic elements in Taine to the doctrines of art as imitation and as expression respectively.[9] What exactly is Taine's definition of art, and what parts do imitation and expression play in it?

Taine summarized the steps through which he had passed in order to arrive at his definition as follows: 'At first we thought that the object of art was to *imitate sensible appearances*. Then separating material from intellectual imitation, we found that what it desired to reproduce in sensible appearances is the *relationships of parts*. Finally, remarking that relationships are, and ought to be, modified in order to obtain the highest results of art, we proved that if we study the relationships of parts it is *to make predominant an essential character*.'[10]

Note that Taine begins by setting aside architecture and music, the 'pure' or non-representational arts, and considering only poetry, sculpture, and painting, the so-called 'imitative' arts. He then follows his usual procedure of abstraction, passing, in a logically ordered exposition, from literal copying to true imitation, from the particular to the general, from the real to the ideal. Starting with 'exact imitation' of 'the living model',[11] he goes on to emphasize that 'exact' here does not imply photographic resemblance, but rather the *logic* of nature, 'the relationships and mutual dependence of parts'.[12] Further, these relationships are not mechanically abstracted, but rather *modified* 'in such a way as to make apparent the *essential character* of the object . . .'.[13]

Hence we arrive at the following definition of art: 'The end of a work of art is to manifest some essential or salient character, consequently some important idea, clearer and more completely than is attainable from real objects. Art accomplishes this end by employing a group of connected parts, the relationships of which it systematically modifies. In the three imitative arts of sculpture, painting, and poetry, these groups correspond to real objects.'[14]

A separate section devoted to music and architecture recognizes, not only the mathematical relationships they both involve, but also the fact that, for example, 'sound is analogous to the cry, and by this title it directly *expresses* with unrivalled precision, delicacy and force, suffering, joy, rage, indignation . . .'.[15] This argument, though it employs the language of expression, is used to prove the *imitative* character of music and architecture.

Thus, Taine's analysis seems intended to include the expressive, as well as the representational, rôle of art. Subjective elements of style represent the artist's means of emphasizing what he considers to be the essential character of the object; distortions, such as those employed by El Greco, are both expressive and real. Taine's definition might even be interpreted so as to cover most of the schools of modern painting: cubism and abstract art are concerned with 'relationships of parts'; surrealism is concerned with the 'essential character' of dreams; and so forth. Picasso's two-faced women can be understood, perhaps, as imitations of essential character achieved by abstracting certain relationships and combining them in an interesting design (see Appendix F).

The *Voyage in Italy* contains a number of passages which indicate some of the meanings conveyed by Taine's use of 'expression'. For example: 'How true it is that art is only *expression*, that above all one must have a soul, that a temple is not a heap of stones or a combination of forms, but at once and uniquely a religion which speaks!'[16] Taine's description of Bernini's statue of 'St. Theresa' is a poetic rendering in words of her 'rapturous attitude', and the work is found to conform 'to the modern standard of sculpture, wholly based on *expression*'.[17] In one passage, the central principle of art is 'to reveal and to perpetuate a *personality*, that of the artist, and of this personality whatever is *essential*'.[18] Since expression involves a logic of its own, 'outward or inward'[19]—i.e., either in external objects, which are imitated, or in the 'human nature' of the artist, which is 'expressed'—'essential character' seems broad, or perhaps ambiguous, enough to cover both.

Instead of praising Taine for his attempt at synthesis, Professor Jenkins erects the contrast between imitation and expression into a hard-and-fast dualism and proceeds to trace 'inconsistencies' in the *Lectures on Art*. His initial error is in accepting the all-too-common reading of Taine's metaphysics as naïvely positivist, materialist, mechanist, and nominalist; but, side by side with such quotations as he cites to justify such a reading, the conclusion of

On Intelligence that, 'if we look at the ideal and the real world, we perceive that their structure is similar',[20] must be considered. If the latter is taken as a truer formulation of Taine's metaphysical position, the sharpness of Professor Jenkins' distinction is seen to be somewhat exaggerated.[21] We prefer to stress in Taine's aesthetic theory his admirable struggle to 'see art steadily and see it whole'.[22]

Conditions for Production of Art

Taine's analysis of the conditions surrounding 'the production of the work of art' (Part II) is both a development of his general philosophy of history and an application and verification of that aspect of his method in a special field. As in the 'Introduction' to the *History*, psychology is a fundamental part of his general law: '*A work of art is determined by an aggregate which is the general state of the mind and surrounding circumstances.*'[23] However, in this section of the *Philosophy of Art*, his attention is focussed on the environmental half of the interaction: the social medium, 'milieu', or 'surrounding circumstances' which help produce a 'general state of the mind'.

The basis of Taine's exposition here, as elsewhere, is an elaborate biological analogy, comparing art to a plant. Just as the physical temperature or climate determines which seeds may survive in a particular soil, so there is a 'moral temperature' which also acts according to Darwin's principle of natural selection: 'There is a prevailing tendency which constitutes the spirit of the age. Talent seeking to force an outlet in another direction, finds it closed; and the force of the public mind and surrounding habits repress and lead it astray, by imposing on it a fixed growth.'[24] Taine's brief discussion of the interrelations between the artist and his society touches on a number of salient points: the experience and ideas the artist shares with his contemporaries; his special aptitude for penetrating to 'the essential character of things' and feeling that character intensely; the manner in which 'his century comes to his aid' through the labours of many creative collaborators; and the fact that the public encourages works which suit its mood and discourages others.

The proofs which are adduced for Taine's general law are both empirical and rational. The former consists of historical examples, 'the four great cycles of European civilization—Greek and Roman antiquity, the feudal and Christian middle ages, the well-regulated

aristocratic monarchies of the seventeenth century, and the industrial democracies of the present day, directed by the sciences'.[25] Taine shows in some detail, in each case, how a special 'soil' produced a special kind of artistic 'flower'.

The rational proof consists of a summary of the necessary chain of causes and effects: 'A general situation, provoking tendencies and special faculties; a representative man, embodying these predominant tendencies and faculties; sounds, forms, colours, or language giving this character sensuous form, or which comport with the tendencies and faculties comprising it, such are the four terms of the series; the first carries with it the second, the second the third, and the third the fourth, so that the slightest variation of either involves a corresponding variation in those that follow, and reveals a corresponding variation in those that precede it, permitting abstract reasoning in either direction in an ascending or descending scale of progression.'[26] (In other words, inquiry may proceed deductively or inductively; from the general to the particular or from the particular to the general; or, observing the distinction made in the essay on Mill, from effect to cause or from cause to effect.)

In this section, *milieu* is treated as the fundamental condition, but such 'accessory causes' as race, 'the particular period of the art' (*moment*), and 'the particular sentiments of each artist' are also mentioned.[27] Emphasis on all these variables leads to the typically nineteenth-century assertion that 'the growth of experience is infinite, and the applications of discovery unlimited'[28]; in this manner, Taine sought perhaps to encourage originality in the younger generation of students at the École des Beaux Arts. He concludes with Goethe's saying: 'Fill your mind and heart, however large, with the ideas and sentiments of your age, and the work will follow.'[29]

Verification of Law: Art in Italy

Taine's lectures for the next two years analyzed the art of Italy in an attempt to verify the law he had enunciated of 'the exact and necessary correspondence which is always seen between a work and the medium out of which it is evolved'.[30] Since the first step in this analysis had been a trip to the home of that art and elaborate notetaking there, we may best see his method in action by glancing first at the volumes on *Italy* in which his impressions were recorded.

Wherever Taine travelled—and we have his *Voyage to the Pyrenees*, *Notes on England*, *Notes on Paris*, and *Travel Notebooks* (on the provinces), as well as his *Italy*[31]—he was a sensitive and acute observer. In an 'Introduction' to the *Italy* volumes, he includes an interesting bit of self-appraisal. His powers of observation are referred to, impersonally, as an 'instrument':

'According to my own experience this instrument, call it what you will, whether soul or intellect, derives greater pleasure from natural objects than from works of art; nothing seems to it to equal mountains, seas, forests, and streams. It has always shown the same disposition in other things, in poetry as in music, in architecture as in painting; that which has most deeply impressed it is the natural spontaneous outflow of human forces, whatever these may be and under whatever form they present themselves. Provided the artist is stirred by a profound passionate sentiment, and desires only to express this fully, as it animates him, without hesitation, feebleness, or reservation, the end is served; if sincere and sufficiently master of his processes to translate his impressions accurately and completely, his work, whether ancient or modern, gothic or classic, is beautiful. In this respect it is a brief abstract of public sentiment, of the dominant passion of the hour and country in which it is born; itself a natural work, the result of the mighty forces that guide or stimulate the conflict of human activities.'[32]

The natural note for the traveller is relativisim, and Taine concludes by avowing distrust of his own limitations, the tendency to view things as through coloured lenses—an inevitable human weakness which it is the function of education, history, and criticism to overcome.

Though it may seem curious to have a book on Italy, many of whose pages are devoted to descriptions of its art, begin with a confession that its author has a greater love of 'natural objects', such frankness provides an essential clue to the strengths and weaknesses of Taine's method. Just as the *History of English Literature* was written primarily as a study in 'the psychology of a people', so Taine's interest in the art of Italy is primarily that of an historian of its culture. On the one hand, he chooses those aspects of the works of art he observes which best illustrate his special sort of generalizations; and on the other, his penetrating comments—on climate and geography, on historical and social

movements, on manners and customs of the people, and on intellectual trends—provide excellent insights into the works of art themselves. Despite the keenness of these insights, however, it still remains true that he tends to see works of art—paintings, statues, villas, palaces, and churches—not so much with the eye of an artist or architect, but from the point of view of a social scientist or philosopher.

Having this wealth of first-hand observation and historical knowledge at his disposal, when he composed his lectures on *The Philosophy of Art in Italy*, Taine naturally emphasized, in treating the masters of Venetian art especially, 'the condition of mind and manners on which the school depends'.[33] And here we approach the central point of his criticism, for it is precisely by analyzing the characteristics of Italian art *objectively* and by tracing the social and psychological *causes* of these characteristics, that Taine helps us to understand why its works are ranked as classics.

This analysis begins by attempting to define the special qualities which make the works of da Vinci, Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Titian great. In their paintings, which, like Greek art, concentrate on the human figure, 'man teaches nature how she might have made him and how she has not accomplished it.'[34] The medievals and moderns provide 'more edification, more pedagogism, more psychology, more interior and domestic peace, more intense reverie, more transcendental metaphysics, or internal emotions'[35]—but not the same vision of human perfection.

Such 'high art' could only be produced by a certain kind of men, and 'by virtue of national and enduring instincts. The imagination of the Italian is classic, that is to say, Latin, analogous to that of the ancient Greeks and Romans,'[36] which was sovereign in the kingdom of form. This is true not only of the five or six greatest geniuses of the Renaissance, but also of a large number of other artists, sculptors, and architects, and of 'a crowd of connoisseurs, patrons, and buyers, a vast public forming an escort . . .'[37] This 'native talent', however it may be accounted for, is seen as a permanent force which reaches its highest achievement when *conditions* are ripe for its development.

The conditions which Taine finds to have been operative in the Italian Renaissance are three in number:

First, man was cultivated, that is, there was a certain degree of intellectual culture, such as that described in Castiglione's *The*

Courtier. The 'seignior' and his lady existed in life: 'around these ideal figures real figures move at various distances'.[38]

Second, man was not *over*cultivated: 'it is necessary that *image* be not smothered nor mutilated by *ideas*'.[39] Only thus could the artist be spontaneous and truly natural. The German is too obsessed with 'the desire to obtain general ideas of humanity, society, the supernatural, nature, and countless other things, in brief, a complete philosophy'[40]; the Parisian lives in a perpetual state of feverish over-excitement. The modern mind, educated to abstractions, finds images only 'through a species of disordered and dangerous hallucination'[41]; among the moderns, 'Goethe alone maintained his balance . . .'.[42]

These first two conditions were psychological, that is, they involved a presumed 'state of minds'; the third set of conditions was more specific, having to do with external circumstances such as are revealed by a study of history,[43] which in this case were conducive to acquaintance with the human form. These all sprang essentially from 'the want of a long and firmly-established peace, impartial justice, and a watchful police',[44] so that men had to be ready to defend themselves and were 'absorbed with great anxieties and tragic passions'.[45] The energetic and tempestuous qualities of life are clearly exemplified in the *Memoirs* of Cellini; and the universal interests aroused in such an active epoch, by the careers of such men as Leonardo da Vinci and Lorenzo de Medici. Only thus can we account for 'the heroic nudities and terrible muscularities of Michael Angelo, the health, the placidity, the pure expression of a Madonna by Raphael, the natural and hardy vitality of a bronze by Donatello, the twining, strangely seductive attitude of a figure by da Vinci, the superb animal voluptuousness, the impetuous movement, the athletic force and joyousness of the figures of Giorgione and Titian'.[46] In sum: 'A picturesque state of mind, that is to say, midway between pure ideas and pure images, energetic characters and passionate habits suited to giving a knowledge of and taste for beautiful physical forms, constitute the temporary circumstances which, added to the innate aptitudes of the race, produced, in Italy, the great and perfect painting of the human form.'[47]

Art in the Netherlands and Greece

By a process of abstraction from the qualities of the works of art themselves, and from the external conditions which helped

produce them, Taine had sought to understand *The Philosophy of Art in Italy*, that is, the fundamental causes of the production of the masterpieces of the Venetian school. But, further, he believed he had also arrived at a universal law: '*All* art which represents the forms of the body depends on this cluster of conditions.'[48]

Thus, the same essential method, applied to the Philosophy of Art in the Netherlands and in Greece, enabled him to analyze analogous phenomena and arrive at similar judgments. The Flemish and the Dutch were treated as typical of the Germanic nations, and in each case the 'seed' of race was shown to have developed into the 'plant' of national character, which produced the 'flower' of art: Rubens is great in a special way which shows him to have been a product of the conditions of life in seventeenth-century Flanders; and Rembrandt, of life in Holland ('Part I—Permanent Causes'). Further, analysis of the history of art in those countries reveals a close correspondence between the character of the art in each of its four large epochs and the social and intellectual *milieu* of each period: Rubens and Rembrandt appear when their countries are flourishing, and art begins to decline with the invasion of Holland by France in 1672 and the war of the Spanish succession.

The closest analogies with art in Renaissance Italy, however, are found in the art of ancient Greece, whose classic sculptures, also devoted primarily to representing the human form, were produced under conditions approximating those of Italy, thus further corroborating Taine's general law. Though akin to the Latin, Greek character was cast in its own mould by special circumstances of climate and geography—mountains, peninsulas, islands, the sea, and so forth—and the mode of living which resulted. As in the unsettled and challenging Italy of the fifteenth century, so in Greece, the people had not become victims of the over-elaborations and complications which characterize modern civilizations. Both their psychological traits ('delicacy of perception . . . a feeling for proportion, dislike of the vague and the abstract . . . the sentiment of human energy',[49] '. . . no break . . . between the language of concrete facts and that of abstract reasoning'[50]) and their way of life (which was 'natural and healthy',[51] embodied in their natural religion and their institutions of the orchestra and the gymnasium) remind us of the conditions earlier established as having been necessary for the 'high art' of the Renaissance.

Whatever better-informed historians and students of art may justifiably say in criticism of Taine's formulations—and, though extremely general, they are usually based on a considerable weight of evidence—the methodological point is abundantly clear: *at no point does Taine separate his scientific analyses from his critical judgments*. This is true because of his very conception of art as imitating (and, if you will, expressing) *essential character*, which, though a *real* phenomenon arrived at by abstraction from experience, also has its place in the *ideal* order of things. Historical method and attention to *milieu*, which make us sensitive to the differences among schools of art, also enable us to penetrate to fundamental causes which imply universal standards for judgment. This principle, central to Taine's entire method, was made most fully explicit in his lectures on *The Ideal in Art* (see our Chapter XII). However, before the relations between analysis and judgment in Taine can be discussed, some of the issues raised by his theory of the conditions or causes of art must be more fully considered.

NOTES

[1] *Lectures on Art*, First Series, p. 23.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[4] Of the work of art on psychology and history.—S. J. K.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[6] (1) A *Traité du Beau*, dated 29 April, 1848 (*V. & C.*, I, 20). (2) A notebook containing *Idées générales sur la littérature et les Arts*, written while in Nevers, a section of which, on the Ideal, began: 'The Ideal is the real purified' (*V. & C.*, I, 197, Note).
[7] Preface to second edition (see 'Selected Bibliography').
[8] *La Fontaine*, pp. 342–344.
[9] 'Hippolyte Taine and the Background of Modern Aesthetics'.
[10] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 76.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 80, our italics.
[16] *Italy* (1871), I, 236, our italics.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 255, our italics.
[18] *Italy*, II, 100.
[19] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 58.
[20] Vol. II, p. 277.

[21] Thus, the very passages he cites to illustrate Taine's analysis of the work of art 'primarily in terms of its creator, rather than in terms of the object it represents' (p. 151) contain references to 'some character of the *object*' and the fact that the artist has 'transformed the *object*' (p. 152, our italics) (*op. cit.*).

[22] A similar attempt at a balance between concepts of imitation and expression is found in Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. Like Taine, Wölfflin finds that style has a 'double root': '. . . to the personal style must be added *the style of the school, the country, the race*' (p. 6); and he alternates discussion of purely aesthetic, formal concepts—like 'linear' and 'painterly'—with sections on 'Historical and National Characteristics'. On imitation-expression, he writes: 'It is no felicitous metaphor to call art the mirror of life, and a survey which takes the history of art essentially as the history of expression runs the risk of disastrous one-sidedness' (p. 226, in a section on 'External and Internal History of Art').

[23] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 87, Taine's italics.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[30] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 9.

[31] See the 'Selected Bibliography', *passim*.

[32] *Italy* (1871), I, pp. iv–v.

[33] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 13.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 63, Note.

[43] Thus, for Taine, we understand 'the Italian soul . . . better through its history than by a definition of it' (*ibid.*, p. 82).

[44] *Ibid.* Taine, writing in 1865, compares this to the situation 'in America . . . in the places where the gold-hunters flock in crowds and live haphazard without having yet formed a government' (*ibid.*, p. 83).

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 415–416.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 450.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 442.

CHAPTER VII

BIOLOGICAL CONDITIONS: RACE AND GEOGRAPHY

The Problem of Race

ANYONE entering upon a discussion of Taine's familiar formulation of the three sources—Race, Environment, and Time —which combine to produce man's 'elementary moral state', and hence indirectly his works of art, is faced with at least two major handicaps. First, these three concepts, even today, are only imperfectly understood, and their many subtleties are still the subject of much study and discussion. Second, the entire formula, but especially the theory of Race, has had serious political consequences for our time; all too often the tool of misguided or vicious propagandists, it was used in Nazi Germany to justify genocide, that unspeakable social crime of our generation. Only a knave or a fool could approach such a complex subject without some moral qualms and a feeling of 'rushing in where angels fear to tread'.

Leo Spitzer, whose *Essays in Historical Semantics* include explorations of the concepts of 'Race' and 'Milieu and Ambiance', states the latter aspect of our problem as follows:

'For Taine's deterministic creed there was needed only a dash of the German philosophy of idealism (*Freiheit in der Notwendigkeit*: "freedom of development within the given pattern of the racial will"), and of organology ("*geprägte Form die lebend sich entwickelt*"), for the race philosophy of the Third Reich to be born. It may be stated that the definition of "race" given by the most violent German fanatics . . . differs from that of Taine's . . . only in the degree to which the racial element in every member of the race is made the exclusive criterion . . .: Taine at least allowed for the

influence of *milieu* and *moment*. Both in Tainism and Hitlerism . . . civilization has been replaced by biology.'[1]

This is a serious indictment indeed, which, *to the extent that it is true*, should make us extremely wary of accepting Taine's generalizations uncritically. But neither should it blind us to the elements of truth in his method. The Devil, it has been said, can quote Scripture. The fact that Hitler's deeds were perpetrated under a party banner which read 'National Socialism' need not imply that nationalism and socialism are totally evil, though it should lead us to clarify, more rigorously than ever, what has been, and should be, meant by such terms.

Nor can we permit the imperfect state of our knowledge to deter us. Most really important subjects are of such depth that, perhaps inevitably, they can never be exhausted; nevertheless, the search for understanding continues. We must rather agree with Albert L. Guérard, a liberal American citizen and student of European civilization, that, though 'Taine himself may be antiquated: his method is still with us. It does not tell the whole truth, nor perhaps the essential truth: but the truth that it tells is far from negligible.'[2] Like Professor Guérard, 'We have no desire to "explode" Race, Environment, and Time: we only want to understand. We all feel that there is "something" to them: but what is that something, and how much of it is there?'[3]

It is, therefore, with modest aims—and some trepidations—that this chapter is begun. Since the problem of Race could very well be the subject of a volume in itself, our present considerations must be severely limited: we shall try primarily to understand what Taine probably meant by his formula; only such secondary sources as seem directly relevant to a study of Taine himself will be considered; and our attention must be restricted to those aspects of the subject which contribute to an understanding of Taine's philosophy and method of criticism.

Historical Backgrounds

Taine's use of the category of Race must be seen against the background of two strong movements in the Europe of his day: first, nationalist developments, cultural and political, both fostered and expressed by the Romantic movement, and the latter resulting in the final unification of Italy and Germany in 1870; second, a tremendous growth of biological science, crystallized in Darwin's

The Origin of Species (1859), and applied by many thinkers to the nascent social sciences in a movement commonly referred to as 'Social Darwinism'.[4]

Thus, the racial element in Taine's theory is the product both of the spirit of his age (if we may apply his method to himself!) and of an honest attempt at scientific formulation, along lines which were shared by many of his contemporaries. For Taine, the goal of science is, through a process of abstraction, to group *facts* according to their various *relations*, and Race is a formula which attempts to sum up a number of those relations: 'What we call the race are the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him into the world, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body. They vary with various peoples. There is a natural variety of men, as of oxen and horses. . . .'[5] This is described as a distinct and tenacious force, whose workings, Taine feels, writing in 1863, are still only imperfectly understood.[6]

There is comparatively little mysticism, if any, in Taine's explanation of the persistence of racial traits: 'For as soon as an animal begins to exist, it has to reconcile itself with its surroundings; it breathes and renews itself, is differently affected according to the variations in air, food, temperature. Different climate and situation bring it various needs, and consequently a different course of activity; and this, again, a different set of habits; and still again, a different set of aptitudes and instincts. . . . So that at any moment we may consider the character of a people as an abridgment of all its preceding actions and sensations . . .'[7] In other words, Race too has its conditions, which Taine is studying along with other causes: it is not being treated as more or less 'real' or 'ideal' than any of the other abstractions of science, but as one among many important factors.

Biological Heredity

Nevertheless, Race *does* frequently play an important part in Taine's criticism, though, as has already been suggested, he tends to focus his attention chiefly on problems of history and psychology: Environment, Time, and Master Faculty.[8] Part of this may be traced to his fondness for the biological metaphor and analogy. If people are like plants and works of art are like flowers, then problems of heredity or Race must be placed *logically* first, as they usually are in biological science; however, it is not always clear,

though it is sometimes the case, that heredity is being treated as the *primary* cause, as in most 'racist' theories.[9] All four factors are usually considered together, and, as is evident from the 'Introduction' to the *History*,[10] Taine's most vital concern seems to be with 'the man invisible', or psychology. The fact that Race is usually considered first in his books (notably the *History* and *Lectures on Art*), undoubtedly prejudices the case against him with most current readers, whose sensibilities on that subject are justifiably tender.

We must begin by emphasizing that most of Taine's ideas on heredity, since they are pre-Mendelian, are unequivocally *wrong*: he fell a victim to most of the errors common to his day, some of which have since been abused by racist ideologists. Though the fact of innate difference among people cannot very well be denied, subsequent research and debate has usually centred around the mechanics by which those differences are passed from generation to generation and on the relative importance of the hereditary factor as compared to the action of the environment (the 'nature versus nurture' discussion).

Taine is extremely vague on the mechanics of heredity, since he lacks our knowledge of chromosomes and genes; he usually falls back on the primitive, and unfortunately still popular, notion of 'blood'. Thus, the Saxons, because they are 'cool-blooded', are 'of a cold temperament',[11] and, after the Norman conquest, 'the English *blood* ended by gaining the predominance over the Norman *blood* in their veins'.[12] Of course, the 'blood' theory of Race has been definitely refuted[13]; any such gross over-simplification, which treats heredity as if it were 'a matter of the transmission of gross aggregates of characters, is both erroneous and meaningless'.[14]

Taine is equally wrong on the nature versus nurture issue. He assumes the Lamarckian principle that acquired characteristics are inherited: 'Under this steady pressure the character forms; that which was habit becomes instinct; *the form acquired by the parent is found hereditary in the child. . . .*'[15] This principle has been generally rejected as unnecessary,[16] and emphasis is placed today on the influence of cultural factors (such as language, patterns of behaviour associated with child-rearing, and education in the broadest sense) in transmitting acquired characteristics. But these are elements for which Taine intended to account by means of Environment and Time.

Further, Taine is sometimes naïve in his assumption of the

persistence of mental traits. Thus, referring to 'the French race', he writes: 'There is in every *mind* of the kind a fundamental activity which, when incessantly repeated, moulds its plan, and gives it its direction. . . .'[17] This is bolstered by the usual botanical analogy ('as in a tree the structure of the first shoot determines the whole foliage, and governs the whole growth'), and a footnote declares: 'The idea of types is applicable throughout *all physical and moral nature*',[18] the implication being that mental traits are inherited in the same degree as physical traits. This is an issue which is far from having been settled yet; if there *is* some degree of temperamental heredity, its mechanics are only imperfectly understood.[19]

Geography: Land and Nation

Lacking a clear notion of the mechanics of heredity, Taine often tends to blend Race with *milieu* (especially in its physical aspects of geography, soil, and climate) and ultimately with Nation. That these Romantic notions of the intimate relations between Man and Land and Nation were so grossly caricatured in the Nazi 'Blut und Boden' slogans should not blind us to the element of truth which they contain. Julian Huxley begins a recent essay entitled 'Climate and Human History' as follows: 'Man's thought and social life are built on his economic life; but this, in its turn, rests on biological foundations.'[20] He summarizes a great deal of evidence for the influence of climate on history, and hence indirectly on art, though his tracing of the rise and fall of entire civilizations primarily to changes in climate and his claim that 'Climate is *inexorable*',[21] seem somewhat exaggerated. Probably Toynbee's formula of 'challenge' and 'response' is more accurate: climate is *one* of the challenges which help mould a people.[22]

On the whole, Taine uses the Land motif skilfully and with some degree of flexibility. The *History of English Literature* begins with a description of the geographic and climatic conditions of the Saxons; and the presumed continuity of English traits which constitutes the English 'race' is attributed to both 'descent and climate'.[23] As in his treatment of Italian art, so in his study of English literature Taine's method was to accompany perusal of 'documents' with much first-hand observation of the English people in their native 'habitat', to use the biological term. One fruit of his trips to England was a volume of *Notes on England*, which should be read in conjunction with the more famous *History*.

These *Notes* are organized in thirty-five chapters, of which only two or three are biological in their tendency. For example, the chapter on 'Typical English Men and Women' begins with a paragraph comparing his method with 'that of artists and of naturalists'[24] and proceeds to classify the 'specimens' into three main types: robust, phlegmatic, and 'the active, energetic human being . . .'. Taine's method was impressionistic, and these types are not too neatly defined. For the robust type, 'there are two probable causes. The one, which is of a special character, the heredity conformation of the race; the other, which is the custom of open-air living and bodily exercise.'[25] A chapter on 'Characteristics of the English Mind' mentions first that 'English education tends to produce this result'[26] (a liking for facts, empiricism) and only later adds that 'this inclination is hereditary', the result of 'an innate disposition peculiar to the race'.[27] But most of the chapters are devoted to descriptions of social types, political institutions, economic classes, art, literature, and religion. In brief, there is no *exclusive* emphasis on the biological factor: the scope of Taine's interest seems more truly anthropological.[28]

Taine's scientific motive of seeking in the physical environment an explanation of the persistence of biological traits is thus an early example of Social Darwinism.[29] But he had another, more personal and persistent, motive for writing so eloquently on the influence of climate, namely, his own very profound sensitivity to nuances of landscape, which Victor Giraud attributes to his childhood in Ardennes.[30] This is in part a Romantic inheritance, though Taine's travel books are remarkably restrained in avoiding some of the more sentimental trappings of earlier 'voyages'. In any case, beginning with the *Voyage to the Pyrenees* (1854) and continuing through his *Notes on England* (1871), he was consistent in his close and loving attention to geography, which was probably more important for his conception of Race than simple recognition of biological heredity.

Finally, as a further extension of his tendency to merge Race with Land, Taine frequently though not very consistently uses the term in a manner synonymous with Nation. We find him referring to such groupings as the French, the Germans, the English, and the Italians as races:

'Of the two great races in which this is the most completely expressed, one, the French, more northern, more prosaic, and

more social, has had for its province the systematizing of pure ideas, that is to say, the method of reasoning and the art of conversation; the other, the Italian, more southern, more artistic, and more given to imagery, has had for its province the ordination of sensible forms, that is to say, music and the arts of design.'[31]

As Professor Barzun has indicated, with impressive documentation, such arguments as these were commonplaces of the late nineteenth century and helped provide the rationale for nationalistic wars.[32]

In *The Philosophy of Art in the Netherlands*, however, the first part, on 'Permanent Causes', includes *separate* sections on Race and Nation. The former makes a distinction between the Latin and Germanic races, but the discussion is not restricted to biology, referring also to differences of social arrangements (family life, politics) and intellectual activities (Classic versus Romantic in literature and art, Catholic versus Protestant in religion). Here Race is a relatively broad concept, covering large groups of nations; derived from 'innate qualities' which are related to 'blood' and 'animal faculties' and 'climate'[33]; and resulting in a special type of psychology and history.[34]

The Nation, in the section which follows, is a narrower concept, more intimately associated with *milieu*, and especially with geography: 'This race, thus endowed, has received various imprints, according to the various *conditions* of its abiding-place. . . . Ten centuries of habitation have done their work . . . in addition to its innate character, there is an *acquired* character.'[35] The latter is a product of 'the soil and the sky', and so forth[36]; in brief, 'All circumstances, moral and physical, their geographical and political state, the past and the present, combine to one end',[37] and that is the production of a nation in which 'one faculty and one tendency' is dominant. In painting, a certain kind of colouring results: 'Here, as at Venice, art has followed nature, the hand having been *forcibly* guided by optical sensations.'[38]

Similarly, *The Philosophy of Art in Greece* begins with a discussion of Race, and here the line between physiology and geography is especially hard to draw, because, for lack of a detailed history of art itself, 'we are more than ever obliged to consider the people who executed it, the social habits which stimulated it, and the milieu out of which it sprung'.[39] The previously mentioned divi-

sion of Latin and Germanic races is corrected somewhat by pointing out that 'Philologists show us a primitive epoch where Indians, Persians, Germans, Celts, Latins, and Greeks had a language in common and the same degree of culture.'[40] This was presumably followed by separation of the Latin and the Greeks, until finally Greek life took form, under the influence of a mild climate, mountainous country, poor soil, and the ever-present sea—all of which, producing a nation of traders and seamen, 'served to arouse the Greek intellect'.[41] Their landscape, characterized by clearness of relief and transparency of the atmosphere, makes for 'positive and clear conceptions'.[42] Thus, Taine attempts to trace a set of complex relationships (religion, politics, and other institutions are also explored) which provided the *conditions*—we should probably say, *some* of the conditions—for the classic art of Greek sculpture.

In sum, Taine himself was very much a victim of 'the *Zeitgeist* of Scientific Realism',[43] falling, sometimes all too easily, into the stereotypes of his time. Very much involved, intellectually and emotionally, in national issues, he sometimes rationalized his prejudices in terms of the relatively primitive biological and anthropological science of his day. As Professors Dunn and Dobzhansky have pointed out in an excellent chapter, the Race concept has often been 'clearly ideological, not biological',[44] and this aspect of Taine's thinking must be clearly recognized.

Science and Pseudo-Science

Nevertheless, it seems much too facile to dismiss Taine as merely another precursor of a movement vaguely labelled Nazism, just as it is wrongheaded to condemn 'the Romantic movement' *in toto* for all the sins committed in its name. Nor do we eliminate problems by recognizing that our predecessors fell short of their perfect solution.

Justice to Taine's intention, if not his achievement, requires that we recognize his truly scientific purpose. In the chapter on 'The Gallic Spirit' which he wrote for the 1861 edition of *La Fontaine*, he shows full recognition of the limitations of his knowledge. After an impressionistic sketch of the French landscape, he admits:

'*These truths are literary, that is to say, vague;* but we have none others at present in this matter, and it is necessary to be content with these, such as they are, while we await the statistical figures

and the precision of experience. There is not yet a science of the races, and we take many risks when we try to imagine how the soil and climate can form them.'[45]

A footnote indicates that 'An anthropological society has just been established in Paris, through the efforts of several eminent anatomists and physiologists, Messrs. Brown-Sequard, Béclard, Broca, Follin, Verneuil.'[46] Despite the tragic uses to which they may have been put, Taine's speculations on Race were no more or less wrong than many of the other generalizations of nineteenth-century science. After all, to assert the relationship of men to their land reduces to a kind of truism: 'One should not indulge in too much guess-work, but after all it is because there is a France, it seems to me, that we have had a La Fontaine and Frenchmen.'[47]

Thus, René Wellek and Austin Warren give Taine's work due recognition in their chapters on 'Literature and Society' and 'Literary History', but repeat the familiar over-simplification that Taine 'reduces all creativity to a mysterious biological factor, 'race' . . .'.[48] However, if we look at Taine's work from a perspective which includes the entire history of the social sciences during the last century, he appears less as a mystical or vicious 'racist' and more as a pioneer of the comparative method who (like most social scientists!) never fully achieved the scrupulous objectivity at which he was aiming.

Two criteria may perhaps be used to distinguish Nazi doctrines from more scientific approaches to the problem of Race, namely, the doctrine of the innate *superiority* of one race over another and the concern for preserving the *purity* of races.[49] On the first point, it seems clear that Taine's interest was primarily an attempt to understand *differences* and not to establish the superiority of a 'master race'. When implications of superiority and inferiority are introduced, it is usually in an attempt to understand why certain schools of literature or art (such as the sculpture of Greece and the painting of Italy) are great. Every 'species' of man Taine studies is examined for *both* its strengths and its weaknesses: thus, though at one point he is tempted to regard 'the human animal' of the Germanic race 'as inferior on comparing him with the Italian or southern Frenchman',[50] such judgments are few, and he immediately goes on to point out 'bad results' in 'the Latin families'. He affords the greatest praise possible to the Northern nations by

indicating that 'their greatest masterpiece is the drama of Shakespeare'.[51]

The idea of racial 'purity' is a canard which Taine sometimes seems to accept. Thus, in his treatment of the relations of the Saxons and Normans in England, he seems to correlate 'poetic genius' and purity of race: 'The race finally remains Saxon. If the old poetic genius disappears after the Conquest, it is as a river disappears, and flows for a while underground. In five centuries it will emerge once more.'[52] He seems to associate some of the superiority of literature and art in England and the Netherlands with the fact that the Germanic race in those countries 'drove out, destroyed and replaced the ancient inhabitants, *its blood, pure, or almost pure*, still flowing in the veins of the men now occupying the same soil'.[53] But, on the other hand, he is careful to do justice to both the 'French' and the 'English' elements in Chaucer, and these elements are shown to have come from his Environment and Time, rather than from a 'racial' heritage; Taine simply associates the more 'original' part of Chaucer's genius with the English character: 'Is it already the English positive common sense and aptitude for seeing the inside of things which begins to appear?'[54]

On the whole, the main force of Taine's many voyages and studies of foreign literatures and schools of art was the very *opposite* of Nazi chauvinism and 'master race' theories. His basic purpose was rather to *correct* such super-nationalistic tendencies as were threatening intellectual life in the France of the Second Empire and to help his people to better understand the English, Germans, Italians, Greeks, Dutch, and so forth. He could be as bitingly critical of the French as he was of the English or Germans. See, for example, the many satirical sketches in the *Notes on Paris* and the brilliant discussion of the virtues and *limitations* of the French 'talent for speaking well' which opens the essay on 'Racine'.[55] And if he desired for his people the noble rôle of mediator in Europe between extremes of East and West, and North and South, who can very well blame him?

One reason why our generation should seek to understand what Taine meant by his concept of Race is that we are so far from having solved the problem ourselves. Thus, Professor Guérard feels, on the one hand, that 'ethnic races are artificial, and none the less real', and, on the other, that their study, as part of 'collective psychology', is 'as dangerous as it is attractive'.[56] *Mere* changes of terminology do not solve problems: unfortunately,

'one can hate "ethnic groups" just as venomously as real or imaginary races'.[57]

Some Critical Conclusions

The problems raised by 'type' analysis, of which the 'race' concept is one example, will be discussed in greater detail in Part Three (Chapter XI); only a few, brief concluding remarks need detain us here. Leo Spitzer propounds an etymology for 'race' which suggests a kind of interest in 'relations' similar to Taine's. He traces the word to the Latin 'ratio' or 'rationes', which was used in the Thomistic tradition in the sense of 'type'; 'species', 'idea', and 'ratio' were used as synonyms, in the same sense as the French 'raison d'être'.[58] However, 'ratio' is more generally used today in the mathematical sense of a 'fixed relation', and there seems to be more of that meaning than of the older scholastic sense in Taine's discussions. If we recall that Taine was studying *facts* and their *relations*, Race might be taken as indicating the *internal* relations of an organism, as against *milieu*, which would indicate its *external* relations. Thus, we can perhaps replace Taine's hazy notions of 'blood' by more precise genetic analysis and still retain his essential idea.

As to the temptation to set up hierarchies of superior and inferior 'types', some such process seems inevitable, *if* criticism is used in a sense which includes the fact of judgment. Thus, if there is superiority and inferiority in art; if there have been great artists and art-producing nations and epochs (we find it hard to deny that this is so); and if one of the functions of criticism is to evaluate and understand such greatness—if all these propositions are true, then we must *probably* seek the explanation of this fact in *some relation of art to life*. To assert some 'aristocratic' principle, in art as in life, is not to deny the validity of democracy, but to insist rather on democracy's need for intelligent self-criticism.

The causes which contribute to the production of great art must surely spring either (1) from the native endowments of people, or (2) from the conditions under which they live, or, since both of these are artificial abstractions from a total situation, (3) most probably from some combination of the two. Thus, it *is* true that the civilization and art of Greece, for example, was great during one period of its history, and the historian is justified in attempting to discovery 'reasons' for that greatness. It may be possible, for example, to prove some sort of relationship between

the production of great art and a particular personality type or types, or a set of environmental conditions; and though either of these may be universal rather than racial or national in their origins, they may help explain why certain races or nations, under certain historical conditions, have been more productive than others. Granted that Taine and his contemporaries over-estimated the influence of purely physical conditions in such an analysis, much of his discussion of the impact of Environment and Time, at least, still seems relevant and sound.[59]

It may be useful to indicate briefly some of the special ways in which biology *does* seem relevant to art criticism. First, its *direct* influence is probably most evident in extreme cases: on individuals who are exceptionally small or large, like Thomas Wolfe, or sick, like Coleridge; and on groups living under extremes of climate, such as the desert or arctic regions. Though biology alone surely does not *produce* works of art, it may set some of the *limits* within which they may be produced. Second, its *indirect* influence is felt, if not through the actual existence of racial and national types, then at least through the existence of such types in the minds of the artist and his public. Thus, 'the image of a people in their own minds and in the minds of their neighbours is one of the ideal forces which help frame their destiny'.[60]

Finally, though it is necessary to insist that the biological factor cannot be summarily dismissed from critical considerations, it must always be taken as only *one of many contributing causes*—a fact which Taine fully recognized in his formula—and probably not the most important one.

'Regardless of how the problem of the relations between biological heredity, individual and group psychology and culture may eventually be settled, the variety of human cultures will appear to us an inspiration rather than as a curse if we learn to respect, to understand and to admire them. In the realm of culture there is enough room to accommodate the diversified contributions not only of different individuals but also of every nation and race.'[61]

Agreeing with Professor Guérard that, 'So far as literature is concerned, cultural elements . . . are vastly more important than race',[62] we turn our attention next to Taine's treatment of Environment and Time.

NOTES

[1] 'Race', p. 155.

[2] *Literature and Society*, p. 4.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[4] See, for example, Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 1860–1915.

[5] *History of English Literature*, I, 12.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 13. A footnote refers to Darwin and Prosper Lucas' work *On Heredity*.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[8] See our Chapters V, VIII, and IX, *passim*.

[9] Thus, Race is the *first and richest* source of these master faculties from which historical events take their rise (*History of English Literature*, I, p. 13, our italics).

[10] Chapter V, above, p. 64.

[11] *History of English Literature*, I, 30.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 66, our italics. (See *Lectures*, First Series, pp. 216–217, for another example of the 'blood' explanation.)

[13] L. C. Dunn and T. Dobzhansky, *Heredity, Race, and Society*, pp. 101–104. Cf. Irwin Edman, Chapter XI, 'Racial and Cultural Continuity', in *Human Traits and Their Social Significance*: 'The cultural achievements of the past, which we inherit chiefly as social habits, are obviously not transmitted to us physically, as are the original human traits with which this volume has so far been chiefly concerned. They are not in our blood; they are acquired like other habits, through contact with others and through repeated practice' (p. 248).

[14] M. F. Ashley Montagu, 'Race Theory in the Light of Modern Science', p. 4.

[15] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 198, our italics.

[16] 'Most biologists believe that the great variety of human heredities are the result of mutations in the near and distant past' (Dunn and Dobzhansky, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–27).

[17] *History of English Literature*, I, 74, our italics.

[18] *Ibid.*, Note 1, our italics.

[19] Julian Huxley refers to genes 'making for social and economic success' (*Man in the Modern World*, p. 54) and writes: 'There is no doubt that genetic differences of temperament, including tendencies to social or anti-social action, to cooperation or individualism, do exist, nor that they could be bred for in man as man has bred for tameness and other temperamental traits in many domestic animals . . .' (*ibid.*, p. 56). Dunn and Dobzhansky are more cautious, stressing the *interaction* of heredity and environment: 'Nevertheless, in spite of all this, it is perfectly evident that some psychic characters depend on the relations between the environment (including the cultural inheritance) and the biological heredity, just as physical characters do' (*op. cit.*, p. 28). Ruth Benedict does not deny the relation of biology and culture, but tries to include the former in a larger perspective: 'Cultural interpretations of behaviour need never deny that a physiological element is also involved. . . . To point out, therefore, that the biological bases of cultural behaviour in mankind are for the most part irrelevant is not to deny that they are present. It is merely to stress the fact that the historical factors are dynamic' (*Patterns of Culture*, p. 217).

[20] *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 69, our italics.

[22] *A Study of History*, Part II, 'The Geneses of Civilizations'.

[23] *History of English Literature*, I, 30.

[24] *Notes on England*, p. 47.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 310.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[28] Cf. the main headings in R. R. Marett's article on 'Anthropology' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 'The Study of Environment', 'The Study of Race', 'The Study of Culture', 'Material and Moral Culture', 'The Competition Between Ethnic Types' (14th ed.).

[29] The first reference to *The Origin of Species* (1859) is in the 'Introduction' to the *History of English Literature* (1863); the first considerable application of Darwin's principle of natural selection is in Sections II and III of the part 'On the Production of the Work of Art' in *The Philosophy of Art* (1864). Few modern readers are aware of the full title of Darwin's book: *The Origin of Species by means of natural selection, or, The preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life.*

[30] See above, Chapter II, Note 9, and Chapter VI, pp. 108–109.

[31] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 22.

[32] *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition, passim.* Chapter V, on 'Race and the Fine Arts', includes a discussion of Taine and his influence (pp. 123–126). It was in protest against this tendency that Ernest Renan delivered a famous lecture at the Sorbonne (11 March, 1882): 'What Is a Nation?' (available in *The Poetry of the Celtic Races, and other Studies by Ernest Renan*). Renan attacked the confounding of nationhood with race, language, religion, community of interest, or geography, insisting that 'A nation is a living soul, a spiritual principle' (p. 80).

[33] *Lectures*, Second Series, pp. 169–171.

[34] The difficulty of some of these distinctions may be judged from the following passage: 'Germanic countries are the patrimony of free parliamentary rule. You see it established today in Sweden, in Norway, in England, in Belgium, in Holland, in Prussia, and even in Austria; the colonists engaged in clearing Australia and the West of America, plant it in their soil, and, however rude the new-comers may be, it prospers at once, and is maintained without difficulty' (*ibid.*, p. 185). Subsequent events have read Prussia, at least, out of this 'family' of 'free' nations.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 191, our italics.

[36] The naïveté of some of Taine's 'causes' can be illustrated by 'that restless and exaggerated desire for action which a dry atmosphere, sudden changes from heat to cold, a surplus electricity, have implanted in the Americans of the United States' (!) (*Ibid.*, p. 199).

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 231, our italics.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 361.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 362–3. Taine may have been referring here to Max Müller's hypothesis concerning a primitive 'Aryan' tongue which, much against Müller's original intention, was transferred from the study of language to that of race and eventually became part of Nazi ideology.

[41] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 373.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 353.

[43] Guérard, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[44] *Op. cit.*, Chapter V, 'Race', p. 94.

[45] *La Fontaine*, pp. 7–8, our italics. This may have been in response to Sainte-Beuve's criticism (cf. our Chapter IV, Note 39).

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 8, Note.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[48] *Theory of Literature*, p. 101.

[49] An historical perspective is probably more just than a contemporary one on these issues. It should be remembered that both the 'purity of kinds' and their hierarchical order were essential parts of neo-classical critical theory (*ibid.*, Chapter XVII, 'Literary Genres', especially pp. 239–240, 244).

[50] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 177.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 188. Another reference to superiority of race occurs in Taine's imaginary reconstruction of the early history of the Netherlands: 'Men of another stamp would not have succeeded; the *milieu* was too unfavourable. In analogous conditions the inferior races of Canada and Russian America (Alaska, S. J. K.) have remained savage; other well-endowed races, the Celts of Ireland and the Highland Scotch, attained only to a chivalric standard of society and poetic legends. Here there had to be good, sound heads, a capacity to subject sensation to thought, to patiently endure ennui and fatigue, to accept privation and labour in view of a remote end, in short a Germanic race, meaning by this men organized to cooperate together, to toil, to struggle, to begin over and over again and ameliorate unceasingly . . .' (*ibid.*, pp. 196–197). Here race does not seem to be merely a biological factor but also to involve qualities of character; and the implication is, not so much of all-around superiority, as of superiority in *particular* directions which enabled a *particular* group to master a *particular* environment. This is a typical expression of Social Darwinism, which fell prey to an elementary fallacy common to most Darwinian reasoning: the 'survival of the fittest' was taken to indicate a general 'fitness', whereas all it really implies is 'fitness to survive'. The reasoning is circular.

[52] *History of English Literature*, I, 66.

[53] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 169, our italics.

[54] *History of English Literature*, I, 143.

[55] *Nouveaux Essais*, pp. 172–183.

[56] *French Civilization in the Nineteenth Century: A Historical Introduction*, pp. 35–36.

[57] Dunn and Dobzhansky, *op. cit.*, p. 95. 'Genes' and 'chromosomes' bring us closer to the full complexity of the problems than does 'blood', but they do not change the basic fact of biological groupings (*ibid.*, pp. 111–112). Franz Boas, an outstanding critic of 'racist' thinking, in his 'Introduction' to Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, referred to the 'dominant character' of a culture in a phrase reminiscent of Taine; another recent example in the Taine tradition is by Geoffrey Gorer, a British-born anthropologist: *The American People: A study in national character*; similar examples could be multiplied. Abram Kardiner, *et al.*, suggest replacing both the 'race' and the 'culture' concepts by a technique of investigation focussed on the 'basic personality type' (*The Psychological Frontiers of Society*, p. xv). These are all just as much abstractions as 'race' ever was; what counts is, not the inevitable fact of abstraction in science, but the

truth or *falsity* of the abstraction, and that is a question to be decided by the weight of much evidence and analysis.

[58] *Op. cit.*, pp. 147–158.

[59] Cf. Edman, *Human Traits*: 'Many psychologists and sociologists, such as McDougall, Bagehot, and Lang, attribute the superiority in culture and social organization of the European races over, say, the Chinese and East Indians, to the fighting instinct' (p. 114). 'But from indications of experiments already made, these so-called (and for practical purposes genuine) intellectual differences between the individuals of different races must be attributed to differences in environment. Races *as* races seem to be equally gifted' (p. 198).

[60] Guérard, *French Civilization*, p. 36.

[61] Dunn and Dobzhansky, p. 115.

[62] Guérard, *Literature and Society*, p. 49.

CHAPTER VIII

CULTURAL FACTORS: ENVIRONMENT AND TIME

The Total Formula

THE Race-Environment-Time formula is a highly abstract over-simplification of many complex and interrelated elements; quite naturally, therefore, it abounds in obscurities and ambiguities. The previous chapter has indicated how Taine tends to merge Race with Land and Nation. Since the formula is a unified whole, it seems possible to start with any one of its three elements and expand that one out into the other two. Thus, Land can be understood as the *milieu* of Race (in its geographical aspect); and Nation, as a *moment* of Race, since a nation is after all a politico-cultural entity which comes into existence at a particular stage in the development of a group of people. In this chapter we shall be concerned with the cultural, rather than the biological, elements in Taine's formula: the cultural aspects of Environment, and their historical developments in Time.

The most concise definitions of these terms are found in the 'Introduction' to the *History*. 'Having thus outlined the interior structure of a race, we must consider the surroundings in which it exists. For man is not alone in the world; nature surrounds him, and his fellow-men surround him; accidental and secondary tendencies overlay his primitive tendencies, and physical or social circumstances disturb or confirm the character committed to their charge.'[1] Though Race is here treated, by implication, as 'essential' and 'primary' in Taine's order of exposition, he soon passes, after mention of climate, from nature to man, from the physical to the social.

Thus, if we compare the Italies of the Roman Empire and the

Renaissance, we presumably find that the people and their geographical *milieu* were not radically changed in the millennium which intervened[2]; the basic difference is one of 'state policy' or political organization. Other circumstances mentioned are 'social conditions', such as were introduced by the rise of Christianity. Phrases and examples used are various: 'prolonged situations', 'surrounding circumstances', 'persistent and gigantic pressures'; the struggle with the Moslems in Spain, political struggles in England, the Catholic Church in France. Taine is concerned here with those causes which 'are to nations what education, career, condition, abode, are to individuals', all those powers 'by which the external acts on the internal'[3]—in brief, what we have come to sum up under the term Environment.

The third set of causes considered by Taine is a bit more difficult to define: 'with the forces within and without, there is the work which they have already produced together, and this work itself contributes to produce that which follows.'[4] Thus, artists are influenced by their predecessors, representing 'different steps' in a 'progressive development', which together create 'great historical currents' characterized by 'internal concords or contrarieties'.[5] These elements, though vaguely resembling those already characterized as Environment, seem to be distinguished from the latter chiefly by their dynamism, their cumulative nature, their 'momentum'—they all include terms involving the concept of Time.

Many critics, both impressed and perplexed by this distinction, have asked with Professor Guérard: 'Where does *environment* give place to *time*?'[6] By examining these terms more closely, as they are actually used by Taine, we may perhaps hope to understand what he intended them to mean.

Environment: 'milieu'

Leo Spitzer's 'historical semantic' investigation is an excellent introduction to the manifold connotations of the term 'milieu'. As he points out, the idea is an ancient one: in Taine's immediate tradition, it is found in Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, but an intimate relationship between the lives of men and their 'ambient' surroundings was fully recognized by the Greeks; Hippocrates, as a doctor, thought especially of the air men breathe,[7] but this was readily enlarged to include other elements of climate. In Aristotle, and others, we find the idea that everything has its

'natural place', which provides us with the original meaning of 'le (mi)lieu' as 'the middle place'.[8]

There were many permutations, during the Middle Ages and later, of the notion of 'ambiance'. Newton's 'medium' was rendered in French translation as 'milieu', and in Pascal the word had very definite connotations of a 'golden mean' of place between the infinitely great and the infinitely small.[9] The modern use of the word came to Taine from eighteenth-century physicists via the 'Introduction' (1840) to Balzac's *Human Comedy*; Balzac took it directly from the biological writings of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire.[10]

In the nineteenth century, a basic split developed in thinking on the subject, between the Aristotelian notion of a 'natural place' or 'golden mean', rendered as 'le juste milieu',[11] and that of a neutral environment, 'milieu d'existence'.[12] If the former sense is preserved, it becomes illogical to speak of a 'milieu ambiant', since what is in the 'true centre' cannot also be 'around'.[13] In Comte, the *milieu* is 'correspondant', i.e., beneficent; but as it became involved increasingly with a philosophy of fatalistic determinism, it became increasingly indifferent and even antagonistic, as in the novels of Zola; to Nietzsche, the theory of milieu was 'eine wahre Neurotiker-Theorie', for this reason.[14] Finally, the determinism of the late nineteenth century is mellowed, and the word crops up, in an essay by Paul Valery, in the sense of 'field', as used by Maxwell for his electro-magnetic theory: 'Thus, at the touch of a poet's hand, a cycle is completed: from physics to biology, to sociology, to popular speech—and thence to the new physics.'[15]

Taine's use of the concept is far from monolithic, including examples which might be variously classified as geographical, political, social, economic, institutional, and psychological. The geographical *milieu*, like the biological Race, sometimes seems to be given a kind of logical priority, though the previous chapter has shown that geography was never isolated from other factors. This is evident not only in Taine's critical writings, but also in his travel books, where he usually passes easily from the contemplation of nature, through direct observation of modern inhabitants or historical reminiscence or both, to an analysis of the kind of society which this particular setting has produced.[16]

Professor Guérard divides the non-geographic environment into its political and social aspects[17]; a general distinction between the

two might be that the latter includes more so-called 'ideal' elements; however, there is no hard-and-fast line drawn by Taine, illustrating his basic tendency to bring together the real and the ideal. Striking examples of the influence of politics on the production of literature and art include the differences in political organization between the Italies of ancient Rome and the Renaissance, already cited, and the Norman conquest of England in the eleventh century.[18] In discussing the latter instance, Taine devotes relatively little space[19] to strictly political factors: as is appropriate in a history of literature, the emphasis is placed on such influences as the French language, literature (in the original and in translation), religion, and 'ideal heroes'. In general, the political considerations to which Taine most frequently refers are those of war and peace, foreign and domestic.[20]

A chapter in the *Voyage in Italy* on the 'Social State' of Naples lumps together 'Politics, Science, and Religion'. This was the period of Garibaldi's struggle, when relations between France and Italy were rather complicated: Taine's report, written in 1865, must have had the same interest that a foreign correspondent's dispatches have today, and his comparisons to recent and contemporary French history are therefore frequent. The following chapter passes from impressionistic sketches of 'Intellectual and Other Traits' to notes on the opera, and concludes by asking: 'In order to develop them [the potentialities of the Italian people, S. J. K.] tell me which government is best, that of a despot which imprisons the wise, or that of a *bourgeoisie* which founds schools?'[21] The impact of politics on the arts has rarely been an academic issue in France, and this was especially true under the Second Empire.

Interrelations of political and socio-economic issues are treated by Taine in a later chapter of the same work.[22] Interestingly enough for those who may be troubled by Taine's presumed 'racism', he argues *against* those who gave 'blood' reasons for considering the unification of Italy an impossibility: 'I reply to this that the revolution here is not an affair of race, but one of interests and ideas. . . . The middle class, the enlightened, are those who diffuse it by leading the people along with them in their wake, as formerly in the United States during the war of independence. It is a new force, superior to provincial antipathies; unknown a hundred years ago; *inherent, not in the nerves, in the blood and in the habits, but in the brain, in study and in discussion . . .*'.[23]

A famous example of Taine's recognition of more strictly economic influences on literature is his essay on Balzac, which begins: 'Balzac was a business man, and a business man in debt';[24] Zola and others, however, were to make much more of the theme of 'money' than Taine generally does. More frequently, he correlates transformations of society with changing currents of ideas and states of mind, as in his discussion of fifteenth-century Florence.[25]

Just as, in his treatment of Race, Taine was led astray by his imperfect knowledge of the facts of heredity, so in his treatment of *milieu* he reveals the limitations of the social sciences in his day. These limitations, together with his fondness for abstractions, led him to write concerning 'social mediums'[26] in a fashion which we find exasperatingly vague and comparatively useless today. As a result, Paul Lacombe, after admitting Taine's importance as a pioneer,[27] could have a field-day finding fault with Taine's psychological and sociological generalizations; Lacombe stressed particularly such facts as the influences of cultural traditions and changing literary reputations, of which Taine was insufficiently aware, and emphasized the rôles of *individuals* in art production and the need for closer study of the 'general psychology of the artist'.[28] In general, he found Taine somewhat a victim of his own system and given to oversimplification: 'Taine did not recognize the complexity of the science which he was discussing.'[29]

One has only to compare the 'Introduction' to the *History* with the wealth of sociological material included in Albert L. Guérard's *Literature and Society* to realize the elementary nature of Taine's sociology: '. . . Taine was satisfied with a very general hint: anthropology was still in swaddling clothes at the time.'[30] Thus, today, 'As a rule, anthropology is applied to literature, not directly, but through sociology',[31] and Taine did *not* pay sufficient attention to what L. L. Schücking has more recently called *The Sociology of Literary Taste*, which considers such problems as the sociological position of the artist and the attitudes of artist and public to one another. Taine approached that sort of discussion, perhaps, in *The Philosophy of Art in Greece*, where a section on 'Institutions' considers the 'Orchestral' and 'Gymnastic' systems and the religious institutions of ancient Greece; beginning: 'If ever the correspondence of art with life disclosed itself through visible traits, it is in the history of Greek statuary.'[32]

Instead of the more precise sort of sociological analysis to which

we have since become accustomed, Taine fell back on his ever-present biological metaphor and compared the action of 'social mediums' to that of climate in biology. Instead of physical heat and cold, we now have a sort of 'moral temperature' which, like the German 'Zeitgeist', is rather hard to define. It seems to be largely a psychological affair, though its causes may be non-psychological; the example Taine chooses is that of a 'melancholy' state of mind: 'five or six centuries of decadence, depopulation, foreign invasion, famine, pests, and aggravated misery, are amply sufficient to produce it.'[33] The distinction, pointed out by Spitzer, between *milieu* as friendly and antagonistic, is reflected here: thus, to develop his general 'law', Taine considers also states of cheerfulness, which work in the opposite sense to that of melancholy, as well as intermediate cases. 'Let us conclude, therefore, that in every simple or complex state, the social medium, that is to say, the general state of mind and manners, determines the *species* of works of art in suffering only those which are in harmony with it, and in suppressing other species, through a series of obstacles interposed, and a series of attacks renewed, at every step of their development.'[34] On the whole, however, *milieu* in Taine has a *negative* connotation, that of an 'external pressure' or 'constraining force' against which the more positive force of Race or native endowment has to struggle, and through which it must break to achieve fulfilment.[35]

These are some of the varied senses in which Taine uses the term *milieu*, which his writings did so much to make an essential part of our critical vocabulary. A close equivalent in English is the word 'environment', which Carlyle coined in 1827 to translate the word 'Umgebung' in a passage from Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Book XIII).[36] The quality of the French word is perhaps 'more personal and more intangible',[37] while the English word is more technical and analytic; however, like *milieu*, the latter's connotations start on the biological level and are capable of extension to include *all* 'the surrounding conditions, influences, or forces, which influence or modify',[38] and we have therefore translated Taine's word as Environment.

Time ('moment') as Epoch and Tradition

Winthrop H. Rice, in an article which attempts to show that, since 'there is no generally accepted meaning' for *moment*, 'the term is entirely unnecessary, even inappropriate',[39] has done a

useful job of analyzing various interpretations of Taine's word, classifying them in three categories.

First, the term is taken to mean a 'moment of time', more or less short or long. It is this meaning which is intended when it is translated into English as 'epoch' or 'age', referring to time-spans which range from such broad period designations as 'antiquity' or the Renaissance, through the familiar references to an artist's 'siècle' (age or century), to the briefest of times, as when one says that an action was taken at 'the psychological moment'.[40]

A second group of critics, beginning with Sainte-Beuve, has used the term to distinguish between long-range and short-range forces. Thus, *milieu* would be taken to refer to such larger aspects of Environment as might be indicated by 'civilization', involving considerations of political and social organization, religious and philosophical systems, and so forth; *moment* would refer to the more specific and personal factors which enter into the individual's life-story and development. Professor Rice rightly objects that the latter too are included by Taine in his treatment of milieu, so that '*le moment*, then, is at once different from *le milieu* and a part of it'; among the terms which are listed as equivalent to this sense of *moment* are: 'influences historiques', 'circonstances', 'institutions', 'changement dans la civilization', 'esprit du temps', 'habitats'.[41] A third group mentioned by Professor Rice does hardly more than paraphrase Taine's original discussion.

Because of this widespread misunderstanding—which is natural, in view of the difficulties presented by the term—and since it has been taken to mean *nothing* (by E. Droz) or *everything* (by F. Brunetière), Professor Rice suggests eliminating its use altogether, and reduces Taine's reasoning to the following analogue, which he considers absurd: 'water is made up of three component elements—H_2, O, and Water'.[42]

However, this argument neither does justice to Taine's conception nor solves the problem. As Leo Spitzer writes:

'To assume, as does Mr. Rice, that *le moment* is the product of *race* and *milieu* as water is the product of hydrogen and oxygen (for such is his chemical analogy) is to betray a lack of historical feeling and to out-Taine Taine in the application of natural to social science. The "hesitations" of Taine, that is to say his elastic use of terms which prevent a "mutually exclusive" interpretation, represent rather a *felix culpa*: this positivist had at least so much of

the feeling for history as to know that it could not be reduced to a given number of separate elements with quite the absolutism of chemistry. And it was perhaps out of remorse for his over-generous endorsement of the parallel between natural and social sciences that Taine introduced the temporal element along with *race* and *milieu*, thereby saving something of the rights of history. *Le moment* is not superfluous in Taine's system, but represents a recognition of the necessity to take into account the imponderable.'[43]

But the point which Taine is making is far from 'imponderable'. The whole *is* greater than the sum of its parts: water is *different* from the mechanical addition of H_2 and O, consisting precisely in the two elements *plus* that total relationship which constitutes its 'waterhood'. Professor Rice dismisses the idea of 'momentum' ('the point of development at which the work or the people studied has arrived at a given moment') very briefly as 'the temporal connotation again'.[44] But it is temporal in a sense different from the first one mentioned: whereas the notion of 'epoch' is discrete and discontinuous, the second sense of *moment* emphasizes *continuity of development.*

Though the word 'momentum' comes from physics—and, like *milieu*, points to Taine's background in eighteenth-century Newtonian science—it has a cultural meaning which is clear enough. Thus, 'among several differences there is this, that the one artist is the precursor, the other the successor'.[45] In other words, 'Culture is historical: the present exists only in its relation with the past.'[46] Professor Guérard has clarified this ambiguity of *moment* by translating it, rather awkwardly, as 'the moment' and distinguishing two senses, those of 'time' and 'tradition'.[47] We have found it more felicitous to use 'time'—'history' would also be accurate—as the more general word, since that is the basic concept involved in *moment.* 'Period' or 'epoch' would then be the proper terms to use for Time when considered as discrete; 'tradition' or 'movement' (as in 'the Romantic movement'), for Time when considered as continuous and cumulative.

Both these uses of Time can be illustrated from the *Lectures on Art.* In *The Philosophy of Art in the Netherlands*, Part II divides the history of art in those countries into four 'Historic Epochs' in an attempt to prove the 'general correspondence between art and *milieu*.'[48] Presumably Race and Environment are more stable or

'Permanent Causes' (Part I), but when considered *historically* they are seen to change with Time, and art is seen to change with them.

Here the distinction between the biological and cultural aspects of *milieu* becomes important, since it corresponds roughly to the distinction between permanent and changing causes. At least, the section on the Nation in Part I[49] stresses the relations between the Land (climate and soil) and the national characteristics of the Flemish and Dutch people, both as the former moulded the latter and as the latter was revealed in grappling with the former; these are relatively permanent forces. In Part II, the emphasis is placed on political and social changes and on intellectual movements, which are pictured as now fostering, now inhibiting, the 'natural proclivities' of the people.[50] The two aspects of Time, or history, are thus hard to separate: accumulations of experience, and especially the 'persistent and gigantic pressures' of nature, tend to create uniformity, continuity, and stability; but historical changes, and especially the ones we have characterized as cultural, tend to make for discontinuity and development. Given two sets of ambiguities—Environment as biological and cultural, Time as Epoch and Tradition—in various combinations, it is easy to see why some confusion should result.

In *The Philosophy of Art in Greece*, 'The Period' (the French here is 'moment') referred to is more Tradition than Epoch: the *moment* in question is that of 'ancient', contrasted with 'modern', civilization, and the emphasis is therefore not on the development of Greek life from century to century, but on the traits which characterized it as a whole; when the *moment* is long, rather than short, it assumes the meaning of Tradition. Climate is mentioned here too, but briefly; most of the emphasis is on such cultural factors as costume, architecture, social organization, idea of death, language, education, and, in the last part, on the major 'Institutions' of Greek life.

Problems, Not Solutions

A backward glance over these last two chapters should reveal the basic soundness of Taine's formula, despite the serious errors in detail he, together with others of his generation, committed in its application. It still remains true, as a general, philosophic law of history, that all civilization, all human experience and creation, is a product of 'the interactions of men with their environments'.[51] Though our understanding of each of the terms in the formula has

become more complex and, it is hoped, more soundly based; and though it is not a matter of indifference from which of the terms we start our analysis, or whether we emphasize cultural or biological factors; yet the formula remains unchanged—just as new discoveries concerning the properties of hydrogen and oxygen do not change the fact that water is H_2O.

Taine's formula is still true, and his uses of it were much more subtle than they are usually made out to be. Under the rubric of Race they included a complex of notions concerning heredity, land, climate, and nation; under that of Environment, a whole set of political, social, economic, psychological, and cultural, as well as geographical, factors; under that of Time, the facts of historical changes and epochs, as well as those of continuity and tradition. As Taine frequently repeated, he was espousing and practising a method, not formulating a closed system. Each of the elements in his formula is rather an abbreviation of a set of *problems* than a finished *solution*; each is capable of reinterpretation and expansion, as our knowledge and understanding of the social sciences and humanities increases and improves.

Finally, it should never be forgotten that the importance of all these factors for Taine lay in the fact that they were necessary conditions for the production of 'the man invisible', of 'states of mind', which in turn produced works of literature, art, and civilization. We must, therefore, turn next to a brief consideration of his psychology, and then to some of the general problems which this method of critical analysis presents.

NOTES

[1] *History of English Literature*, I, 14.

[2] This point, implied rather than stated, may be a gratuitous assumption.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

[6] *Literature and Society*, p. 102.

[7] *Essays in Historical Semantics*, pp. 180–181.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 208–209.

[10] Geoffroy, who tried to apply physical and chemical methods to the study of life, used the phrase 'milieu ambiant'.

[11] Illustrated in the following quotation from John Stuart Mill: 'And the mode of thinking thus designated [Positivist—S. J. K.] is already manifesting

its importance by one of the most unequivocal signs, the appearance of thinkers who attempt a compromise or *juste milieu* between it and its opposite. The acute critic and metaphysician M. Taine, and the distinguished chemist M. Berthelot, are the authors of the two most conspicuous of these attempts.' (*Auguste Comte and Positivism*, pp. 2–3.)

[12] Spitzer, *op. cit.*, Note 50, p. 283.

[13] *Ibid.*, Note 49, pp. 282–283.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 213–216.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

[16] In *A Tour Through the Pyrenees*, Book II, on 'The Valley of Ossau', illustrates this method especially well (see Chapters IV–VI, 'Landscapes', 'Eaux-Chaudes', 'The Inhabitants').

[17] *Literature and Society*, Chapters V and VI.

[18] *History of English Literature*, 'Book I.—The Source.'

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

[20] For example, towards the close of the fifteenth century, 'The monarchy, in England as throughout Europe, establishes peace in the community, and with peace appear the useful arts' (*ibid.*, p. 162).

[21] *Voyage in Italy*, I, p. 88. References are to the single-volume 3rd edition in English.

[22] Volume II, Book I, Chapter IV.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 30, our italics.

[24] *Nouveaux Essais*, p. 51.

[25] *Voyage in Italy*, II, Book III, Chapter II, especially p. 111.

[26] Section II of Part II of *The Philosophy of Art* ('On the Production of the Work of Art') contains a 'General exposition of the action of social mediums' (*Lectures*, First Series, p. 18).

[27] *La psychologie des individus et des sociétés chez Taine historien des littératures:* 'Taine was an innovator. That is a great, a very great praise. . . . Others come after him, who, more easily and with less merit, nevertheless advance more directly and go further' [pp. i–ii, S. J. K.].

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 209, S. J. K.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 371, S. J. K.

[30] *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[32] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 471. Does not Taine perhaps mean that we *know* a great deal about Greek life from its art?

[33] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 95.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 104, our italics.

[35] René König, *Die Naturalistische Ästhetik in Frankreich*, distinguishes between Naturalism and Romanticism on this basis: whereas the Romantics asserted man's *rebellion* against society, the Naturalists were more deterministic and pessimistic in their *acceptance* of social pressure as a fact of nature (Note 60, p. 90). See also his excellent 'Exkurs Über das Problem der Milieukreise' (pp. 101–107).

[36] Spitzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–233.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

[38] *Webster's New International Dictionary* (1931).

[39] 'The Meaning of Taine's *Moment*', p. 278.

[40] Professor Rice refers to an article by F. Baldensperger which suggests a possible connection with 'the phrase *das psychologische Moment* attributed to Bismarck in connection with the siege of Paris' (Note 3, p. 273). The term may come from Hegel: it occurs as early as 1850, in Taine's student notes on 'Philosophy of History' (Chevrillon, pp. 399–400). Giraud also sees the influence of Hegel, rather than Comte: 'The theory of the "moment", like that of the "milieu", is already found in Hegel, and not merely in germ.' (*Essai sur Taine*, p. 44, Note 2.) Thus cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art* (lectures originally delivered 1820 ff.): the translator's note to 'a *phase* in the speculative idea' reads as follows: '*Moment*. A phase in an evolutionary, or, as it is here, a dialectical process. A momentary feature of it' (Vol. I, p. 94).

[41] *Op. cit.*, pp. 275–276.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 277 and Note 10.

[43] *Op. cit.*, p. 286.

[44] *Op. cit.*, p. 276.

[45] *History of English Literature*, I, 16.

[46] Guérard, *Literature and Society*, p. 105. A persuasive statement of this point is T. S. Eliot's well-known essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1917).

[47] Chapter VII.

[48] *Lectures*, Second Series, p. 163.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 191–216.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 319.

[51] 'The correspondence of the biological co-ordinates, Organisms, Functionings and Environments, with the sociological analogues, Folk, Work and Place, is obvious.' J. A. Thomson, article on 'Biology', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th ed.), Vol. 3, p. 608.

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CHAPTER IX

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CORE: MASTER FACULTY

The Master Faculty Idea in Taine

NEAR the close of his life, Taine reaffirmed his oft-repeated claim that 'for forty years, I have merely practised *applied or pure psychology*'.[1] Anyone seeking to understand the full significance of such a declaration must ask: What are the main features of Taine's psychology, and why is it so central to his entire philosophy of criticism?

Though the fact has been repeatedly emphasized in previous chapters,[2] the manner in which psychology ran like a golden thread through all Taine's labours can perhaps be most effectively stated by means of a brief glance at the development of the concept of Master Faculty. André Chevrillon[3] finds this aspect of Taine's theory most explicitly stated in the two Prefaces to the *Critical and Historical Essays*, but, though the terminology used may have varied from period to period, the basic idea was never absent from his work.

During his student years, Taine already conceived the goal of seeking 'the dominant elements, or abstract generators'[4] of civilizations and wrote of the 'Psychology of an historical state'.[5] Psychology was central, not only for history, but also for metaphysics,[6] and his original project for a doctoral thesis was a study of 'The Sensations'.[7] During his first half-decade as a writer in Paris, while producing the early critical and historical works which established his reputation, he never ceased to study for and plan, as his *magnum opus*, a comprehensive *Treatise on Knowledge*,[8] and he was only diverted from this project by his important *History of English Literature* and *Lectures on Art*.

Despite what seemed like a side-tracking of his major interest, Taine thought of all his more popular works as so many specific applications of method by means of which he would gain a wider audience for his more general philosophy. He wrote in the Preface to *On Intelligence* (December, 1869): 'For fifteen years I have contributed to these special and concrete psychologies; I now attempt general and abstract psychology.'[9] Thus, his criticism never lost its central psychological orientation: La Fontaine was treated as giving poetical expression to 'The Gallic Spirit' in the seventeenth century; Livy, as a Roman patriot with oratorical gifts; and so forth. In the words of the *History*, literature reveals men, 'visible' and 'invisible', and through them 'the psychology of a people'.

Combine the notions of psychology and 'dominance' and all the essentials of 'la faculté maîtresse' are present.[10] However, Taine first uses the phrase itself in the 'Preface' to the *Essay on Livy* (1856): 'Is there in us *a master faculty*, whose uniform action is imparted differently to our different wheels, and which impresses on our machine a necessary system of foreseen movements?'[11] The plan for the *Treatise on Knowledge* has the phrase 'the fixed tendency'.[12] In the concluding chapter 'On Method' of *The Classic Philosophers* (1856), Taine writes that 'all the parts of its institutions and all the events of its history derive from *the master faculty of a people*'.[13] A number of the figures whom Taine treated in *The Classic Philosophers* were psychologists, and it is in the chapter on Royer-Collard that we find the first statement of Taine's central psychological thesis, namely, that 'External perception is a *true hallucination*'.[14]

Though the phrase, 'master faculty', does not occur in the 'Introduction' to the *History*, that essay does refer to 'fundamental faculties' and uses such rough equivalents as 'primitive disposition' and 'general traits'.[15] Despite the fact that most readers associate the 'Introduction' primarily with the Race-Environment-Time formula, it both begins and concludes with an emphasis on mental phenomena: 'So, if we arrange the *psychological* map of the events and sensations of a human civilization, we find first of all five or six well-defined provinces—religion, art, philosophy, the state, the family, the industries . . .'.[16] Thus, *all* of the complex historical facts whose relations Taine is seeking come to a focus in the central fact of psychology.

'*On Intelligence*'

Unfortunately, the relevance of Taine's work *On Intelligence* to his philosophy of criticism in general, and to the concept of Master Faculty in particular, is lessened somewhat by the fact that it remained incomplete. The unwritten work *On Will*, referred to in the Preface,[17] would probably have contained much material more directly applicable to the production of literature and art. Thus, the completed volumes are discussions of 'The Elements of Knowledge' and 'Of the Different Kinds of Knowledge'; but the original plan had called for supplementing the part on 'Theoretical functions' by one on 'Practical functions or operations by which *the idea reproduces itself in reality*.'[18] This would have included divisions on 'passion' and 'will', and one of the sections in the latter would have considered 'Pure abstract ideas compared to *abstract ideas transformed into metaphors*.'[19] Chapters on 'The Fixed Tendency' and its influence would have constituted, in effect, detailed treatments of the Master Faculty idea.

Nor is it our purpose to consider in any detail Taine's position in the development of psychology as such. Here, too, as in so many other fields, he was a pioneer: the development of modern, empirical psychology in France is usually dated from 1870, when Taine's volumes appeared, forming an early link in a chain of works by such distinguished figures as Ribot, Binet, Charcot, Janet, and Freud, who laid the foundations for the science of abnormal psychology.[20] Such topics as his analysis 'Of Sensations', for example, are beyond our present scope. Nevertheless, much in these volumes is directly relevant to our study of his philosophy of criticism. There are frequent references to literature and art, and, despite his concluding claim that he has stopped short 'on the threshold of metaphysics',[21] Taine poured so many of his philosophical reflections into his psychological treatise that it provides an excellent summation of his general position.

As usual, Taine's procedure is double: the first part is analytic; the second, synthetic. 'The Elements of Knowledge' start by considering 'Signs' (Book I) or names, as in Mill's *System of Logic*, and pass on to the 'Images' (Book II) for which signs are substitutes, paying special attention to the phenomena of hallucination, and picturing a kind of Natural Selection at work: 'So, in the struggle for life, in which all our images are constantly engaged, the one furnished at the outset with most force, retains in each

conflict, by the very law of repetition which gives it being, the capacity of treading down its adversaries. . . .'[22] Thus, various faculties may be suppressed, restored, and created: '. . . our images, by connecting themselves, make up the group which in literary and judicial language we call the moral personality'.[23] Images are, in turn, 'reduced' to combinations of elementary 'Sensations' (Book III), and finally 'The Physical Conditions of Mental Events' (Book IV) are considered.

After summarizing what was known in the 1860's of 'The Functions of the Nervous Centres', Taine considers in this concluding book of the first part various philosophical hypotheses concerning the relations of nervous functions to mental events, favouring the Spinozist solution of psycho-physical parallelism: 'It is possible then that the sensation and the internal movement of the nervous centres may be at bottom one and the same unique event, condemned, by the two ways in which it is known, always and irremediably to appear double.'[24] Nature is pictured as having two faces, corresponding to Spinoza's attributes of thought and extension, each of which ranges from simple elements to complex states: 'From base to summit, the correspondence on either side is perfect'.[25] Finally, these general ideas are applied to 'The Human Person and the Physiological Individual'.

It is here that we arrive at a discussion of 'faculties' or 'powers' which provides the psychological basis for Taine's doctrine of the Master Faculty. He emphatically disavows any intention of erecting these terms into 'metaphysical entities, pure phantoms, begotten of words . . .'.[26] Nevertheless, 'the force is the cause of the event . . . it may be compared to an inexhaustible stream, of which the event is a wave'.[27] Nothing exists, i.e. is substantial, but the events themselves: 'The forces, faculties, or powers appertaining to this web are nothing more . . . than the property which any particular event of the web has of being constantly followed, under various conditions, external or internal, by some particular internal or external event.'[28] There is nothing mysterious or occult about these faculties, which, of course, we discover by methods of scientific analysis and abstraction. Of such stuff is the Ego, or Self, constructed: as we rise higher in the evolutionary scale, we find that 'just as the nervous apparatus is a system of organs in different states of complication, so the psychological individual would be a system of souls in different degrees of development'.[29]

The philosophical basis of Taine's psychology becomes even clearer in his treatment 'Of the Different Kinds of Knowledge' in the second part. Basically, 'external perception is a true hallucination'[30]: hence we can learn much about the normal operations of the mind by comparing them to, and distinguishing them from, their abnormal states. The analysis of 'powers' is carried further in accounting for 'The Knowledge of Bodies', which are treated as '*Certain possibilities and certain necessities of sensations. . . '*.[31] Such a definition is true of people, as it is of things: 'This man is, first, the permanent possibility of tactual, visual, and other sensations, which I experience in his neighbourhood; and further, he is a distinct series of sensations, images, ideas, and volitions, conjoined to the *tendencies* by which this series is accomplished.'[32]

Thus, 'The Knowledge of Mind' is arrived at by a synthesis of elements: 'Let us reunite in one group and one bundle all these capacities and faculties, common or special, which are met with in any one, and we shall know what he is, in knowing what he contains.'[33] Again, we postulate no separate metaphysical entity: 'Thus, faculty and capacity are wholly relative terms . . . the word never does more than state that the conditions of an event or of a class of events are present.'[34] The Ego, or Self, is defined as 'the permanent possibility of certain events under certain conditions, and the permanent necessity of the same events under the same conditions, with the addition of a complementary one, all these events having a common and distinctive character, that of appearing as internal'.[35] Since it is a delicate equilibrium of complex forces, it may easily deviate from its normal form, and 'nearly as we are situated to ourselves, we may deceive ourselves in many ways respecting our self'.[36] Nevertheless, despite the enormous complications involved, the analysis of these faculties, and ultimately of the laws which govern their operations, is the problem which psychology presents.

After the knowledge of bodies and minds in their interrelations, we pass finally to 'The Knowledge of General Things', by which Taine means, though the word does not occur here, *universals*, or natural types. Despite cautious disavowals, this concluding Book IV is an approach to the empirical metaphysics, based on psychology, of whose desirability Taine wrote so often.[37] As in M. Paul's speculations in *The Classic Philosophers*, where the notion was broached somewhat tentatively,[38] the 'type' or species is central here: these 'general characters' are 'the most important

agents of nature',[39] and through them we understand why, among possible 'faculties', certain ones are 'masters' in certain cases and not in others.

Because they exist as 'abstracts', we come to know universals by a process of 'abstraction'.[40] Some of our 'general ideas' correspond to, are copies of, real things; others, like mathematical ideas, are models, whose objects are possible, rather than actual. We *construct* the latter as preliminary outlines which, though only approximations of reality, 'have a relation with things'[41] and, if properly derived, may be made to agree with them; some become the ideals by which we regulate our conduct and make our judgments concerning Utility, Beauty, and Good. A footnote here refers the reader to *The Philosophy of Art* and *The Ideal in Art*, and the issues raised by this discussion, as well as the concluding chapter on 'The Explanatory Reason of Things', must be postponed till we consider the general problem of the relations between type analysis and judgment in Taine (Chapters XI–XII).

Three Meanings of Master Faculty

Now, perhaps, we are in a better position to understand what Taine intended by his concept of Master Faculty. As with Race, Environment, and Time, so here too a few words are used to cover an extremely complex and diverse set of ideas. At least three usages can be readily distinguished: the first is a kind of neutral connotation in which the concept, if not always the phrase, is applied to things as well; the other two refer to people, considered first as individuals and then in social groups.

Thus, when Taine writes of art as making predominant an 'essential character', he is using a neutral term which can be, and as a matter of fact is, applied to both living and non-living things.[42] The 'character' of a person consists of his powers or 'faculties', and what is 'essential' in him is his 'Master' faculty. Though it may sound fanciful to describe such ideas as that of a leaf in botany or of 'electrical action' in chemistry or of gravity in physics[43] as their respective 'master faculties', that is the frame of reference within which Taine is operating, and such a usage is not incompatible with his general pantheistic tendency.

However, the specific term which is applicable to human beings is the psychological 'faculty', and in that connection, as we have already seen, the term is used with reference either to an individual or to a 'people', race, or nation. When Taine says that a certain

kind of literature or art was the product of a particular Master Faculty, we are often not sure whether that faculty is understood to have resided in the individual artist or in his Race-Environment-Time. Most frequently both seem to be intended: the 'state of mind' of the artist as well as the more general 'state of minds'—something like the German *Zeitgeist*—of which he is a product and example.

This ambiguity seems to follow from the fact that Taine treats psychology as both effect and cause. Thus, the 'elementary moral states' mentioned in the 'Introduction' to the *History* are both products of Race-Environment-Time and, once produced, themselves the most immediate, universal, and permanent causes: 'religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families, are in fact only the imprints stamped by their seal'.[44]

This constant shuttling back and forth between the individual and society can be illustrated by the following remarks on Racine, which are fairly typical:

'Like Shakespeare and Sophocles, Racine is a national poet; nothing more French than his theatre; *we recognize there the species and the degree of our feelings and our faculties . . . his genius is the image of ours;* his work is the history of the passions written for our use; he suits us in his faults and his merits; he is the best interpreter of the heart for our race.'[45]

'There are Racine's surroundings; *it is to this spirit of the race and the age that his own spirit adapted itself.* If climates exist in the physical world, they are also to be found in the moral world.'[46]

The Master Faculty is found both (1) in the great national poet and (2) in the national spirit and tradition; to disentangle the two seems as hopeless as finding a solution to the riddle of the chicken and the egg.

Thus, Master Faculty leads us directly to a central problem of both individual and social psychology. If *On Intelligence* represents Taine's effort to develop the concept in the context of individual psychology, the bulk of his other writings do the same for what Wundt, and others, have treated as *Völkerpsychologie*: 'Believing in the concrete rather than the abstract, Taine thought of this Folk-Psychology as the real sphere of applied psychology and deserves the credit of introducing to France this product of German thought.'[47]

Some Critical Conclusions

The problem of faculties remains on the psychological agenda today, though it is very much more complicated than Taine and his generation realized.[48] How much more difficult then must the 'Master' half of the formula seem to us now! Taine's readiness to assume the rule of one Faculty over the others may be accounted for by his classical background and hierarchical principle, but especially by his interest in abnormal psychology: he 'initiated the French tradition that the normal mind is to be understood by a study of the abnormal'.[49] Thus, there is an interesting parallel between his phrase, 'la tendance fixée', and 'l'idée fixe', which became a popular expression for what is now called 'obsession'. An old tradition has it that 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied', and it seems natural therefore to attempt to account for literary and artistic 'genius' by a concept which belongs, perhaps, more in abnormal than in normal psychology.

Nevertheless, one of Taine's central points is that *the same basic processes* are involved in normal as in abnormal behaviour, and the implication therefore remains that psychology should study 'Everyman In His Humour'. In brief, every individual, like every nation, has his Master Faculty; but the poet or painter is one in whom the normal characteristics of the type are more fully developed—just as the work of art 'makes *predominant* an essential character'—and therefore, in that sense, *more typical*. His 'abnormality', so to speak, consists in his being *most fully* normal, or, in philosophical language, 'The Ideal is the real purified.'[50] Such, at least, is Taine's general contention, though it raises issues with which we shall have to be concerned in the next chapter.

On the whole, the Master Faculty concept, too, must be taken as stating a problem rather than presenting a solution. After all, as with Race, Environment, and Time, it reduces to a kind of truism: the artist writes or paints the way he does, in part at least, because of the kind of man he is. Why else are we interested in the biographies of artists? But the relationship is surely more subtle and complex than Taine usually seems to realize. And, though the principle remains basically sound, its specific applications must be expected to change and develop with the progress of psychology and the social sciences.

NOTES

[1] In a letter to Victor Giraud, 1891, printed in Giraud's *Hippolyte Taine: Études et Documents*, pp. 81–83. Quote on p. 82, our italics.

[2] See, especially, Chapters I and V.

[3] *Taine*, 'La faculté maîtresse', Chapter III, Part V.

[4] Notes of 1850 (*ibid.*, p. 399).

[5] Notes of 1851 (*ibid.*).

[6] Cf. Appendix A, 'Historical and Natural Science'.

[7] Cf. Appendix A, 'Taine's Doctoral Theses'.

[8] See the discussion in the *Life and Letters* (*V. & C.*, II, 2–4). A detailed outline of the projected book has survived (*ibid.*, pp. 377–380).

[9] Vol. I, x.

[10] The theory of 'master faculty' occurs in Frederick Schlegel's *Philosophy of History* (1829) as 'vorherrschende und überwiegende . . . Seelen-Vermögen'; a French version of Schlegel's work (1836) translated this passage as 'la faculté souveraine' (Giraud, *Essai sur Taine*, p. 29, Note 1). Also, Giraud traces many of Taine's ideas on philosophy of history in the *Livy* to the Introduction and Part III of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (*ibid.*, pp. 28–29, Note 3). Of course, the idea of a 'ruling' or 'master passion' is very old.

[11] Cf. our Chapter II, p. 17.

[12] *V. & C.*, II, 379.

[13] *Les Philosophes classiques*, p. 369, our italics.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 44 and ff.

[15] *History of English Literature*, I, 9.

[16] *Ibid.*, 18–19, our italics.

[17] See quotation in 'Selected Bibliography'.

[18] *V. & C.*, II, 378, our italics.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 379, our italics.

[20] See 'France and the Development of Abnormal Psychology', Chapter XII, Part III, in J. C. Flugel's *A Hundred Years of Psychology*. During later years, Taine kept in touch with developments in psychology. His correspondence includes references to Ribot and Binet; and during his visit to England, in May, 1871, he writes about discussions with 'Mr. Bain, the latter a "sharp and acute" Scotsman; I had a chat with him on the progress which remains to be made in psychology; it seems that he and Mr. Grote have been corresponding all winter about my *Intelligence*' (*V. & C.*, III, 127–128).

[21] *On Intelligence*, II, 288.

[22] *Ibid.*, I, 81. A footnote refers to Darwin: 'The theory of the great English naturalist is nowhere more precisely applicable than in psychology.'

[23] *Ibid.*, I, 97.

[24] *Ibid.*, I, 196.

[25] *Ibid.*, I, 201.

[26] *Ibid.*, I, 204.

[27] *Ibid.*, I, 207.

[28] *Ibid.*, I, 211.

[29] *Ibid.*, I, 215.

[30] *Ibid.*, I, 224.

[31] *Ibid.*, II, 17, Taine's italics.

[32] *On Intelligence*, II, 34, our italics.
[33] *Ibid.*, II, 99.
[34] *Ibid.*, II, 101.
[35] *Ibid.*, II, 109.
[36] *Ibid.*, II, 110.
[37] Cf. Appendix A, 'Historical and Natural Science'; and the second half of the essay on Mill, discussed in our Chapter IV.
[38] Cf. our Chapter III.
[39] *On Intelligence*, II, 136.
[40] *Ibid.*, II, 138 ff. See our Chapter IV, *passim.*
[41] *Ibid.*, II, 161.
[42] Cf. our Chapter VI, 'Art as Imitation and Expression'.
[43] *On Intelligence*, II, 149–151.
[44] *History of English Literature*, I, 9.
[45] *Nouveaux Essais*, pp. 171–172, our italics.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 177, our italics.
[47] George Sidney Brett, *A History of Psychology* (Vol. III, *Modern Psychology*), p. 248.
[48] For a good summary of the psycho-analytic discussions, see 'Adler, Jung, and "Type" Psychology' (Part IV, Chapter IX, in J. C. Flugel, *op. cit.*); the picture has been immensely complicated by contributions from sociology and cultural anthropology (*ibid.*, Chapter XIII). Jung's *Psychological Types* (1923) are fairly close in spirit to such distinctions made by Taine as that between Mill's *empiricism* and Carlyle's *intuitionism*, or that between Shakespeare's *creative* and the typically French *analytic* styles (*History* I, 357–358); and an interesting parallel to the study of 'primitives' is provided by Taine's consideration of the manner in which little children develop 'the faculty of language' (*On Intelligence*, I, pp. 15–19; II, p. 176). Vague 'faculties' have been supplanted by more complex 'factors' in the work of C. E. Spearman (Flugel, Chapter XI) and L. L. Thurstone (*Multiple-Factor Analysis*), who writes: 'Factor analysis is reminiscent of faculty psychology. It is true that the object of factor analysis is to discover the mental faculties. But the severe restrictions that are imposed by the logic of factor analysis make it an arduous task to isolate each new mental faculty, because it is necessary to prove that it is called for by the experimental observations' (p. 70). Further: 'It is the faith of all science that an unlimited number of phenomena can be comprehended in terms of a limited number of concepts or ideal constructs' (p. 51). In Jung, see especially 'Chapter V. The Problem of Types in Poetry' and 'Chapter VII. The Problem of Typical Attitudes in Aesthetics'.
[49] Boring, E. G., *A History of Experimental Psychology*, p. 606.
[50] Cf. our Chapter VI, Note 6.

CHAPTER X

PROBLEMS OF ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The 'New Criticism'

THUS far, our study of Taine's critical method has sketched its more general features and especially the various categories of analysis which he employed: abstraction, history and psychology, causes and conditions, biology and culture, and master faculty—these were the chief avenues through which he sought to understand literature and art. Concerned primarily with a philosophy of method, the preceding chapters have probably given an inadequate impression of what has been described as 'the social density, the soaked-up material of history that distinguishes Taine at his best'[1] and of the brilliant series of critical essays and books in which these categories were applied; to correct that lack, however, there can be no substitute for first-hand acquaintance with Taine's works themselves. Finally, despite some corrective criticisms, made in the light of later scientific developments, our chief goal has been sympathetic exposition, and the result has been, on the whole, to defend the basic soundness of his approach.

Nevertheless, neither criticism nor science have stood still in the century since 1850. Besides correcting many of the details of Taine's system within the framework of his own scientific method, recent decades have also witnessed an anti-Naturalist movement[2] which has attacked some of his more basic assumptions. These attacks, some of which will be considered briefly in the present chapter, have come chiefly from two quarters: first, from critics and aestheticians of literature and art; and second, from scientists and philosophers who, gathering information and opening vistas unfamiliar to the nineteenth century, have had a powerful impact on recent world-views and thus, indirectly, on the theory and practice of criticism.

First for the critics. A revolt against the kind of 'historicism' represented by Taine has been the chief negative characteristic of an influential movement commonly referred to as the 'new criticism'; positively, this movement has been characterized by intense and subtle concentration of attention on the work of literature or art itself, rather than on the historical and psychological conditions of its production.[3] There is evidence that the 'new criticism', having performed its necessary function, has lost some of its original force, at least in its more extreme and rebellious form[4]: indicative of a more balanced view is such a study as the *Theory of Literature*, by René Wellek and Austin Warren, which might be considered an attempt to blend the best elements of the 'new' and the 'old' criticism, from the point of view of the 'new'. Both authors have laid claim to 'a similar pattern of development, passing through historical research and work in the "history of ideas", to the position that *literary study should be specifically literary*. Both believed that "scholarship" and "criticism" were compatible. . . .'[5]

This work crystallizes a major accusation which has been levelled at Taine's method, by including most of his categories in a section headed 'The *Extrinsic* Approach to the Study of Literature' and labelling attempts at 'causal' explanation as examples of the 'fallacy of origins'.[6] In their stead, it advocates 'The *Intrinsic* Study of Literature', beginning with 'The Analysis of the Literary Work of Art'. Taine's approach to criticism, especially in the pictorial arts, was indeed *consciously* 'extrinsic', as has already been pointed out (Chapter VI)[7]; but though that word does unfortunately carry connotations of inferiority (such as would be conveyed by the phrase '*merely* extrinsic'), its use does not in itself settle the issues of the relations between external and internal considerations (to use less prejudicial words) and of the value of the external approach for criticism.

That Taine was aware of the issue, and made his choice of method deliberately, is evident from his clear distinction between re-creative and philosophical criticism, and his defence of the latter, in answer to Sainte-Beuve's criticisms.[8] The contrast between these two emphases was thus not a discovery of the twentieth century: among Taine's contemporaries, for example, Eugène Fromentin, author of *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland* (1875), was one 'whose persistent critical concentration on the aesthetic' provided something of a corrective to Taine's

concern with historical causes.[9] But Taine was fully aware of questions of style: any one of his studies will probably illustrate this concern, in some degree or other,[10] and the theoretical point is made in the section on 'The Converging Degree of Effects' in *The Ideal in Art*. Either extreme is a false abstraction from the complex total situation; and the 'new critics', who often treat the work of art as if it existed 'out of space, out of time', are in their own way 'reducing' the aesthetic experience to less than its proper fullness.

Wellek and Warren would agree with Taine on the importance of *analysis* for criticism, but they would direct attention to other elements more 'purely' literary, such as 'Euphony, Rhythm, and Meter' (Chapter XIII), 'Style and Stylistics' (Chapter XIV), and 'Image, Metaphor, Symbol, Myth' (Chapter XV). The issue becomes one ultimately of the nature and 'ontological status' of the work of art: *What*, precisely, is it that the critic analyzes?[11] 'An answer to our question in terms of individual or social psychology cannot be found. A poem, we have to conclude, is not an individual experience or sum of experience, but only a potential cause of experiences.' Defined as 'a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers',[12] 'It is neither real (like a statue) nor mental (like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle).' Their position, termed 'perspectivism', is an attempt at a synthesis to supersede 'The unsound thesis of absolutism and the equally unsound antithesis of relativism . . .' and involves 'a process of getting to know the object from different points of view . . .'.[13]

But surely this is not so very different from Taine's contention that he was analyzing *facts* and their *relations*. The point is that the relations of a work of art are inevitably *external* as well as *internal*; Taine's 'perspective' is therefore valid and important; and the issue really is one, first, of how external factors are related to the internal ones, and of the relative importance of the two; and second, of the validity and status of our categories. Wellek and Warren do not commit themselves on the issue of 'nominalism versus realism', preferring merely 'to avoid two opposites, extreme Platonism and extreme nominalism'.[14] But part of the strength of Taine's critical system lies in the fact that he does *not* evade the philosophic issue, frequently reasserting his Spinozism, as in the concluding chapters of *On Intelligence*. An interesting criticism by William James is pertinent here: 'How can M. Taine fail to have

perceived that the entire doctrine of "Substitution" so clearly set forth in the nominalistic beginning of his brilliant book is utterly senseless except on the supposition of realistic principles like those which he so admirably expounds at its close? How *can* the image be a useful substitute for the sensation, the tendency for the image, the name for the tendency, unless sensation, image, tendency, and name be *identical* in some respect, in respect namely of function, of the relations they enter into? Were this realistic basis laid at the outset of Taine's *De l'Intelligence*, it would be one of the most consistent instead of one of the most self-contradictory works of our day.'[15]

Whether or not Taine is consistent or self-contradictory, it is obviously because, rightly or wrongly, he had a vision of the unity of the Real and the Ideal, developed in his concluding chapter on 'The Connection of General Characters, or the Explanatory Reason of Things', that he tended to merge his *external* with his *internal* analyses.[16] Hence,

'By means of existing records, and by the exact processes of methodical reconstruction, we are at present able to suppress the distance of time so as to represent to ourselves by more or less numerous specimens, the Frenchman or Englishman of the seventeenth century or of the Middle Ages, the ancient Roman and even the Hindoo of the Buddhist epoch, to picture to ourselves his life, private, public, industrial, agricultural, political, religious, philosophical, literary, in short, to construct the descriptive psychology of his moral and mental state and the circumstantial analysis of his physical and social medium, then, to pass from these elements to still simpler elements, to discern the aptitudes and tendencies which were found effective and preponderant in all the processes of his mind and heart, to note the general conceptions which determined every detail of his ideas, to mark the general inclinations which determined the directions of all his actions; in short, to distinguish the primordial forces which, present and in action at each moment of the life of each individual, impress on the total group, that is to say on the society and the age, the characters which observation has recognized there.'[17]

A footnote adds: 'I have attempted to apply this method in many historical essays, and have explained it in the preface to "Essais de Critique et d'Histoire," and in that to "Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise".'

In other words, within the framework of Taine's thought, critical analyses of the work (which is one of the 'records'), the man, and the age were closely interrelated; they cast light on one another; they were all parts of the same enterprise. As a result, a *true* understanding (and, ultimately, judgment) of *Paradise Lost*, for example, was unthinkable without an understanding of John Milton and the Puritans. That this must be so follows from the fact that poetry depends on communication by means of language and symbols that are themselves social and cultural products, so that attempting to analyze its 'meanings' without some understanding of the context which produced them is like trying to read an unknown language; of course, any skilled reader of English poetry *must* bring to his reading much Race, Environment, Time, and Master Faculty, willy-nilly, and whether he is conscious of it or not! And, in the last analysis, if we wish to resolve the aesthetic issue, we are driven to an examination of its philosophical bases.

The Problem of Causation

Thus, the questions raised by Taine's theory of causation are more fundamental than those raised by the 'new criticism', since how we answer them will in turn decide which factors in aesthetic analysis we consider 'extrinsic', and which 'intrinsic'. Three chief approaches to the problem of causation seem possible: the monistic, the dialectical, and the pluralistic; and if we recognize a plurality of causes, we may treat them anarchically, oligarchically, or monarchically, the latter two implying some sort of hierarchical principle.

Thus, the basic source of many of Taine's limitations, as well as his virtues, as a critic may be his tendency towards philosophical monism, as a result of which he usually expects a one-to-one relationship between the condition and the product, the cause and the effect; fortunately, history is not so simple. He assumes that the artist and his work will be *typical* of, i.e. *similar* to, his Race, Environment, and so forth; but, as Jung has noted, 'some writers reveal their type in their creative work, while others reveal their anti-type, their complement'.[18] Is William Blake a typical product of eighteenth-century rationalism? An artist may follow the general lead, or be in rebellion against it, or reach some sort of compromise; the compromise, in turn, may be more or less stable, or in a constant state of tension.

Of course, the very fact of rebellion against a trend is indicative of its influence, and Taine was not unaware of some of the dialectical processes involved. The fact that *milieu* can be either friendly or antagonistic to struggling artists, thus determining whether the work which survives will be cheerful or melancholy, has already been noted[19]; but the more subtle possibility, that an artist may achieve greatness precisely because he is different or a-typical, is not often recognized by Taine. One *abuse* of the notion of typicality would be to equate the 'type' with the 'average', in which case an argument might be made for Edgar Guest as the great American poet. Taine avoids this pitfall, since 'typical' for him means, not average, but 'ideal'; but he does tend to overlook the writer who is out of the main stream, and the operation of such psychological mechanisms as *compensation*, which have come to be better understood since his day.[20]

One exception to this general tendency, however, is the essay on Saint-Simon, author of the *Memoirs*, in which, using the formula of 'The Age', 'The Man', and 'The Writer', Taine accounts for the greatness of that 'secret historian' in terms of his maladjustment to the eighteenth-century court with which he was associated: 'instead of fighting openly with his hands, he fought secretly with the pen. He might have been discontented and a conspirator; he was discontented and a scandal-monger.'[21] Nevertheless, Taine's usual assumption is that the artist is *representative*, that there is a *correspondence* between the work and the age. This monistic attitude towards the problem of causation is one expression of his preference for the metaphysics of Spinoza, as against Hegel's dialectics.[22] Undoubtedly, it seems somewhat crude and simple-minded to a generation which has been exposed to the neo-Hegelianism of the Marxists, Freud's analyses of subconscious processes, and ambivalences, polarities, ironies, paradoxes, and ambiguities without number.[23]

The third alternative, of a pluralism of causes, is one of which Taine was well aware. On the one hand, in his essay on Macaulay it is a basis for praise[24]; on the other, it is an aspect of Mill's position with which he strongly disagrees.[25] Thus, Taine's monism *includes* a recognition of many factors: he does not, for example, make Race alone, or Environment alone, the prime mover. But he does insist that certain factors are more essential than others, primal elements and generative causes. In this respect he provides

an interesting comparison with William James, the great advocate of pluralism. George Sidney Brett stresses their similarities:

'An instructive parallel might be drawn between Taine and James, not only in respect of their qualities as writers and the character of their interest in human life, but also as the two prominent exponents of anti-rationalistic methods. It is true that Taine was not fully emancipated; but it is also true that James was enslaved by excess of liberty.'[26]

Thus, in James' *Psychology*, the chapter on 'Reasoning' (XXII) goes along with Taine in mentioning 'analysis' and 'abstraction'[27]; but then James dissents on the monistic issue: 'All ways of conceiving a concrete fact, if they are true ways at all, are equally true ways. *There is no property ABSOLUTELY essential to any one thing.*'[28]

On this issue, James' position might be characterized as 'anarchic'—though 'democratic' is a term which better conveys his intention and spirit—whereas Taine's, based on a hierarchy of forces in nature, might be characterized as 'monarchic' and 'oligarchic'. Thus, at the top of a *pyramid* (which can be taken as a symbol for any system of relations) the Master Faculty 'rules'; below it is the oligarchy of Race-Environment-Time, comprising the whole of the possible causes of 'motion'; below these is the broad base of many lesser causes, a multiplicity of factors such as have been sketched in previous chapters (especially VII and VIII).[29] Another image might be that of many rivulets and brooks flowing into three *rivers*, which in turn combine to form one powerful stream of tendency. The first of these metaphors, however, is too static, the second is too mechanical. The truest picture of Taine's intention is that of an organism, 'ruled' by a nervous system (or, in the pre-scientific conception, a heart); composed of a few major organs; these in turn composed of many lesser tissues and cells, and so forth. Whichever image is used, the central point is that our process of analysis, as it goes from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract, is also going from the varied effects to the simple cause; and from elements which are less, to those which are more, fundamental and important; thus establishing a 'hierarchy of necessities'.

If we may risk a rather broad generalization, recent developments in the psychological and social sciences have tended to combine elements of James' pluralism with Taine's hierarchical

principle, as polar elements of an organic unity.[30] As a result, we find a dual attitude to Taine's method in Professor Muller's recent discussion. On the one hand, Taine is mentioned, only once, among those who advocated 'the more harmless form of the race hypothesis', with the observation that 'culture and not race is the ruling force'[31]; and every effort is made to stress individuality, flexibility of categories, opposition to absolutes, and the importance of differences and particularities. On the other hand, those elements of Taine's system which have become commonplaces of critical thinking are vigorously defended: 'Joel Spingarn's manifesto on the "new criticism" is typical. "We have done with the race, the time, the environment of a poet's work as an element in Criticism". . . . As a matter of fact, we have done with none of them; all the species are still alive and kicking. Nor should we have done with any of them.'[32] Further: 'The race, the milieu, the moment largely determine what is possible and important, and must influence the choice we usually have to make, in life as in literature, between width at the price of disorder and order at some price of narrowness.'[33] The 'sociology of knowledge' represented by Karl Mannheim is cited as 'an elaboration of the familiar idea of cultural compulsions or climate of opinion',[34] the latter being, of course, a paraphrase of Taine's 'moral temperature'. In general, Prof. Muller insists on the importance for criticism of seeing literature in its context of *time* and *place*: 'the great fathers were also children of a country and an age . . .'.[35] He argues eloquently for Matthew Arnold's conception of literature as 'criticism of life' and for recognition of the mutual involvement of 'The Individual and Society',[36] concluding with a quotation from Kierkegaard to the effect that responsibility and freedom are achieved when 'The individual becomes conscious of himself as being this particular individual with particular gifts, tendencies, impulses, passions, under the influence of a particular environment, as a particular product of his milieu.'[37]

In sum, with necessary modifications and qualifications, the scientists, if not the critics, have been moving towards, rather than away from, Taine's general biological orientation. That the organic concept implies some principle of unity in variety, and some hierarchy of forces within the organism, is fairly evident. Just what that principle and hierarchy may be in the case of *aesthetic* criticism is a problem we have yet to examine.

What Does a Critic Analyze? Internal and External Relations

If it is granted that Taine's general theory of causation and biological categories may still be valid, a new perspective on the problem of external and internal relations, or 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' approaches, raised by the 'new criticism', may perhaps be gained. Taine's chief categories have been shown to be biological (Chapter VII), cultural (Chapter VIII), and psychological (Chapter IX). How are these factors related to one another, and what are their relative degrees of importance for criticism?

As has been shown, Taine's formula is roughly equivalent to John Dewey's analysis of experience as the interactions (psychology) of organisms (biology) with their environments (culture).[38] Now, to return to the question raised in the opening section of this chapter, *what* is it that the critic in fact analyzes? We should say, quite simply, *his experience* of the work of art, using that term, however, with the richness of connotation it has, for example, in Dewey's *Art as Experience*. Such a statement would not deny the validity of the Wellek and Warren claim that ontologically the work of art is 'a potential cause of experiences'. However, this potentiality was equally true of the Venus de Milo statue, for example, as a piece of marble, both before and after it was excavated. What really counts for criticism is the experience of that statue, in its excavated state, by a perceptive observer; obviously, no one can criticize unwritten poems of 'mute inglorious Miltons', or poems he has not read.

It is the vital experience, then, if anything, that is *intrinsic* to criticism of a work of art, and that experience is a total product of interactions between what Dewey has called 'The Live Creature' and 'The Expressive Object'.[39] *Any factors which are relevant to a full perception of any of the elements in that interaction must therefore be relevant to criticism.* Since art is neither created nor enjoyed in a vacuum, what Dewey has, in another context, called the biological and cultural 'matrixes'[40] must be taken into consideration. Whether or not Taine did so adequately is beside the point: his attempt was proper and admirable, and needs to be amended and expanded, not thrown into the discard.

Nevertheless, the *locus* of criticism must be in the experience itself, not in its matrixes, and surely the most significant way of considering experience is as psychological. This would be a suffi-

cient justification for Taine's setting the Master Faculty at the head of his hierarchy of causes. The biological and cultural matrixes are necessary conditions, but the conscious experience[41] is what counts most, since it involves the relations, *external as well as internal*, which are central both to 'The Act of Expression' and to our 'Having an Experience' of the work of art.[42]

Such a psychological emphasis would provide a criterion for determining which elements are intrinsic, and which extrinsic, to the problem of criticism. The full meaning of such lines as 'Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit Of that forbidden tree . . .' cannot be experienced without a prior acquaintance with *Genesis*; hence the doctrines of *Genesis* are as intrinsic to an analysis of those lines as considerations of metre. Whether or not a statue is hollow may not affect my experience of it as a statue; *if* it does not, then that consideration is extrinsic to its criticism as a work of art, though not to its production as an artifact. Whether Milton's eyes were blue or brown probably had no effect on his poetry, but the fact of his blindness affected it profoundly; the former relations are therefore external, the latter internal, to the production and criticism of his art. Thus, from the point of view here suggested, to consider the effect of Milton's blindness would *not* be to take an 'extrinsic' approach to the study of his poetry.

A further distinction must be made: to *which* experience are our relations internal or external? On the one hand, there was the experience of the *author*, before and during the act of expression or creation; on the other, there is the present experience of the *critic*, as he reads and thinks about what he is reading. Taine, by writing explicitly 'On the Production of the Work of Art' (*The Philosophy of Art*, Part II), indicates clearly that he is concerned primarily with an attempt at a reconstruction of the experience of the author; hence, for him, the relations summed up by the terms Race, Environment, Time, and Master Faculty are indeed internal and intrinsic to his subject-matter.

But he is assuming, unconsciously and perhaps unjustifiably, a correspondence between his reconstruction as a critic and historian, and what actually happened. In other words, he is implicitly adding to his explicit recognition of the *imitative* and *expressive* rôles of art[43] an element of *communication*, thus completing the trilogy of major categories which have recently been labelled the 'Form', the 'Source', and the 'End' of art.[44] Taine

took for granted what our generation, with its highly developed sense of semantic difficulties, has analyzed so thoroughly that it sometimes seems in danger of analyzing it out of existence: namely, the intelligibility of art, and its ability, when successful, to communicate experience.[45]

However, *difficulties* of communication—symptomatic though they may be of an age characterized by a breakdown of values and widespread obscurantism, in life as in art—need not invalidate Taine's placing psychology at the head of his hierarchy. Whether or not the artist is communicating his *own* personal and social experiences—and many though the slips may be between the cup of life which the poet has actually drained and the lips of his readers who would sip of it also—it still remains unquestionable that the artist usually *does* intend to induce some sort of experience in his public, or in a potential public—unless, of course, he is one of those rare birds who claims to sing only for himself. It is, after all, relatively trivial whether we speak of the *poems* or the *personalities* of William Blake and Alexander Pope as mystical and rationalistic respectively; indeed, when critics refer to personalities, they usually mean poems, or rather their *experiences* of poems. And the latter emphasis has the advantage of not shutting out whatever light may be shed on the works of art, thereby *enriching* our experiences of them, from knowledge of the contexts in which they were produced.

Thus, the shift induced by the 'new criticism' has been chiefly one of emphasis, corresponding to the shift in the writing of history, as in the works of James Harvey Robinson, from the impossible ideal of a total reconstruction of the past, to the more modest goal of an interpretation of the past in the light of subsequent developments and the needs of the present. Taine's search for the general laws of history was perhaps a step in this direction; and his writing of the monumental *Origins of Contemporary France* was motivated by a desire to understand 'la débâcle' of 1870. Nevertheless, it is necessary to make explicit what Taine may recognize theoretically but often seems to forget in practice—namely, that his readings and criticisms are after all his own special literary *aperçus*, based on his own special interpretations of history and of the lives and personalities of the men who are his subjects—and not the *final* word on anything.

In sum, the 'new critics' are unduly narrow when they abstract the work of art from its historical context and try to treat as

external, or 'extrinsic', all relations except those contained in literature *as literature* (whatever that may mean). But they have served as a healthy corrective to the positivistic myth of the historian as an objective Scientist endowed with a kind of God-like omniscience—that cocksureness which some practitioners of the historical method, driven by a passion for classification, have tended to exhibit; and with their help that method could be immensely enriched. Its focus would now be on the complex of relations revealed in the contemporary critic's experience of the work of art, as a twentieth-century man, aware of history and tradition, but of history and tradition constantly enlarged by ever-new perspectives; and on careful and sensitive reading, with which no criticism has ever been able to dispense. It would continue to search for 'dominant traits', or 'master faculties', but they would not now be so much those of a fictive poet or artist (who cannot be summoned from the grave to a psycho-analyst's couch!) but rather of his surviving work, whose undying power to move and please is what really counts.

Thus, the 'new critics' have helped us remember—what no true critic, including Taine, has ever forgotten—that criticism, though pursued with all the help that scientific analysis can provide, can never dispense with the imaginative insight and fire of art. Taine recognizes this fully in the second part of his *Essay on Livy*, on 'History Considered as an Art', and fortunately he preserved the great tradition in much of his practice. As Edmund Wilson put it recently: 'The truth was that Taine loved literature for its own sake—he was at his best himself a brilliant artist—and he had very strong moral convictions which give his writing emotional power. His mind, to be sure, was an analytic one, and his analysis, though terribly oversimplified, does have an explanatory value. Yet his work was what we call creative. Whatever he may say about chemical experiments, it is evident when he writes of a great writer that the moment, the race, and the milieu have combined, like the three sounds of the chord in Browning's poem about Abt Vogler, to produce not a fourth sound but a star.'[46]

The Metaphysical Issue: Analysis and Judgment

There is a difference, however, between recognition of the primary importance of experience, and hence psychology, for criticism and Taine's more general doctrine of a hierarchy of ideal values and the identity of the Real and the Ideal. The former

is an hypothesis to be verified by reference to aesthetic theory and the practice of critics, and merely provides *a framework for objective analysis*; the latter involves a fundamental metaphysical position which, Taine thought, provides *a basis for judgments* of aesthetic value.

That 'master faculties' or 'elementary moral states' are important, probably central, factors to be considered in analyses of works of art and our experiences of them, does not necessarily imply that they are '*universal and permanent causes*'.[47] Thus, for Émile Boutroux, the only truly 'necessary relation' is analytic and *a priori*: 'To sum up, the criterion of the necessity of a relation is the possibility of reducing it analytically to a subjectively and objectively necessary synthesis. The principle of the necessary conjunction of things, the magnetic stone whose virtue is transmitted to every link, can only be the *a priori* causal synthesis.'[48] In every other case, he claims, an element of contingency remains.

The idea of a *permanent* Master Faculty presents difficulties, especially if we realize, from Taine's own analysis, that psychology is being treated both as effect and as cause.[49] It is hard to see in what sense any faculty (such as, for example, 'the English character', however it may be characterized) is permanent, unless it is taken to be rigidly determined by *heredity*. If it is not already present at birth, then at what point is it fully formed: in childhood, adolescence, or maturity? What if a member of 'the English Race' is transported to America soon after birth: will the 'permanent' cause of Race still be efficacious?

Or perhaps it is unique conjunctions of Race-Environment-Time which create 'primitive dispositions' in groups, i.e., entire nations, rather than individuals, 'since the accidents which thwart them, being limited and partial, end by yielding to the dull and incessant repetition of their efforts . . .?'[50] Then at what point in time was 'the English character' permanently formed: before, during, or after the Norman conquest? Unless we conceive of such faculties as having been themselves *caused*, and having *developed* over a period of years, we seem to have thrown the essence of history out of our analysis and invoked a kind of 'unmoved mover'.

Similar doubts assail us when we consider the 'universality' of causes which are said to be 'present at every moment and *in every case*'. With Professor Guérard, 'We agree that there is a

"Gallic tradition"', but we recall, with him, too, that 'At one time the best representative of Gallic wit was Heinrich Heine, a German Jew; today, it might well be Aldous Huxley.'[51] Or are we to take care of such examples by falling back on the old dodge that 'the exception proves the rule'?

At this point, too, we may well recall the difficulties presented by Taine's ambiguous references to abstraction (Chapter IV). William James, in a review of *On Intelligence*, stated the problem as follows:

'Every *real* abstraction is an extract (to use his happy terminology) from a multitude of particular things or events which may differ as to their other details. The British school says the things are "similar" as to this character, but Taine affirms the common character to be literally the "same" in all, thus giving it a sort of ontologic status, a real existence differing from that of individuals and events only in possessing superior stability and permanence. The beauty and value of these abstract characters, or generalized extracts, is that they are fertile, for they contain wrapped up in them—sometimes obvious, sometimes latent, and to be discovered only by a keen analytic eye—further properties, other abstractions. . . . The class of abstractions to which he is not thus indulgent differs from the former chiefly in its infecundity. It is that of *substances*, such as matter, the ego, the faculties of the mind, and what may be called the dynamic entities, as power, necessity, cause, force, etc. Here his nominalism stands firm. . . . His best and deepest reason for rejecting [this] class of abstractions is that they really explain nothing. . . . We find M. Taine constantly forgetting this point of view. . . .'[52]

Is the Master Faculty a false 'substance' or a '*real* abstraction'?

Finally, if we have defined what we mean by a 'universal and permanent cause', and shown it to be a 'true' abstraction, how can we be sure that the *hierarchy* we establish on its basis is the only valid one? The possibility always remains—stated for criticism by the 'perspectivism' of Wellek and Warren—that for other purposes, and from other points of view, other hierarchies might be set up and other causes found to be universal and permanent.[53] In other words, how are we to decide the metaphysical issue which, as Stephen C. Pepper has recently shown in persuasive detail,[54] underlies the conflicts of critical systems?

These questions are important for our study of Taine because

he consciously makes the transition from the process of *analysis* (the categories of which have been outlined in Chapters III through IX) to the process of judgment, by way of a metaphysical position. The Master Faculty concept is a specific example of a philosophical doctrine of natural types; therefore, before we can attempt to answer any of the above questions, and evaluate the bases of critical judgment in Taine's system, we must examine some of the more general issues raised by type analysis.

NOTES

[1] Irving Howe, 'Edmund Wilson: A Reexamination', *The Nation*, 16 October, 1948, p. 431.

[2] Cf. our Chapter I, 'The Problem in our Century'.

[3] Cf. Mr. Brooks' essay, cited above, 'Preface'.

[4] Cf. the 'Foreword' by Mr. Brooks to R. W. Stallman, editor, *Critiques and Essays in Criticism*, 1920–1948, pp. xv–xvi.

[5] *Op. cit.*, p. vi, our italics.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[7] Chapter VI, 'Conditions for Production of Art'.

[8] Chapter IV, 'Taine Replies to Critics . . .'.

[9] See Meyer Schapiro, 'Fromentin as a Critic'.

[10] For example, in *La Fontaine*, the chapter 'De l'expression'; in *Livy*, Chapter IV, Part Two; and so forth.

[11] For a recent discussion of this issue, see Richard Rudner, 'The Ontological Status of the Esthetic Object'. My own position, incorporating material from this book, has been more fully stated in Sholom J. Kahn, 'What Does a Critic Analyze?'

[12] Wellek and Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 157–158.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[15] 'The Sentiment of Rationality', in *Collected Essays and Reviews*, p. 112.

[16] A critical study which stresses the centrality of Taine's psychology, and his attempt at theoretical *unity*, is A. Laborde-Milaà's *Hippolyte Taine: Essai d'une biographie intellectuelle*, Paris, 1909. See especially Chapter II, 'La Conciliation théorique. La Méthode'.

[17] *On Intelligence*, II, pp. 261–262. Cf. Hamlet's speech concerning 'the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' (Act III, Scene 2).

[18] Wellek and Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[19] Chapter VIII, 'Environment'.

[20] Thus, though there is a good deal of the Classic about Taine's doctrine we must not overlook the Romantic elements in his makeup (Chapter IV, 'Abstraction as Weakness'): his interest in psychology made him aware of the

poet as abnormal and 'possessed', to complement the poet as normal and 'maker' (Wellek and Warren, p. 79). Consider, for example, his discussion of Shakespeare as 'a nature poetical, immoral, inspired, superior to reason by the sudden revelations of its seer's madness' (*History of English Literature*, I, 341 ff.). But then, in these respects, Shakespeare, for Taine, was *typical* of the Elizabethan age!

[21] *Essais*, p. 206. Taine writes here of a combination of 'chance' and necessity: 'His favour and his disgrace, his education and his temper, his virtues and his faults had brought him there. Thus are great men born, *through chance and necessity*, like the rivers, when the accidents of the soil and its slopes reunite all its streams into one channel' (*ibid.*, p. 216, our italics).

[22] See our Chapter II, 'Spinoza versus Hegel'.

[23] For examples of these recent dialectical tendencies, see 'A Note on Methods of Analysis', in Herbert J. Muller's *Science and Criticism: The Humanistic Tradition in Contemporary Thought*, pp. 50–56, which develops Kenneth Burke's 'perspective by incongruity'; and William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

[24] Cf. our Chapter V, '"Macaulay" and "Carlyle"'.

[25] See Mill's *A System of Logic*, Chapter X, Book III, 'Of Plurality of Causes: and of the Intermixture of Effects'; and Taine's essay on Mill: 'We can now comprehend the value and meaning of that axiom of causation which governs all things, and which Mill has mutilated' (*History of English Literature*, II, 614).

[26] *A History of Psychology* (Vol. III, *Modern Psychology*), p. 262. Brett's qualification (to the effect 'that Taine was not fully emancipated' from rationalism) is a negative way of doing justice to his subject. 'Anti-rationalistic' would be a queer adjective to apply to the author of *On Intelligence*, who inherits the traditions of Condillac and Spinoza! Consider his affinities with such twentieth-century rationalists as Ernst Cassirer and Morris R. Cohen (Chapter XI, below); and Henri Peyre, who writes of 'the rigidly dogmatic and rationalist criticism . . . from Taine to Faguet . . .' ('Literature and Philosophy in Contemporary France', an essay in Northrop's *Ideological Differences and World Order* which begins with a quote from Taine: 'Beneath every literature there is a philosophy', pp. 269, 281). Taine was very much interested in irrational phenomena, but his *method* was never anti-rationalist.

[27] *Psychology*, p. 353.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 355, James' emphasis.

[29] Note that in Appendix E the relations have been reversed, for diagrammatic purposes, and the Master Faculty is pictured at the base of the pyramid.

[30] Thus, a pervasive tendency towards pluralism does not eliminate either the *possibility* of ultimate unification or the *problem* of which factors in an analysis are important, and which trivial.

Herbert J. Muller's *Science and Criticism*, an informed, sensitive, and critical survey of the current situation, finds that 'the trend in scientific thought is indicated by the constant recurrence of such terms as "continuity", "evolution", "inter-relation", "integration", "system", "field", "pattern"—all summed up in the concept of dynamic, organic wholes' (p. 241). Since 'the "cause" is finally the whole situation', a new approach to the problem of freedom has been attempted. In France, the generation which matured under Taine's

influence produced such works as Émile Boutroux's *The Contingency of the Laws of Nature* (1874), which opposed the fundamental category of 'necessary relation' and stressed the reality of flux; this line of thought was given further development by Henri Bergson (*Time and Free Will*, 1889; *Creative Evolution*, 1907).

However, despite the popularity and persuasiveness of such attacks, they often consist of more poetry than science (see my essay: 'Henri Bergson's Method'). As Professor Muller puts it, 'the principle of determination has not actually been abandoned in science, but . . . as now formulated it is less frightening. It is no longer a doctrine of mechanical predestination: it is a description of invariant sequences and relations—of the orderliness in nature that alone makes intelligent behaviour possible' (p. 85). In psychology, the Gestalt approach has enabled us to recognize *levels* of determination (p. 163); in the social sciences, there has been a reaction against Marxian economic determinism, which does violence both to 'the basic uniformities of all lives in a common environment; and the immense heterogeneity of individual or group interests and purposes' (p. 193).

That Taine recognized an element of chance, or indeterminism, is evident from his essay on Mill: 'Here Mill is right. Chance is at the end of all our knowledge, as on the threshold of all our postulates . . .' (*History of English Literature*, II, 615).

[31] *Op. cit.*, p. 216. Also mentioned as having fallen prey to the 'race hypothesis' are Arnold, Carlyle, Meredith, Stendhal, Sainte-Beuve, and Renan.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 181, our italics.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 230–238.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

[38] Cf. our Chapter VIII, 'Problems, Not Solutions'.

[39] Chapter headings in Dewey's *Art as Experience*.

[40] *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Chapters II and III.

[41] Together, of course, with the 'intimations' which spring from the *unconscious*.

[42] Chapter headings from Dewey's *Art as Experience*.

[43] Cf. Chapter VI, 'Art as Imitation and Expression'.

[44] Mark Schorer, *et al.*, *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*, 'Introduction'.

[45] See the discussion by Wellek and Warren of the problems connected with the various kinds of experience involved in reading (*op. cit.*, pp. 146–151), especially the issue of the presumed 'intention' of the author (pp. 148–149).

[46] 'The Historical Interpretation of Literature', in *The Triple Thinkers: Twelve Essays on Literary Subjects*, p. 261.

[47] *History of English Literature*, I, 9. The idea of such causes is a persistent one; for example, we find Professor Muller summarizing Ruth Benedict's analysis of Dobuan culture, in her *Patterns of Culture*, as follows: 'Their society is organized by a *permanent, universal* animosity and malevolence . . .' (*op. cit.*, p. 210, our italics).

[48] *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

[49] Cf. our Chapter IX, 'Three Meanings of Master Faculty'.

[50] *History of English Literature*, I, 9.

[51] *Literature and Society*, p. 128.

[52] Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, p. 560, quoting from review of *On Intelligence* (*The Nation*, 1872, XV, 139).

[53] The Marxist, for example, would build his hierarchy on 'methods of production' instead of 'master faculties'.

[54] *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*, especially the 'Introduction' and Chapter I: 'A Theory of Empirical Criticism'.

PART THREE

★

SCIENCE AND AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

CHAPTER XI

PROBLEMS OF TYPE ANALYSIS

Historical Background: the Problem of Universals

THE core of Taine's philosophy, and of his attempt at a science of criticism, is his search for the 'true abstraction', that is, for the natural type which is not merely a formal concept but is, in the fullest sense, concrete. Permanent causes, ideal types, generative facts, elementary moral states, races, essential characters, general characters, master faculties—these are all variations on the same theme, developed in different contexts. What are some of the problems involved in this search? How did it enable Taine to complete his theory and practice of criticism?

The problem of 'universals' or types has been, not whether or not that word has any meaning, but what that meaning may be. Unless universals 'existed', in some sense, there could be neither science nor communication: the historical and logical controversy, however, has centred rather around the question of *how* they are to be taken as existing. For the realist, they have had an existence independent of particular individuals; for the nominalist, only individuals can be said to exist, and universals have therefore been considered to be convenient and sometimes arbitrary labels for groups of individuals. Taine's solution combined elements of both,[1] and was closest to that of the conceptualist, for whom universals are creations of the mind, but for whom they are not arbitrary, since, if properly derived and criticized, they *correspond* to something real outside the mind.

Taine's general position can be stated by contrasting it with that of Mill, on the one hand, and of Hegel, on the other. All of Taine's observations concerning abstraction in the essay on Mill involve this issue, explicitly or implicitly: 'We discover couples; that is to say, *real compounds and real connections* . . . we can search for generating elements into which they may be resolved, and

from which they may be deduced.'[2] Mill's *A System of Logic* also has a chapter which treats 'Of Abstraction, or the Formation of Conceptions',[3] but his emphasis is on the point that 'The facts are not *connected*, except in a merely metaphorical acceptation of the term. The *ideas* of the facts may become connected, that is, we may be led to think of them together; but this consequence is no more than what may be produced by any casual association.'[4] Taine, however, raises the question of whether—or, perhaps, in what sense—the *process* of abstraction yields a true *product*. Is it proper to translate the verb ('to abstract') into a noun ('abstraction')?

The extreme opposite of Mill on this issue is Hegel, with whose name the modern doctrine of the concreteness of universals is usually associated. Thus, Taine concludes his Preface to *The Classic Philosophers* by attributing his belief 'that the world discovered by experience thus finds its reason, as well as its image, in the world reproduced by abstraction' to the German thinker: 'Such is the idea of nature expounded by Hegel. . . .'[5] This will recall our previous discussion of Taine's student criticisms of Hegel, and the points made in Chapter II concerning his agreements, disagreements, and misunderstandings of Hegel are relevant here: in sum, Taine thinks of abstraction first as a process, like that which the practising scientist uses, not merely as a formal category of Being; he insists on the methods of hypothesis and verification to ensure that concepts *correspond* with concrete realities; and he balks at the Kantian and Hegelian distinction between Understanding and Reason.[6]

Nevertheless, it may be useful to look again at Taine's differences with Hegel, in this new context. Hegel's central discussion occurs in his *Subjective Logic*, which is the third volume of the larger *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*). The first two volumes are concerned with Being (*Sein*) and Essence (*Wesen*) respectively, constituting an *Objective Logic* (or metaphysics) which reinterprets the Kantian categories of the Understanding (*Verstand*) in terms of the dialectical principle. In the third volume, according to Hegel, the Concept or Notion (*Begriff*) is revealed in its fullness of development; thus, 'we should begin by regarding the *concept* in general as the *third member* in a triad whose other members are *being* and *essence*, or, in other words, *immediacy* and *reflection*'.[7]

Hegel's introductory chapter on 'The Concept in General'

carries on a sort of dialectical ballet, in which the concept finally appears as 'the unity of *being* and *essence*',[8] the negation of a negation. In his first chapter he then breaks the general concept down into 'the three factors of *universality*, *particularity*, and *singularity*'.[9] Clearly, he is not concerned, at least in the *Subjective Logic*, so much with the relations between particulars and universals that are found *in nature*—with existing realities like those which constitute the subject-matters of the various sciences—as with the *concepts* of particularity and universality, considered as categories of a dialectical system. Now this dialectic Taine does *not* adopt, though he *does* agree, as we have seen, with Hegel's general Spinozistic assumption that 'The order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas.'

In general, Taine is much more concretely concerned than Hegel with universals as empirical facts in the sciences; and though he reaches somewhat similar conclusions, he claims to get there by a different route, namely, induction. His version of scientific method is to start with the particular specimen, or perception of that specimen, and arrive, after a process of abstraction and elimination, at the presumed universal fact, such as the biological species or other natural type (for example, chemical element, such as hydrogen; or psychological trait, such as 'oratorical genius' or 'English character').[10]

Taine's Position in 'On Intelligence'

Taine's doctrine of universals is developed most systematically in the last book of *On Intelligence*, on 'The Knowledge of General Things'. There he begins by asserting, unequivocally, what seems like the realist position that 'there *are* general things', or universals,[11] and then asks, concerning the structure of our general *ideas*, 'under what conditions it *corresponds* to the real and natural edifice of *things*'.[12] Describing 'general characters' as 'the *uniform and fixed* portion of dispersed and successive existence',[13] he sets up a scale in which 'the general character is an abstract character, and the more abstract as it becomes more general, and the more general as it becomes more abstract'.[14] Among the examples cited are such physical forces as gravity and such biological types as 'the race or variety', which stands in the relationship of being less abstract and general to 'the species, that is to say to Man'.[15]

This generally realist beginning is followed by what seems like a nominalist analysis, based on the principle that 'the formation of

our ideas is nothing more than the formation of names, which are *substitutes*',[16] and we seem to be confronted by the self-contradiction which James pointed out.[17] However, Taine attempts to combine these two emphases by means of a conceptualist position in which, as a result of scientific analysis, experimentation, and rectification, 'the acquired general idea corresponds with an actually general thing, that is to say with a group of characters which involve or tend to involve one another, *whatever be the individuals and circumstances under which one of them is given*'.[18] Citing Goethe's theory that 'the various organs of a plant are nothing more than transformed leaves' as an example, he claims that 'the original type is manifested by fixed relations'[19] and generally correlates 'structure and function'.[20] Thus, 'leaf' is a name for a concept which corresponds to something in reality.

As if in answer to the familiar criticism that the only truly fixed relations are those which are analytic and *a priori*,[21] Taine attempts to prove a correspondence between the sciences of construction[22] and those which are concerned with 'real things'. Thus, a perfectly straight line does not occur in nature, but the *idea* of one has 'a function and a value. Though constructed on their own accounts', such 'preliminary outlines . . . have a relation with things'. The gap between ideal constructions (the internal relations of which are analytic) and things can be made to disappear either (1) by completing and amending the former, or (2) by reducing and abstracting the latter[23]; the former must be exact, 'very general, and, if possible, universal', and simple if they are 'to have a chance of agreeing with things'.[24] One example of these 'constructions' is the work of the artist, who 'takes a block of marble and hews out the ideal form which Nature has not been able to display to us'.[25]

As before,[26] Taine disavows any intention of identifying such fixed relations with 'the mysterious link by which metaphysicians connect cause and effect'[27]; thus, 'they do not exist outside individuals and events, as Plato taught, nor in a world other than our own'.[28] Nevertheless, he contends, a universal cause 'possesses, *in itself*, the property of being accompanied, followed, or preceded by' other characters; '*taken apart and in itself*, isolated by abstraction, extracted from the various media in which we meet with it, it possesses this property'.[29]

Analogous to the relations between constructions and things are those between deductions and inductions; thus, from the

objects of knowledge, we turn to the processes by which we come to know them; 'Two artifices of method lead us to our end.'[30] *Induction* begins with 'a very probable hypothesis . . . that a character, taken apart, has an influence; . . . it is sufficient for it to be given for one or more other characters to be also given'.[31] (But the Kantian problem remains: How can we *know* such a character except in terms of its *actual relations*?) Taine develops and illustrates Mill's canons of induction, the first three of which he compares to Bacon's 'Tables of Presence, Absence, and Degrees',[32] and shows that they all involve 'the elimination or exclusion of characters other than the character we are in search of'.[33] *Deduction* 'is only a derivation of the preceding methods; for it starts from a property of the antecedent obtained by those methods. This property is that of being sufficient, that is to say of exciting, by its presence alone, a certain consequent.' That the idea of *sufficiency* is necessary for both induction and deduction seems clear; but that it can be *proven* inductively is far from obvious: 'In truth, this will only be a supposition or hypothesis; but it will be the more probable in proportion as the total consequent, being more complex and more multiplex, further limits the number of hypotheses capable of accounting for it; and it will be wholly certain when, as is the case with the motion of the planets, we can demonstrate that no other combination of forces could produce it, that is to say that the double antecedent assumed is not only possible, but alone possible, and therefore, real.'[34]

Next Taine considers the origins of 'Laws concerning Possible Things', or constructions: these are based on axioms, which are '*analytical* propositions, the subject of which contains the attribute . . .'; such are the 'metaphysical axioms' of identity, contradiction, and the alternative.[35] Now, of the abstract points and lines of geometry, we say that, when they are equal, they are identical,[36] but Taine also contends 'with Leibnitz and D'Alembert, that among the principles of mechanics, are many which are not merely truths of experience, but also *analytical* propositions'.[37] Thus, 'axioms and their consequences are necessary truths . . . applicable, not only to all observed cases, but to all cases, without possible exception . . .'. Taine seeks to justify this by a position intermediate between that of Kant, for whom these 'fixed relations' are 'the effect of our mental structure',[38] and Mill, for whom they are merely results of experience. For Taine, 'the two data

are such that the first includes the second . . . *they are but one thing in two aspects*. Their connection, then, is absolute and universal. . . .'[39] Experience, 'in many cases, in astronomy, optics, acoustics, . . . ascertains that certain existing things present the required characters. . . . In all these cases the necessary propositions are *applicable*, and the real data have the intrinsic connection which Kant and Mill deny them.'[40]

The ultimate justification for such a belief lies in what Taine, in his concluding chapter, calls 'The Explanatory Reason of Things'. In the sciences of construction, 'All the theorems are demonstrated by *analysis*, by the analysis of the terms of the definitions.'[41] In the sciences of experience, 'the resources are fewer and the difficulties greater'[42]; experiments and inductions are required; but, 'if the processes of discovery have been different, *the structure of things has been shown to be the same*'.[43] A general law, like an axiom, is simple and universal and contains many lesser and more complex laws within it; the latter are compared to pillars of a cathedral which 'all indicate by their gradual diminution and converging directions, that a loftier arch must finally reunite them'.[44]

Finally, we come to the consequences of this belief for our real subject-matter, namely, the natural and historical sciences, in which the organic principles of Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire reign: the former stressed the 'uses' or *functions* of organs; the latter, their 'holding a place in a plan' or *system*: 'A part, then, has the property of exciting by its presence the presence of a whole system of parts, arranged according to a fixed pattern, which gives us the rough framework of the whole animal, and has, besides, the property of determining by its structure and function, the structure and function of the other parts which gives us the whole structure and group of the functions of the complete animal.'[45] On the basis of the latter principle, a palaeontologist can reconstruct a skeleton from a jawbone, and an historian can do the same for a civilization from a poem.

An additional question in the natural sciences, supplementing those of 'function' and 'place in a plan', is that of *origin*, exemplified by Darwin's theory.[46] This is the special province of history, which is concerned with elements both of permanence and of change: 'To form the species, there was a fixed condition, the transmission of an older general type, and changing conditions, the new circumstances which, selecting the subsequent ancestors,

added to the type the characters of the species.—To form a particular historical epoch, there was a fixed condition, the maintenance of the national character, and a changing condition, the new state in which the nation happened to be placed on emerging from the preceding epoch.'[47]

There are limits, however, to the powers of reason and science. The ultimate parts or elements of real things—for example, in the science of Taine's day, the atoms of matter and cells of living organisms—may never be fully known: 'no one has seen or can see them . . .'.[48] Though our knowledge has progressed amazingly in the last century, the fact that the principle of indeterminism has been widely accepted as a working principle in atomic physics has substantiated part of his conclusion, at least: 'Thus, at a certain limit, our explanation is at a standstill, and though, from age to age, we push it further on, it is possible that it may always stop before a certain limit.'[49] Also, Taine anticipates a development which reads very much like what the 'quantum' principle in physics may eventually become: 'Perhaps, on the other hand, at a certain point of decomposition, all difference between the compound and the factors is at an end, and the properties of the compound are nothing more than the sum of those of its factors, just as the whole weight of a body is nothing more than the sum of the weights of its molecules; in which case the limit would be attained, since, knowing the properties of the compound, we should thereby know the properties of its final elements.'[50] However, these are very general speculations.

As a kind of climax to Taine's exposition, we find that his conclusions converge and 'will be led by their convergence, towards a universal law of a higher order, which governs every law'.[51] Here we have a revealing admission: 'At all events, we believe this. We cannot show this reason, but we are persuaded that it exists; we anticipate it by a bold affirmation as to our future discoveries, and even as to discoveries which perhaps we shall never make.'[52] Thus, we assume that a gap in our knowledge or understanding 'never arises from the explanatory reason failing or having failed *in things*, but always from its failing or having failed *in our minds*'.[53] This universal law involves the statement that 'if we look at the ideal and the real world, we perceive that their structure is similar'[54]; hence our theorems, if true, can be applied everywhere and everywhen.

However, Taine is cautious on the issue of absolute determinism:

'We have here considerable *probabilities*, and may sum them up by saying that there is no analogy to authorize our supposing the absence, in any case, of *the explanatory reason*, while many analogies lead us to suppose its presence in all cases. Still we have here *probabilities* only. . . .'[55] Again, he refuses to separate the structure of the mind from that of things, preferring to say that necessity has, 'as ultimate cause, *the adjustment of our mental structure to the structure of things*'.[56]

Taine concludes by attempting to demonstrate the necessity of 'an explanatory reason' through an analysis of the formal relations between a general attribute and a particular subject.[57] This 'does not affirm that there are in fact distinct subjects, nor that two or more distinct subjects possess in fact the same attribute. Experience alone can instruct us as to this'[58]—but he clearly implies that experience *does* so instruct us. The axiom of causality is 'a consequence and an application' of the axiom of explanatory reason, as is 'the idea of one necessary whole, . . . that *existence* is itself explainable'.[59] Ending with the image of a cathedral as 'one grand harmony', Taine claims to pause 'on the threshold of metaphysics'—though he has in fact been writing on a central metaphysical issue for the last one hundred and fifty pages!

These, then, in brief summary, are Taine's arguments for the existence of universals or natural types. How do they stand up today? If we attempt to judge this issue by glancing at the status of universals in contemporary science, we find that such a penetrating student of scientific method as Morris R. Cohen, for example, agreed with Taine in his insistence that the search for 'invariant relations' must include 'an intelligent use of type analysis' as the inventive, creative element in the process of induction.[60] It would require a kind of special stubbornness to deny that the 'element' or 'species', in some sense, has a determining influence on processes in which particular specimens are involved. *To the extent that* forms of natural things have a function to perform, and are efficacious in performing that function, the 'general characters of things' (like hydrogen and horse) must surely be said to exist.[61] Their 'concreteness' consists in the fact that they serve as efficient causes in determining the course of events; and propositions which include them enable us to make predictions, thus pointing to verifiable uniformities in nature.

We seem to be confronted with a dilemma: either particulars and no discourse, or universals, natural types, and abstractions,

with all the pitfalls that the latter involve, most dangerously in the social sciences.[62] At first glance, the latter choice seems inevitable: 'What we have called type analysis, involving as it does a certain lack of explicitness in its assumptions, of definiteness in its terms, of coherency and accuracy in its conclusions, may not be the ultimate ideal of social science, but it is all we can expect in the foreseeable future.'[63] At this point, we seem driven to choose the latter horn of dilemma and to strive, as Taine would have us do, to make our abstractions 'true', rather than 'false'—or, at least, as true as possible.

The Issue of Substance

Later discussions of the problem of universals have, however, sought another way out of this difficulty. The major criticism levelled at the concept has been the metaphysical one involved in the polemic against the scholastic idea of 'substance'. Whether we mean to do so or not, its critics contend, by naming types and speaking of them as efficient causes, we endow them with a substantiality they do not possess. Thus, on the one hand, Cohen emphasizes, with Taine, 'that the application of laws to phenomena presupposes the existence of real classes, that many things and processes are really alike. If there were no real likeness, no examples of identity in different instances, the formulation of scientific laws would be without any possible application.'[64] On the other hand, he points out that '. . . the principal difficulty of grasping the nature of universals is the tendency to confuse thoughts with images, and thus reify all objects of discourse'.[65] Cohen would avoid the latter tendency by identifying 'the genuine *substance* of things with those *relations or structures* which are the objects of rational science . . .'.[66]

One of the first to attempt a thoroughly relational analysis of 'substance' was Ernst Cassirer, who, as early as 1910, was applying the 'relativity' principle, most popularly associated with Einsteinian physics, to more general philosophic issues. He did not deny that, in some sense, the species or type 'exists'; however, 'That the general birch-tree "exists" can only mean that what is to be stated by it is not a mere name, not simply a *flatus vocis*; the statement is meant to refer to *relations* of the real. We express by the notion "general birch-tree" merely the fact that there are *judgments* which do not refer to this or that—here and now given—birch-tree, but claim to apply to "all" birch-trees. I can uphold

this logical participation, this μέτεξις of the particular in the general, without transforming it into an ontological statement in which two fundamental forms of reality are posited.'[67] The central point was rather that, with the development of the relational concept, a higher synthesis has been achieved in which the problem of reality, as such, has become 'unreal'.

The individual—though it is inexhaustible, i.e., cannot ever be fully known—yet, 'as an infinitely distant point, determines the direction of knowledge'.[68] At the opposite extreme, the universal type—such as the species, 'horse', and the chemical element, 'hydrogen'—is seen as a necessary means by which we approach the ideal limits of knowledge, and its scientific function seems quite 'real'; at the very least, the metaphysical issue of its status may still be kept open. For thinkers like Cassirer, its 'substance' is *synonymous with*, nothing but, its 'function'. However, neither the individual nor the type has any *meaning* without the other; both are equally abstractions. In Cohen's words: 'We do not have pure particulars any more than pure universals, to begin with. . . . Definite individuals are, therefore, the *goals or limits* rather than the data of scientific method. When we attain knowledge of particulars we see that their nature depends upon the universal connections which make them what they are.'[69] Cohen's final solution for this 'pseudo-problem' lies in what he calls the principle of polarity: 'The efforts of the human intellect may be viewed as a tension between two poles—one to do justice to the fullness of the concrete case before us, the other to grasp *an underlying abstract universal principle* that controls much more than the one case before us.'[70]

In brief, Taine seems to have anticipated many of the important criticisms of the natural type from the point of view of its substantiability, or lack of it, at least as revealed in the writings of such unrepentant rationalists, solidly grounded in the methods and findings of twentieth-century science, as Cassirer and Cohen. Though Taine is optimistic, in the fashion so characteristic of his century,[71] he is far from naïve concerning the problems of making the Ideal and the Real agree. The fact that many today, like Cassirer, skirt the ontological issue, has not settled it, and Taine's solution still remains possible, at least as an article of scientific faith.

The most questionable part of Taine's analysis, from our less optimistic standpoint, would be his belief in the possibility of

demonstrating that the universal, 'taken apart and in itself', is a sufficient cause; instead, we are more likely to accept such a principle as what Bertrand Russell has recently called a 'postulate', unproveable, but necessary for science.[72] Since, as a matter of brute fact, we always find causes enmeshed in webs of relations, many today prefer not to worry about the issue of substance. Thus the pragmatist, resting content with knowledge of functions and consequences, may dismiss Taine's problem as meaningless; others, with Cassirer, may resolve the dilemma, not by taking one of its horns, but by achieving a 'higher synthesis', escaping between the horns into the new world of relativity. Nevertheless, Taine's 'one grand harmony' has not really been discarded,[73] and both the 'concrete individual' and the 'abstract universal' or type continue to function as 'ideal limits' for the scientist's quest.

The Issue of Absolute Idealism

The solution of Substance as Function may be derived from Cuvier's principle that an organ must be *useful*; that of Absolute Idealism, from Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's principle of its having *a place in a plan.*[74] The latter consequence, and criticism, of the doctrine of natural types results from following some of its implications to what seem like logically warranted, but may be empirically doubtful, conclusions. If 'organic form' is characteristic of all processes, and if all processes are necessarily related—so the argument runs—a necessary conclusion would seem to be that the universe is *one huge organism.* Cohen characterizes this style of thinking as 'vicious organicism', which he considers to be on a par with 'vicious atomism' in its falsification of the facts.[75] The element of truth in this position is what nineteenth-century thinkers were fond of calling, after Leibniz, 'the principle of sufficient reason', which Cohen himself has formulated as follows: '*Everything is connected in definite ways with definite other things, so that its full nature is not revealed except by its position and relations within a system.*'[76] However, such a statement tends to overlook the fact, already stressed above, that there are real discontinuities in nature (Appendix C). Historically, this principle has been usually associated with one form or another of philosophic idealism, and the motivation for its use has been strongly aesthetic, as in the works of Bernard Bosanquet.[77]

However, it should be possible to select the valid elements from such an analysis without falling prey to extremes of either

idealism or aestheticism. Recognition of the importance of thought, or reason, in science need not result in a *reduction* of reality to its ideal aspects. Thought does not have a separate existence; it is rather 'men thinking' who create their *versions* of the world—not the world itself—and men have still to submit their concepts to criticism and verification before they can be satisfied that their 'worlds' are real. The idealist, who constructs a cosmos in his own image, may be true to certain aspects of experience, but he must recognize that his version, like that of the materialist, is subject to the dangers inherent in abstraction. Experience can be *viewed* as a work of art, but the world may not *be* such.

Closely related to the aesthetic issue is that of value in general: thus, most discussions of 'the concrete universal' can be criticized as confusing criteria of truth with those of value, to the detriment of objective science; especially in the social sciences, the sins committed in the name of man's 'rational animality', for example, have been legion. This criticism may be answered from two directions: first, by showing that the element of value, aesthetic and pragmatic, is not absent from science—for example, in Occam's Razor[78]; and second, by showing that it is precisely from the elements of form and universality that standards of value must be derived. For example, our notions of normality, health, and so forth, are abstractions of relations that are found to be typical of the species.

The underlying motive of such a system as Bosanquet constructs is philosophical monism, the emphasis on totality and unity. Such a philosophy may often carry the synthesizing operation beyond the stage warranted by present knowledge; further, it sometimes fails to recognize the possibilities of pluralism and the facts of discontinuity.[79] It need not follow, from the fact that natural types have a real function, that the entire world must be *one*. Such a grandiose conception may serve, like those of the 'individual' and the 'universal' generally, as an ideal limit for scientific investigation, but it must perforce remain logically vague and empirically unattainable. Nevertheless, whether or not this metaphysical hypothesis is true need not affect the validity of type analysis on a more modest scale: hydrogen and horse may be understood as both 'concrete' and 'universal', *with or without* a cosmic Absolute.

Of course, both these motives—the aesthetic and the monistic —were strong in Taine. The former needs no excuse in a critic of

literature and art, and the latter represents the core of his inheritance from Spinoza. Thus, though we may not be willing to follow Taine to the end in his search for the Absolute, and though types are inevitably abstractions, both the process of abstraction and the unification of knowledge are *necessary for science*; and though the 'concrete universal' in science may be indeed a 'myth', it may sometimes prove useful as an organizing principle. Perhaps no *particular* definition, say of hydrogen or horse, is truly both concrete and universal; but, at the very least, a definition which answers to both these descriptive terms represents *the proper ideal* of science. Similarly, though unification of all the sciences into one organic whole seems impossible today, whether on the basis of Taine's hierarchical or of Hegel's neatly dialectical principles, such a goal remains, like that of the fully known individual, as 'an infinitely distant point' towards which the sciences may be moving.

Criticisms of Taine's Position

The relational, functional analysis of universals or types which has been sketched may help us clarify some of the perplexities into which we were led at the conclusion of the previous chapter by Taine's concept of 'universal and permanent causes'. Though not without some validity, this concept would now seem to require revision in a number of directions.

First, we may well cease the hopeless endeavour to find the 'Ding an sich', *abstracted from* all relations, replacing it, perhaps, by the more fruitful concept of 'potentialities' or 'powers', waiting to be actualized and discovered through their *entry into* ever-new relationships. This would include what is valid in Taine's statement of 'the property which any particular event of the web has of being constantly followed, under various conditions, external or internal, by some particular internal or external event',[80] but in a more dynamic, operational context. More fully aware of the *dangers* of abstraction, we should preserve an awareness of the total 'field', of the biological and cultural 'matrixes', in which our natural types are found. Realizing that we will surely never know what they *are* 'in themselves', if that phrase has any meaning, we should be content with full and sensitive explorations of all that they *may be* when realized in actuality.

Second, avoiding the mystifications of the Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, we should nevertheless strive for an even

truer historical sense than Taine ever achieved. Though theoretically aware that permanence and change are both involved in development, he tends to stress the former, thereby oversimplifying his formulas. We should, by way of correction, pay more attention to the fourth dimension of such 'permanent causes' as 'the English character' and 'the Gallic tradition', including in our accounts the facts of their origins, gradual and complex developments, and sometimes *drastic* changes. That Race, Environment, and Time are less stable forces than Taine suspected has been dramatized by such technological developments as the aeroplane and atomic energy; and the factor of change has been emphasized by later historians, like Spengler and Toynbee, who have considered the dynamisms of declining civilizations. The Race of ancient Babylon has vanished in the abysses of Time; not even its Environment of fertile soil and flourishing cities remains unchanged; and its Master Faculty survives, if at all, in historical documents and fragmentary ruins.[81]

Finally, if we may resort to a paradox, our causes must be seen as only '*relatively* permanent' and '*relatively* universal'. This must be so because the best of scientific knowledge remains hypothetical and subject to emendation. Thus, we may say that, *on the basis of these and these facts thus far studied*, 'the English character' seems to exhibit such and such traits; but we have no guarantee—though, as Taine says, we may have 'considerable probabilities'—that what seem like permanences now will always remain such; new combinations, and new perspectives, are always possible. Exceptions do indeed 'prove' our rules, but in the original Latin meaning of 'testing' them. We can only say that a condition is universal, *to the best of our knowledge*.[82]

These are the chief modifications introduced by a functional analysis of Substance; and similar revisions are implied for Taine's hierarchical principle by our critique of Absolute Idealism. Thus, any scale of values we use remains valid for a *particular purpose*, or, even if it seems all-inclusive, as *the best we have achieved thus far*. The 'Declaration of Human Rights' proclaimed by the United Nations as 'universal' includes many articles not included in the 'Bill of Rights' of the United States Constitution; and we may expect it to be superseded and perfected in turn. So with the strife of scientific theories and philosophical systems: they are all, at best, approximations of the truth.

Nevertheless, granted these cautions and modifications, the

kind of type analysis which reveals *relatively* permanent causes, *approximately* true abstractions, and the *best available* scales and perspectives—all these *are* necessary for value judgments which may be called critical and philosophical because grounded in true perceptions. We may, therefore, proceed now to consider how such *analytical* categories are applied by Taine in the *judgment* of literature and art.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Appendix A, 'Metaphysical Systems'.

[2] *History of English Literature*, II, 613–614, our italics. Cf. our Chapter IV, 'Defence of Abstraction'.

[3] Book IV, Chapter II.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 427.

[5] *Op. cit.*, p. x.

[6] See Appendix A, 'Spinoza versus Hegel'.

[7] *Hegel's Doctrine of Formal Logic, Being a Translation of the First Section of the Subjective Logic*, p. 115.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[10] Cf. Appendix A, 'The Problem of Method'.

[11] 'I mean thereby things common to many instances or individuals' (*On Intelligence*, II, 133), our italics.

[12] *Ibid.*, 134, our italics.

[13] *Ibid.*, 136, our italics.

[14] *Ibid.*, 138.

[15] *Ibid.*, 137.

[16] *Ibid.*, 141.

[17] Chapter X, 'The "New Criticism"'.

[18] *On Intelligence*, II, 148, our italics.

[19] *Ibid.*, 149, our italics.

[20] *Ibid.* Cf. also p. 261, and *passim*.

[21] Cf. quote from Boutroux, our Chapter X, 'The Metaphysical Issue'.

[22] Those 'treating, like mathematics, of the possible and not of the real' (*On Intelligence*, II, 151).

[23] *Ibid.*, 161.

[24] *Ibid.*, 165.

[25] *Ibid.*, 167.

[26] Cf. our Chapter IX, 'On Intelligence'.

[27] *On Intelligence*, II, 171.

[28] *Ibid.*, 174.

[29] *Ibid.*, 173, our italics.

[30] *Ibid.*, 174.

[31] *Ibid.*, 178.

[32] *Ibid.*, 185, Note.

[33] *Ibid.*, 185.

[34] *On Intelligence*, II, 187.
[35] *Ibid.*, 197–198.
[36] *Ibid.*, 205.
[37] *Ibid.*, 216–217, and ff.
[38] *Ibid.*, 226.
[39] *Ibid.*, 230, our italics.
[40] *Ibid.*, 231.
[41] *Ibid.*, 246.
[42] *Ibid.*, 253.
[43] *Ibid.*, 256, our italics.
[44] *Ibid.*, 259. Cf. our Chapter X, p. 130.
[45] *Ibid.*, 261.
[46] *Ibid.*, 268.
[47] *Ibid.*, 270–271.
[48] *Ibid.*, 263.
[49] *Ibid.*, 264. The Heisenberg principle would change the wording here to 'it is necessary that it should'.
[50] *Ibid.*, 265.
[51] *Ibid.*, 271.
[52] *Ibid.*, 272.
[53] *Ibid.*, 274, our italics.
[54] *Ibid.*, 277.
[55] *Ibid.*, 281, our italics.
[56] *Ibid.*, 282, our italics.
[57] *Ibid.*, 283–286.
[58] *Ibid.*, 286.
[59] *Ibid.*, 288.
[60] Appendix C, 'Type Analysis in the Sciences'.
[61] The language here seems to imply a blending of efficient and formal causes. Perhaps so: perhaps the distinction is fundamentally one made in time, between the beginning and end of a unitary process. In any case, whatever other elements of analysis are involved, *forms function efficiently.*
[62] See, for example, Cohen's chapter on 'Communal Ghosts in Political Theory' (*Reason and Nature*, Book III, Chapter III).
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 367.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 161, our italics.
[67] From *Axel Hägerström*, quoted in Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer*, pp. 208–209.
[68] Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, p. 232.
[69] *Op. cit.*, p. 161, our italics.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 368, our italics. Nevertheless, a persistent function would seem to point to a persistent 'something'—structure, or pattern of organization, or constellation of powers, however you choose to label it. That we can never fully understand the operations of this 'something' should not lead us to deny the evidence for its existence; and convenient labels would still seem to be the ancient ones of 'forms' and 'universals'; if these terms did not exist, we should have to invent them, or their equivalents.

[71] The prevalence of Taine's Spinozistic solution is indicated by the following quotation from James: 'Huxley, Clifford, Haeckel, Fechner, and Taine . . . regard consciousness and matter as coextensive throughout all levels of complexity' (Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, I, 489, in a chapter on 'Spencer and Cosmology').

[72] See his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, Part Six, 'Postulates of Scientific Inference', especially Chapter V, 'Causal Lines', and Chapter VI, 'Structure and Causal Laws'.

[73] Cf., for example, the quotation from Einstein and Infeld. Appendix A, 'The "Eternal Axiom"' (Note 67), and our Chapter X, 'The Problem of Causation'.

[74] Cf. this chapter, Note 45.

[75] *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 160, Cohen's italics. Cf. Taine's 'eternal axiom' and 'explanatory reason'.

[77] Appendix D, 'Bosanquet's Hegelian Analysis of "The Concrete Universal"'.

[78] Cf. Edman, *Human Traits*: 'It is a desire for beauty as well as a thoroughgoing scientific passion which prompts men like Poincare, and Karl Pearson to seek for one law, one formula which, like "one clear chord to reach the ears of God", expresses the whole universe' (p. 63).

[79] For example, when Whitehead wanted to construct a metaphysics which did justice both to the concreteness of the 'actual occasion' and the universality of the 'eternal objects', he tried to correct the tendency towards 'vicious organicism' (not altogether successfully) by introducing 'the principle of the *Isolation of Eternal Objects* in the realm of possibility'. (*Science and the Modern World*, Chapters X–XI, on 'Abstraction' and 'God'. Final quote from p. 165, Whitehead's italics.)

[80] Cf. our Chapter IX, Note 28.

[81] But other possibilities of permanence may be contained in Jung's theory of the 'racial unconscious'.

[82] Though, on the whole, Taine's optimistic faith in the powers of reason remained unshaken, he frequently used the more cautious language we are suggesting. Thus, our ideas should be 'very general, and, *if possible*, universal' (*On Intelligence*, II, 165, our italics); the characters we seek to abstract may be 'one *or more*' (*ibid.*, 185, our italics); 'existing things present the required characters, or at least *tend* to present them . . .' (*ibid.*, 231, our italics); and so forth.

CHAPTER XII

FROM ANALYSIS TO JUDGMENT

'*The Ideal in Art*'

THE preceding chapter has been both too short and too long. Its treatments of such complex philosophic issues as universals, substance, and the absolute are, of course, brief and inadequate; and yet even these may have seemed like over-long digressions in our critical exposition of Taine's thought. They are, however, directly relevant to, and necessary for, a full understanding of the climax of his critical system in the important lectures on *The Ideal in Art.*

Delivered in the winter of 1866–1867, three years before completion of *On Intelligence*, these lectures contain many of the essential doctrines of that later work in germ; indeed, some of their passages read like lucid and eloquent summaries of the key ideas which we have laboured to extract from Taine's longer and more technical treatise. They open with a forceful statement of the problem which has been found to be central in Taine, namely, the relations between scientific analysis and critical judgment, the former presumably pointing in the direction of *relative* standards, the latter implying the need for some *absolute* scale of values: 'Can we discover a principle of subordination by which to assign rank to the diverse products of art?'[1]

'At the first glance we are tempted to say, no; the definition which we have given seems to bar the way to this investigation; it leads one to believe that all the works of art are on a level. . . .'[2] A large number of examples are cited—culminating in a comparison of the 'Ledas' of Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Correggio—to illustrate the variety of treatments which different writers and artists have given to the same theme. 'Which is to be preferred? And which is the superior character, the charming

grace of excessive happiness, the tragic grandeur of haughty energy, or the depth of intelligent and refined sympathy? All correspond to some essential portion of human nature, or to some essential moment of human development . . . all the important parts in the province of life have their value.'[3]

These are conclusions to which one might be led by a superficial understanding of analysis. 'And yet in the imaginary world as in the real world there are different degrees because there are different values. . . . We have always, and at every step, pronounced judgment.'[4] By a general consensus of opinion, such figures as Dante, Shakespeare, Mozart, Beethoven, Goethe, Rubens, Rembrandt, Dürer, Titian, Leonardo, Michael Angelo, and Raphael are acknowledged to be supremely great. Since such 'definitive judgments' are the accumulated products of many generations, all of whom, each '*from his own point of view*, . . . agree in the same verdict, the sentence, *probably*, is just . . .'.[5] On the one hand, 'A critic is now aware that his personal taste has no value, that he must set aside his temperament, inclinations, party, and interests; that, above all, his talent lies in sympathy . . .'; but on the other, 'Such a course, . . . as it is composed of analysis, . . . is, like every scientific operation, capable of verification and perfectibility. By following this method we have been able to approve and disapprove of this or that artist, . . . to determine the nature of values, to point out progress or decline, to recognize periods of bloom and decay, not arbitrarily, but according to a common criterion.'[6] More profoundly considered, analysis and judgment are inseparable.[7]

To justify this conclusion, Taine invokes the doctrine which has been discussed above as that of the natural type or universal. Since, as we have seen, the object of art is 'to make *predominant* an *essential* character',[8] the most perfect art will be that in which the character is 'the most *notable* possible and the most *dominant* possible'.[9] The natural question—*What* makes a character notable or essential?—is then answered in a brief section[10] which, in concise form, conveys the essence of Taine's doctrine on universals, 'general things', or 'permanent causes'.[11] In sum, Taine contends: (1) that 'general characters' are real, existing causes; and (2) that they can be arranged on a hierarchical scale, the peak of which is occupied by characters variously described as being most forceful; most simple, general, and elemental; most permanent and stable; and most important.

Some of the issues raised by this position have already been considered, and an attempt has been made in the previous chapter to translate it into terms more congenial to twentieth-century thought. In general, our discussion has sought to understand universals in their functional relationships; treated them as ideal limits for scientific investigation of potentialities; and found that the tendency towards organicism in modern science lends support to Taine's hierarchical principle. However, we have stressed the relative and hypothetical status of all such concepts; and have felt the need for caution in using conclusions which depend for their justification on settlement of the ultimate issues of Substance and the Absolute.

Scales of Value

Taine's applications of his hierarchical principle to criticism are developed through an elaborate set of analogies designed to prove (or based on the assumption) that there is a correspondence between the hierarchy of reality and that of works of art: 'At the apex of nature are sovereign forces which master all others; at the apex of art are masterpieces which surpass all others; both heights are on a level, and the sovereign forces of nature are declared through the masterpieces of art.'[12] How is this transition accomplished, and what are the hierarchies involved?

In an introductory section, Taine is careful to define his use of the word 'ideal' as follows: 'Things pass from the real to the ideal when the artist reproduces them by modifying them according to *his idea*', and this involves a process of *abstraction*, like that of the scientist, except that art renders essential character 'more apparent and powerful'.[13] This implies, not only that the gap between the Real and Ideal is not, in its nature, unbridgeable,[14] but that the artist, in his own way, makes the leap. Referring to 'characters', Taine writes: 'When they traverse the intellect of the writer or of the artist, in order to pass from the real world into the ideal world, *they lose nothing of what they are*. . . .'[15] Such an assumption of perfect, almost transparent, correspondence and communication seems rather doubtful, though great art often produces that *illusion*; in any case, it is pre-semantic, and whether or not such translation is possible, the process is surely more complex than Taine's analysis would make it out to be.[16]

With this qualification—namely, that the correspondence of 'the ideal in art' with 'the ideal in nature' is more an article of

Taine's faith than a demonstrated proposition—the elaborate and persuasive set of analogies which Taine develops in the course of his lectures may be examined. The diagrams in Appendix E are an attempt at representing the various scales and their relations to one another; since Taine is not always neat in distinguishing the steps in his hierarchies, some of our breakdowns may well be questioned, but, with all their imperfections, these pictures may help the reader to gain a synoptic view. They should be accompanied by Taine's concluding summary:

'We have established, according to our preceding studies, that a work of art is a system of parts, at one time imagined in its entirety[17] as it happens in architecture and in music, at another reproduced according to some real object as it happens in literature, sculpture, and painting; and we are reminded that the purpose of art is to manifest by this *ensemble* some notable character. We have hence concluded that the merit of the work is greater proportionately as this character becomes more notable and more predominant. We have distinguished in the notable character two points of view, according as it is more important, that is to say more stable and more elementary; and according as it is more beneficent, that is to say, more capable of contributing to the preservation and to the development of the individual and of the group in which he is comprehended.[18] We have seen that to these two points of view, according to which we may estimate the value of characters, correspond two scales by which we may value works of art. We have remarked that these two points of view are combined in a single one, and that, in short, the important or beneficent character is never but one force, measured at one time by its effects on others[19] and, at another, by its effects on itself[20]; whence it follows that character having two kinds of power has two kinds of value. We have then sought how, in a work of art, it can be more clearly manifested than in nature; and we have seen that it takes a more powerful relief when the artist, employing all the elements of his work, makes all their effects converge.[21] Thus is established before us a third scale; and we have seen that works of art are so much more beautiful as character is imprinted and expressed in them with a more universally predominant ascendency. The masterpiece is that in which the greatest force receives the greatest development.[22] In the language of the painter, the superior work is that in which the character possessing the greatest

possible value in nature receives from art all the increase in value that is possible.'[23]

Some Criticisms of Taine's Criteria

The general point, that *there are degrees of value both in life and in art*, is well made in these pages, but a number of important questions are raised by the special character of Taine's argument.

First, the term 'ideal' in the title seems like a misnomer, especially in view of Taine's rather narrow definition of the word at the outset.[24] Betraying the influence of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, its use is rendered incongruous by the fact that Taine's aesthetic system is based on a different metaphysics from that of Hegel.[25] 'On Force in Art',' 'Degrees of Value in Art', or (using the language of *On Intelligence*) 'General Characters in Art'—these would all have been more accurate, if less elegant.

Second, the total impression is too static and sketchy for a work which aims to 'take in the whole of art in a single glance, and comprehend the principle which assigns to each work its rank on the scale'.[26] The section on 'The Converging Degree of Effects' is a valiant, and suggestive, attempt to save the day by asserting something like the organic principle, but it does not quite succeed. 'Convergence' is an image from mechanics, not from biology; the emphasis on 'unity'[27] would be more just if it recognized 'unity in *variety*'; and it is here that we miss most the sense of complexity which requires dialectical categories.[28] In brief, though pointing in the right direction,[29] Taine here is neither thorough nor organic enough; he has not quite succeeded in giving us a complete aesthetic, as he claims to have done. Of course, one must take into consideration the brevity of his attempt,[30] but its relative failure may have resulted not merely from the fact that he was delivering a limited number of lectures, but also from limitations of his point of view.

For example: a major weakness of Taine's argument is that he treats only those arts which take *man* as their subject-matter; in our century, which has been outstanding for what Ortega y Gasset has called the 'dehumanization of art', this seems especially serious. Thus, Taine has stacked the cards in his own favour; at least, it might be much more difficult (though not necessarily impossible) to apply his value scales to such modern phenomena as the landscape, the still life, and the cubist abstraction in art.

Also, his applications of the categories of 'importance' and 'beneficence' are peculiarly humanistic and might not be so readily applied to a non-imitative art like music. Taine tries to anticipate this criticism by treating the relations between the imitative and non-imitative arts as analogous to those between what are discussed in *On Intelligence* as the sciences of 'real things' and of 'possible things' (or 'constructions'), and justifies his concentration on the former as follows: 'But a symphony, a temple thus constituted are living beings like a written poem or a painted figure; for they are also organized beings, all the parts of which are mutually dependent and governed by a *guiding principle*; they also possess a *physiognomy*, they also manifest an *intention*, they also speak through *expression*, they also terminate in an *effect*. Under all these headings *they are ideal creations* of the same order as the others, subjected to the same laws of formation as to the same rules of criticism. . . .'[31] However, whereas it may be relatively easy to erect a scale of moral values in terms of the 'essential characters' of people and nations, for example, a similar scale of musical and architectural types would be less obvious. The idea of 'force' or 'forces' may have interesting possibilities for analyses of those arts,[32] but Taine's dismissal of the problem is a serious blemish.

Another major difficulty emerges when an attempt is made to combine Taine's value scales into a single pattern: the aesthetic criteria seem to clash with the scientific ones on crucial points. For example, Taine's central doctrine—that the more important or essential character will be most permanent and *simple*—seems to imply a certain superiority for the *primitive*. Thus, 'In the psychological, as well as in the organic individual, it is necessary to distinguish the *primitive* as well as the later characters, the elements which are *primordial* and their arrangement which is derived.'[33] This is in line with both evolutionary theory[34] and Romantic taste: 'Here, as in natural history, it is necessary to note the *embryo* of the nascent mind in order to discover in it the distinctive traits of the complete and developed mind; *the characters of the primitive* age are the most significant of all. . . .'[35] Though Taine has too fine a sense of discrimination to let this principle dominate his choice of examples completely, it seems implied by his reasoning and is, of course, a familiar argument in debates on the relative merits of the Ancients and the Moderns. Thus, at the very highest level, the Hebrew Psalms are cited as expressing 'some sentiment, some type, common to almost all groups of humanity'[36]; 'true

heroes' are found in epics, and 'creations *truly ideal* are fertile only in *primitive and simple* epochs'.[37]

However, when Taine passes from consideration of the predominantly moral criteria of 'importance' and 'beneficence'[38] to the more aesthetic and organic criterion of 'The Converging Degree of Effects', the superiority of the primitive is no longer maintained. Instead, historical analysis reveals three stages, of gestation, maturity, and decline. Now the primitive writer is seen as *ignorant*: 'He is not wanting in inspiration; . . . noble forms flit obscurely through the depths of the soul; but processes are not known; people do not know how to write, how to distribute the parts of a subject, how to employ literary resources.'[39] Instead of a straight line of evolution from the simple to the complex, with the implication of a falling off from primitive greatness, the image is of a seed which gradually comes to flower and then fades.[40] 'In the primitive period the work is still imperfect.'[41]

The basic source of these, and other, contradictions in *The Ideal of Art* would seem to be an imperfect blending of *static* and *dynamic* elements, ultimately traceable to the conflict within Taine of Spinozistic and Hegelian influences. An attempt is made to fuse these in the concluding formula: 'The masterpiece is that in which the *greatest force* received the *greatest development*.'[42] The former is, on the whole, treated statically—though 'force' is inherently a dynamic concept. Thus, what counts in determining the 'importance' and 'beneficence' of a character is its permanence and stability, in a world-picture which has the essential traits of Spinoza's Substance. Health, Love, Civilization, Universal Man are all invoked as *logical* concepts, which of course are found in reality, but which have a kind of eternal and absolute validity.[43]

In the concluding section on 'The Converging Degree of Effects', however, the entire emphasis shifts from *permanence* to *development*, and the spirit changes from that of Spinoza to that of Hegel. Hence the introduction of the concept of growth and maturity (translated, however, characteristically, into the mechanistic language of convergence). Since this is the point at which the transition from life to art, from moral character to aesthetic form, is made, it presents the crucial issue. But this shift does not necessarily redound to Taine's discredit: an adequate aesthetic, like an adequate philosophy generally, must do justice to the facts of permanence as well as those of change: and perhaps a more adequate application of the organic principle to the problems of

'importance' and 'beneficence' would resolve some of the contradictions which seem to have resulted. Surely the increased emphasis on dynamic principles in the third section is demanded by the subject-matter, and is indicative of that sincere sensitivity to the realities of aesthetic experience which often tends to save Taine as a critic when his abstract theories may seem about to fail him.

Finally, it should be noted that the hierarchical principle used in *The Ideal in Art* was not a new one, but had been active in Taine's criticism from the beginning,[44] having been applied in his two earliest studies, the *La Fontaine* and the *Livy*. Thus, he wrote in the former: 'La Fontaine has given us a world together with a judgment on the world',[45] and the 'Conclusion', written in 1861, asserted of the great artist 'that one can measure him and give him his rank'.[46] Similarly, the 'Conclusion' of the *Essay on Livy* attempted to judge him by comparisons both to the great ancient historians and to the schools of modern history.[47] And the other *Lectures on Art*, especially the earlier ones on Italy and the later ones on Greece, were applications of the same basic principle.[48]

Type Analysis in Literature and Art

This, then, is the fashion in which Taine goes from scientific analysis to critical judgment: assuming, not only that a correspondence of the Real and the Ideal can be attained in science, but that it is the nature and purpose of art, in its own fashion, to make the transition from the former to the latter, he proceeds to develop scales of value for life and then to apply them, by analogy, to art. The procedure is summarized as follows in *On Intelligence*:

'We survey the men who live around us, we are struck with a certain general form appropriate to them; we observe, sometimes in one, and sometimes in another, higher degrees of the external signs of some quality or disposition beneficial to the individual or the race, agility, vigour, health, sagacity, or energy; we gradually collect these different signs; we take pleasure in contemplating a human form in which the characters we consider most important and most valuable are manifested by a deeper and more universal print, and if an artist be found in whom this group of conceived conditions results in an express image, a sensible representation, an internal half-sight, he takes a block of marble and hews out the ideal form which Nature has not been able to display to us.'[49]

Of these qualities, *The Ideal in Art* takes 'energy' or 'force' as central, and, working out its internal (individual) and external (social, or 'racial') relations, attempts to judge works of literature and art on the basis of the scales which result. Then, as if realizing that, though he may have revealed significant correspondences between life and art, he has not done justice to the dynamics of *art itself*, Taine applies the organic principle, sketchily and inadequately, to an analysis of the chief elements in works of literature and art, and their possible 'convergence', considered first aesthetically and then in terms of historical development. We have now to consider some of the issues which arise from such an approach to criticism, in general, as well as in Taine's particular formulation of it.

Since the core of such criticism lies in the assumed *correspondence* of science and art, via the natural type or universal, we may best approach the problem it presents by asking: In what ways are the uses of type analysis in the arts *similar* to, and in what ways are they *different* from, its uses in the sciences? Have we not entered an entirely different realm? In Coleridge's familiar words: 'A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.'[50] If the natural type is elusive, and subject to the dangers of abstraction, in attempts to define an element like hydrogen or a species like horse, how much more difficult must its meaning become when we seek for it in the subtle complexities of art!

Yet the issue of universality versus concreteness, which we have seen to be central to type analysis generally, is a familiar one in aesthetic criticism.[51] Very briefly, emphasis on the concrete and the varied has usually been characterized as Romantic; that on the universal and unified, as Classic. Starting, as one must in experience, from the concrete, we find that Romantic criticism stresses, above all, the *uniqueness of individual personality*, and tends to be *subjective*, on two scores; it considers, not so much the work of art as an object in itself, but as it *expresses* the artist and is the basis of a fresh *experience* in the reader or spectator. Classic criticism, on the other hand, seeks the universal both in content and form, recognizing the recurrence of persistent *themes* in art (nature, man,

the gods, love) as reflections of ideal structures in the world and man's experience of it; and discussing the natures of similarly persistent types or *genres* of art (such as, in literature, the epic, drama, and lyric; tragedy, comedy, and satire). Thus, it emphasizes and values, not the unique individualities of aesthetic experience, but its *recurrent traits*, and tends toward *objectivity*, both by focussing its attention on *the work of art itself* as a thing to be understood and evaluated, and by looking in it, not so much for expression of personality as for reflection or *imitation of reality*, of the world and human nature, in their universal aspects.

What, then, are some of the parallels between the two types or 'species', say, of 'horse' and 'tragedy'? How many of our observations on the former (Appendix C) are valid in the latter case?

In analysis of works of art also, the basic procedure is one of seeing the individual specimen in its various *relations*: to other works by the same artist, of the same period, of the same tradition and type; to the life of the artist and his *milieu*; and so forth. This point was especially emphasized by the French critic, Charles Lalo, whose early works were, interestingly enough, roughly contemporaneous with those of Cassirer:[52] '*Aesthetic relativism*', Lalo writes, '*will only be complete when it has genuinely covered all relations*',[53] including the mathematical or mechanical, the physiological, the psychological, and the sociological. However, just as it is necessary to consider discontinuities, as well as continuities, in nature, so here too there must be an element of limitation: 'If aesthetics is to become a science, as Lalo desires, then we ought to be able to discern an aspect of negation in its definition of method. . . . Practically, all relations=no relations.'[54] Professor Gilbert then traces some of the actual negations implied by Lalo in his applications of his theory of relativity and indicates that the types of limitation which might be further developed could be classified as intensive and extensive, or qualitative and quantitative.[55]

Consider, for example, the following definition by Thomas Munro: '*A style of art is a compound descriptive type which requires a comparatively large number of specifications for clear definition.* It consists of a *combination of traits or characteristics which tend to recur together* in different works of art, or have done so in the art of some particular place and period. It is a recurrent *trait-complex*; a distinctive cluster or configuration of interrelated traits: e.g., in Gothic architecture: pointed arches, high vaults, pitched roofs, slender

piers, thin walls, large stained glass windows, flying buttresses, etc. Also, Wölfflin's definition of Baroque as painterly, recessional, open, with "unified unity" and relative clearness.'[56] Professor Munro goes on to specify in great detail the various facts, distinctions, and concepts which are usually considered relevant to the analysis of a style in art. Emphasis is placed on the complexities of the problem, and, concerning the scientific goal of isolating or abstracting a *pure type*, he writes: 'This is often debatable'[57]—since artists are freer, and more wilful, than nature. Nevertheless: 'Some traits are usually regarded as basic and essential to the style, involving many other traits and determining their distinctive mode of interrelation. (E.g., "painterly" in Wölfflin's theory of Baroque.)'[58]

Dangers and virtues, similar to those that accompany abstraction in science, are also encountered in aesthetic theory and criticism. Bergson's complaint of loss of *reality* is the reason why each generation has to develop a 'new criticism' to correct what it considers to have been the theoretical errors and aesthetic blind-spots of its predecessors. Dewey's complaint of loss of *practicality* is less obvious, since, as Kant pointed out, art is characterized by 'purposiveness without purpose'. However, if we recognize the social rôle of art as an expression and instrument of culture, critical abstractions which have ceased to be meaningful may lead to a breakdown of the important function of *communication*: in a new cultural context, one generation's Romanticism becomes another generation's Naturalism.

Like those of a scientist, a critic's theoretical tools must be 'appropriate' and 'clear'. Just as inappropriate and inadequate concepts have stifled the progress of science, so, in the hands of insensitive critics, they have frequently prevented appreciation of great art; an obvious example is the abuse of neo-classic rules, which prevented full appreciation of Shakespeare by Frenchmen like Voltaire in the eighteenth century. And recognition of the rôle of ambiguity in poetry should not lead to ambiguity in criticism; one should be clear, so to speak, in one's understanding of obscurity (as in the critical essays of Yvor Winters).

Similarly, abstraction is as necessary for the critic as for the scientist. The former, too, begins with many concrete individuals (poems, paintings, statues); with reading, looking, and feeling; and with gross descriptions, such as: this is the tragedy of a king who unwittingly killed his father and committed incest with his

mother, or this is a statue of a horse. Not only does each work of art seem 'unique', but so does each individual's experience with it, a fact which accounts for Anatole France's vague definition of criticism as the adventures of a soul among masterpieces. Without some such adventure, the arts would indeed be dead and sterile things; as would the sciences without much individual observation and laboratory experiment, which are the life of abstraction and theory. But as soon as an individual starts *talking* about his experiences with works of art—and that is, after all, what criticism must be—he finds himself, willy-nilly, going beyond description of the work or experience under immediate consideration into statements which involve universals: like the scientist, he begins to translate forms into form-ulas. Thus, despite the blind spots which its abuses may occasionally engender, we cannot very well dispense with aesthetic theory.

Also, in art as in nature, there are discontinuities as well as continuities, and classifications are both possible and necessary.[59]

To sum up: the fact that, in these and other ways, natural types or universals in art present striking parallels to similar concepts in science, constitutes the basic argument for a science of criticism, for the possibility of going from analysis of facts to judgments of aesthetic value. And the assumption of a correspondence between the two kinds of analysis, and the 'ideal' results they produce, lies at the heart of Taine's philosophy of criticism.

NOTES

[1] Cf. our Chapter I, 'Analysis Versus Judgment?' The problem of relativism has been frequently encountered in previous chapters.

[2] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 181.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 191–192.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 194–195, our italics.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 195–196.

[7] Cf. a recent statement of this principle by Theodore Spencer: 'It would seem, in other words, that our awareness of a unit-idea (the state of cosmological knowledge in Milton's day) here leads us inevitably to a judgment of value; or rather, what we make as a judgment of value (the clumsiness of Milton's picture) is explained by our awareness of the unit-idea. Knowledge of fact and judgment of effect are part of the same complex, and the total view should include both. We know that Milton had a choice to make; in terms of

contemporary science he made it wrong. If we are not, perhaps, justified in assuming that a consequent sense of intellectual guilt made him fumble, we at least can see the unlucky results in his poem, and can have an aesthetic opinion accordingly.' From a review of Lovejoy's *Essays in the History of Ideas*, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (October, 1948), p. 445.

[8] Cf. our Chapter VI, 'Art as Imitation and Expression'.

[9] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 197.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 201–209.

[11] Cf. our Chapter XI, 'Taine's Position . . .'.

[12] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 261.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 180, our italics.

[14] Cf. our Chapter XI, 'The Issue of Substance'.

[15] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 261, our italics.

[16] Cf. our Chapter X, 'What Does a Critic Analyze?'

[17] We have had to correct John Durand's translation here. The French runs: tantôt créée de toutes pièces . . .'; 'at one time drawn from every detail' does not convey the meaning.

[18] Appendix E, I: 'Scales of Permanence'.

[19] *Ibid.*, I, B: 'Social Force'.

[20] *Ibid.*, I, A: 'Individual Force'.

[21] *Ibid.*, II: 'Scales of Development'.

[22] *Ibid.*, III: 'Diagram of Total Forces'.

[23] *Lectures*, First Series, pp. 351–353.

[24] Cf. Note 13, this chapter.

[25] Cf. Rosca's discussions in the second part of his book (*op. cit.*), especially Section I ('Nature de l'art') of his Chapter VI.

[26] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 351.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

[28] See, for example, the formula for Rembrandt: 'the idea of an expiring light in a humid atmosphere and the mournful sentiment of poignant reality' (*ibid.*, p. 350). Though extremely suggestive, this seems, like so many of Taine's other formulas, excessively abstract and lifeless.

[29] That Taine means to point a direction and develop a *method*, is evident from the fact that he concludes with his usual recognition of limits and complexity: 'Criticism labours in vain, it cannot define all the results that flow from it; . . . life is the same in works of genius and in those of nature; . . . no analysis can reach the end of it. But in these as well as in those observation verifies the essential concordances, the reciprocal dependencies, the final direction and the harmonies of the *ensemble* but whose entire detail it does not succeed in distinguishing' (*ibid.*, pp. 350–351).

[30] Consider the following self-criticism: 'If I had had the necessary leisure. . . . I should have treated ethics as I have treated aesthetics, experimentally, analyzing and comprehending the chief systems of morality practised (and not only those professed) in China, among the Buddhists, among the Greeks in the age of Cimon and the Romans in the age of Cato the Elder, in primitive Christianity, in France under Saint Louis, in the Italy of 1500, in the Spain of 1600, etc.; and I should have tried to finish with a chapter entitled the *Ideal in Life* analogous to that which I have written on the *Ideal in Art*' (*V. & C.*, IV, 172–173, 4 November, 1883). In principle, at least, Taine should have

welcomed the insights into art which have been gained since his time from anthropology and other social sciences.

[31] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 198, our italics.

[32] Cf. Dewey's *Art as Experience*, Chapter VIII, 'The Organization of Energies'.

[33] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 223, our italics.

[34] Thus, there is a rough correlation between Taine's 'degree of importance' and 'survival value', and Taine's 'degree of beneficence' and the qualities which make one 'fit' to survive. At least this would apply to the 'health' and 'integrity of the natural type' (*ibid.*, p. 286) of the physical man; 'love', a beneficent trait of the moral man, is a less Darwinian concept, except in so far as it indicates a structure of forces which helps *society as a whole*, or the 'race', to survive.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 224–225, our italics.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 284, our italics.

[38] Edmund Wilson claims that we find Taine 'smuggling himself out of his confinement within a mechanistic universe in various more or less illogical ways. When he comes to write his philosophy of art, he is obliged to introduce a moral value in the form of "the degree of beneficence of the character" of a given artist or painting.' (*To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History*, p. 51.) However, this is a relatively superficial contradiction, if it is one at all, since Taine translates 'beneficence' into terms of 'force' and 'external relations'. The more profound conflict comes with Taine's concluding criterion, 'The Converging Degree of Effects', as we shall see.

[39] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 325.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 330.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 342.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 353, our italics.

[43] Taine later admitted this weakness, claiming that he had not had the time to consider moral values 'experimentally'. (Cf. Note 30, this chapter.)

[44] Cf. Rosca, pp. 396–403, and Note 1, this chapter.

[45] *La Fontaine*, p. 161.

[46] Cf. Chapter VI, 'Early Essays . . .'.

[47] *Op. cit.*, pp. 334–360. Cf. our Chapter V, 'History as Science and Art'.

[48] Cf. our Chapter VI, 'Verification of Law'.

[49] *Op. cit.*, II, 166–167.

[50] From Chapter XIV, *Biographia Literaria* (*Coleridge: Select Poetry & Prose*, p. 251). Contrast the spirit of Coleridge's statement with the following passage from Taine: 'The relationship existing between art and science is as honourable for the one as for the other; it is the glory of the latter to give to beauty its principal adjuncts; it is the glory of the former to base its noblest structures on the truth.' (*Lectures*, First Series, p. 201.)

[51] See, for example, the entries under 'Universal' in Greene (*op. cit.*); essays by W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., 'The Structure of the "Concrete Universal" in Literature', and Scott Elledge, 'English Criticism of Generality and Particularity'; and the chapter on 'Literary Genres' in Wellek and Warren (*op. cit.*), which concludes: 'The subject of the genre, it is clear, raises central questions for literary history and literary criticism and for their interrelation. It puts, in a

specifically literary context, the philosophical questions concerning the relation of the class and the individuals composing it, the one and the many, the nature of universals' (p. 247).

[52] *Substance and Function*, 1910; nine volumes by Lalo, 1908 to 1923, cited by Katherine Gilbert, 'Beauty and Relativity: The Theory of Charles Lalo', in *Studies in Recent Aesthetic*.

[53] Lalo's italics, *ibid.*, p. 145.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 149–154.

[56] 'Style in the Arts: a Method of Stylistic Analysis', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, December, 1946, 'Special Issue on Baroque Style in Various Arts', p. 129, Munro's italics.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

[59] Cf. Wellek and Warren, Chapter XVII, on 'Literary Genres'; and Irvin Ehrenpreis, *The 'Types Approach' to Literature*.

CHAPTER XIII

CRITIQUE OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

Two Stages of Abstraction in Art

STRIKING though the parallels may be, however, there are important differences also, between the objects of scientific and of aesthetic analysis, of which Taine was insufficiently aware. These differences all spring from a central paradox, which makes a work of art seem, now more complex, now more simple, than a work of nature. The individual King Oedipus (of Sophocles' tragedy), like the subject of the psychologist's study and experimentation, is inexhaustible, but in different ways. For all the 'infinite' complexity of a single biological cell, many such cells exhibit relatively stubborn structures, or at least the scientist is persuaded that they do. Works of art, however, involve such complex variables as media, language, traditions of style, symbolism, personalities of artists, and so forth, each of which is capable of endless study, the result being a kind of *multiplication* of 'infinities'.

From another point of view, however, the problem of universals may seem simpler here, since the artist has a greater freedom than the scientist (who is constrained by the 'facts') to shape raw materials and indulge in fantasy—in a sense, *creating* those worlds which are works of art. The sciences which come closest to the freedom of the arts, in this respect, are the various branches of mathematics,[1] or, in Taine's language, the sciences of 'construction'. In art (considered as imitation of nature) there are *two* stages of abstraction, in contrast to the single process characteristic of science: first, that which the artist performed when he *created* the work of art; and second, that which the critic performs when he experiences and *analyzes* it. This provides some justification for treating works of art, not so much as if they were subject

to natural necessities, but as laws and worlds unto themselves; for writing of their 'special logics' and 'inner necessities', which—as in certain kinds of ornamental and abstract art, for example—make their significant relations, indeed, relatively analytic, i.e., *internal*.

Thus, the intention of the artist (even more than the powers of nature, which set roughly determinate but stretchable bounds to our explorations of hydrogen and horses) has been to *limit* the world into which he invites us. He has used a particular language and artistic form; he has placed a frame around his picture; above all, he has so organized his materials that they constitute a *unity* of some kind. One of the tests of a great work of art is its tendency to approach the virtually infinite riches of nature, so that there seems to be literally no end to the number of interpretations and criticisms of which it is susceptible. Yet the work of art also has an initial timelessness as an object of contemplation (such as Keats celebrated in his 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'), associated with its formal character and certain typical modes of organization, and giving a special quality to aesthetic experiences. People and horses grow old and die; they are usually in motion, so that we may have to pose them for the painter; but, granted that we have a definitive text and a means of preserving *objets d'art* against the ravages of time, the latter remain fixed, 'eternal', providing what Robert Frost has called 'a momentary stay against confusion'.[2]

However, this may be perhaps more the poet's dream than his achievement: as Professor Dewey has emphasized, our *experience* of a work of art always takes place *in time*, and varies *from time to time*.[3] It is rather out of changing emphases (constantly shifting, in both experience and criticism, from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the universal, and back again) that we derive standards for criticism and terms for discussing styles and other classifications. Despite this complexity, which is an application of the general principle of polarity, we may paraphrase what Cohen has said of 'type analysis' in the social sciences[4]: criticism which refers to universals may have its weaknesses and fall short of the ideal, but it seems to be *inevitable*.

Aesthetic Types Mediated by Culture

Related to this initial paradox of 'unity in variety' is the fact that, though the universal or type may act as an efficient cause in the arts, it does so only *indirectly*. A sonnet doesn't *make itself*, as an

atom of hydrogen seems to do; a tragedy doesn't achieve its own form, as a well-fed horse does, given normal conditions.[5] The element of environment is present in all these cases, of course, but nature's ways seem *relatively* uniform and stable compared to the varieties of which human personalities, societies, and artistic traditions are capable.

Thus, uniformities in the arts must be attributed to universals which operate, not so much on chemical and biological, but rather on psychological and social—i.e., *cultural*—levels. They must be understood in terms of the common world of physical and human nature which both the artist and his public share: paintings of horses produced in Flanders, Italy, and Spain have traits in common because the horses in those countries do; changes have been rung on the sonnet form by poets in many languages because of the possibilities it offers for discipline, compactness, and intense expression of a single idea (either through variations on a theme, as is customary in Shakespeare, or through thesis and anti-thesis of some kind); tragedy and comedy are universal forms in the arts because they are such in life. Nevertheless, to compare the development of tragedy in Athens to the growth of a plant is to tell only half the truth: between the seed of life and the flower of art come the *consciousness* of the poet and of his audience, as well as the complex forces of language, symbolism, and culture generally. The analogy between the manner in which the 'idea' of a horse is realized in Man O'War, and that of tragedy, in *Oedipus Rex*, is real enough, but very rough indeed; Taine's analyses of the latter process were suggestive, but grossly oversimplified.[6]

One consequence of this difference is that *analyses of universals in the arts, though intimately related to similar analyses in humanistic sciences like history, psychology, and sociology, operate on different levels of complexity*. For example, the psychologist gains insights from the poet; and the generalizations used by the critic of art, if sufficiently 'clear' and 'appropriate', may be included in propositions which, to some limited extent and in certain special ways, may, like those of the scientist, be verified and used for purposes of prediction; we are not suggesting an antagonism between the truths of science and art. But compare the 'Oedipus complex' theory of Freud and Sophocles' tragedy: both have a kind of 'concrete universality', which helps account for their respective values, and surely they help illuminate one another.[7] In Taine's language, the same 'master faculty' and 'dominant idea' is involved in both, and,

since that idea is more or less common to the human race, it helps explain the superior force of the Greek play. But Freud's concept is an hypothesis, based on clinical data and subject to modification in the light of subsequent experimentation; and Sophocles' drama is a finished work of art, coming from a world of myth, poetry, and religious ceremonial. Freud's analysis adds to the 'truth' of the play (in a roundabout sense he may be said to have 'verified' it), but, of course, he is not concerned with the aesthetic elements which make the play effective *dramatically*.[8]

Since the universals of art differ from those of science in both these respects (the double abstraction and the more indirect cultural and aesthetic influences involved in the former) how may the two be expected to meet? Surely this happens, if at all, in the world of *experience* which is common to both, and to which the artist and scientist are constantly returning for their materials—ultimately, because they are both men. As Professor Guérard writes in his most recent discussion of Taine: 'The *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, is no abstraction, but a confused and potent reality.'[9] Taine's emphasis on psychology and the Master Faculty, considered as the product of Race, Environment, and Time, though overly abstract and rigid, is a basically sound recognition of this centrality of experience.[10]

Universals of Content and Form

A third major difference between type analysis in science and in the arts is that, in the latter, it is customary to distinguish between content and form,[11] and universals in the arts may be classified on that basis. Universals of *content* include treatments of the same natural *objects*, i.e. the species 'horse'; but these may range in quality from a wild Rubens horse, as portrayed in the 'Castor and Pollux' painting; through the dignified, stylized statues of horses in St. Mark's, Venice; to the agonized, distorted horse in Picasso's 'Guernica' mural. In literature, we may compare treatments by various poets of the same *theme*, such as a Greek myth, or the Fall of Man. Universals of *form* include such familiar *conventions* as the sonnet in poetry and the sonata in music; in the pictorial arts, such universals are usually referred to as *styles*, for example, the 'baroque'.[12]

However, since it is generally difficult or undesirable in the arts to separate form from content, a number of concepts have arisen which may be used to signify universals of both form and content,

including such overarching concepts as 'romantic' and 'classic', 'tragedy' and 'comedy'. The organic principle serves as a constant reminder that such a separation is necessarily artificial, but in actual critical analysis distinctions between content and form (plot and development, theme and treatment) seem hard to avoid.

The Metaphysical Issue: A Relational Analysis

However, despite these important differences between type analysis in the sciences and the arts, concreteness and universality are widely invoked criteria of aesthetic judgment, paralleling their use to define the ideal goal of science.[13] They may also lead to a *definition* of art itself, as in Taine:

'The end of a work of art is to manifest some essential or salient character, consequently some important idea, clearer and more completely than is attainable from real objects. Art accomplishes this end by employing a group of connected parts, the relationships of which it systematically modifies. In the three imitative arts of sculpture, painting, and poetry, these groups correspond to real objects.'[14]

But to say of the artist that he manifests 'essential character' (the universal) is not to distinguish him sufficiently from the scientist, whose formula or law seeks the same goal. Taine makes it clear elsewhere (especially in the section on 'The Converging Degree of Effects' in *The Ideal in Art*) that the artist works in special ways his wonders to perform: he gives us an actual *illusion* of reality, using his art to force on us, in Coleridge's words, 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith'.[15] As Taine put it in one of his letters, referring to Rembrandt's paintings and Shakespeare's plays: 'This is poignant, it is life itself, but condensed, assembled. . . . Art is *a general idea becoming as particular as possible.*'[16] In other words, art is a universal become concrete.[17]

The general manner in which these criteria are invoked by Taine to establish scales of value for the arts has been indicated in the preceding chapter; but our analysis of this process may be completed through consideration of some of the specific problems raised by the issues of Substance and the Absolute, already treated in their applications to the sciences (Chapter XI). What is the *metaphysical* status of universals in the arts?

As has been shown, the tendency today is to replace the concept of substance by that of functional relations. What, then, *is* the

work of art, i.e., *what relations does the critic analyze*? Wellek and Warren indicate that a poem is 'a potential cause of experience', and refuse to characterize that potentiality as either real or mental or ideal; however, such a metaphysical lack, though serious, is not fatal, if it is replaced by an analysis of the *actual relations* of which the language of substance is an abstraction and a name, i.e., those which are to be found in the *experience* of art itself. Hence, our critical universals must be sought in *the complex sets of relations which constitute the various aesthetic experiences.*[18]

An adequate development of these relations is obviously beyond the scope of this study, since it would constitute a complete aesthetic system. Later writers, however, have gone far beyond Taine in this direction, including Charles Lalo[19]; John Dewey, in his *Art as Experience*; and Stephen C. Pepper, in his *Aesthetic Quality: A Contextualist Theory of Beauty.*

In very brief summary, these experience-relations must include both those of the artist and of the spectator-critic, each to his own environment and to the work of art; and every experience implies a 'Live Creature', an environment (biological and cultural 'matrixes'), and their complex interactions. A universal like 'tragedy', therefore, must stand for a set of uniformities or 'invariant' sequences in one or more of these sets of relations.

How these sets of relations are in turn related to one another will, in part, be determined by the conception of the nature of art which governs the analysis:

(1) If art is considered as *imitation of reality*, its universals may be sought in interactions of artist and critic with *reality* (organized as scientific and humanistic knowledge and classified by Taine under the headings of Race, Environment, and Time) and with *works of art*; and the universals thus discovered in each of these areas will be expected to correspond. Thus, the artist's horse and the scientist's horse will each refer, in its own fashion, to the same essential facts, in both their concretenesses and their typicalities.

(2) If art is considered primarily as *expression of personality*, its universals may be sought in relations *more internal* (not completely so, since experience always involves external relations) *to the experiences* of the artist and the critic; and, since privacy and uniqueness may be stressed, there will be less expectation of correspondence between the two. The focus will be in psychology (Taine's Master Faculty).

(3) Finally, if art is considered primarily as a means of

communication, its universals may be sought in those relations which give *meaning* to the experiences of both artist and critic, namely in those contexts which are more specifically *cultural* (i.e. language, tradition, symbol, myth, and so forth). The focus will be in the semantic problem.[20]

Obviously, Taine's analyses tend to stress the first two of these sets of relations (though the third *may* be theoretically covered by what he refers to as 'external relations'); and, if we ignore the tendency of some 'new critics' to set the poem up as a metaphysical 'thing in itself', their work may be seen as governed by a stress on the third set of relations listed. That all three elements are probably necessary for a fully adequate conception of the complexities of aesthetic experience should serve as a chastening thought for extremists in both camps.[21]

And they said 'The man in the street is so naïve, he never
Can see the wood for the trees;
He thinks he knows he sees a thing but cannot
Tell you how he knows the thing he thinks he sees.'
And Oh how much I liked the Concrete Universal,
I never thought that I should
Be telling them vice-versa
That they can't see the trees for the wood. . . .
Good-bye now, Plato and Hegel,
The shop is closing down;
They don't want any philosopher-kings in England,
There ain't no universals in this man's town.
(Louis MacNiece, from *Autumn Journal*)

Concreteness and Universality as Criteria of Judgment

From our relational analysis of the 'substances' which are the subjects of aesthetic judgment may be derived the hierarchical principles on which that judgment should be based. One element which is common to all the possible sets of relations in aesthetic analysis is the dynamic element of *experience*. In general, therefore, the universal relations which are characteristic of the greatest art will be *universal aspects of experience*, and Taine recognizes this by referring ultimately to *psychology*: to the Master Faculty of the artist, and to the 'dominant idea' or 'essential character' made predominant in works of art, which 'manifest an intention', 'speak through expression', and 'terminate in an effect'.

However, two preliminary observations must be made concerning Taine's uses of psychology in arriving at his aesthetic judgments. First, writing at an early stage in the development of that science, he was subject to the limitations inherent in his situation as a pioneer; hence his grossly oversimplified use of the faculty principle, his habit of finding hallucinations and madmen in unlikely places, and so forth. Primarily interested in the problem of knowledge, he tends to treat the aesthetic experience as a kind of scientific knowing, as a process of intellectual analysis. Thus, the fact that he never completed the second half of his psychological treatise, *On Will*, may be both a cause and an effect of this overly intellectual preoccupation, as a result of which his criticism, like his psychology, tends towards the abstract and the static.[22]

Second, because of his interest in history, he was more interested in reconstructing *the artist's experiences* and the artist's world than in analyzing *his own* personal experiences with the works of art. The least one can say concerning this preference is that, though Taine was saved by the solidity of his knowledge and the power of his historical imagination, the former is necessarily more conjectural and remote than the latter; as a result, in the service of less gifted and sensitive scholars, the historical method could lead to superficiality and irrelevance—just as abuse of the 'new criticism's' method of close reading and analysis of structures of meaning could lead to another form of pedantry. Since Taine was *consciously* using literature and art, in part, to document history and make it come alive as a vital experience, it is no accident that his scales of value stress permanence (and, secondarily, development) in *Time*, and treat more purely aesthetic experiences, like those of style and subtleties of design, as incidental and derived. But the proof of the pudding is still in the eating, and in Taine's works, at least, the historical method produced some nourishing and tasty critical dishes.

Another basic criticism of Taine's scales of value in the arts is that they tend to stress *unity* and *simplicity*. That other alternatives are possible is evident from a recent essay by Charles Lalo,[23] who also approaches the problem of criticism scientifically: thus, he seeks to proceed 'From Facts to Values', by a method for which he suggests the name 'aesthanalysis',[24] and he advocates 'The Experimental Method' and 'The Comparative Method'.[25] But his hierarchy emerges as *the precise opposite* of Taine's in its emphasis on complexity: '*To proceed from facts to their aesthetic values is to*

ascend from heterogeneous structures, which are elementary or relatively simple and natural, to their superstructure of a polyphonic type, which is relatively complex and artificial.'[26] For Taine, the facts are complex, but the universal elements in them, which determine their degrees of value, are simple; for Lalo, 'Aesthetic value is the degree of *Prägnanz* of a superstructure.'[27]

Does this indicate that both these approaches are arbitrary, and that other hierarchies are equally possible and equally valuable? More probably, these two types of scales, one advocating simplicity and the other complexity, represent *the two perennial possibilities of Classicism and Romanticism.* Despite his strong Romantic streak,[28] many of Taine's basic criteria in *The Ideal in Art*, at least until the Hegelian concluding section, were classical and even Aristotelian, starting as he did from a conception of art as 'imitation of reality'. Thus, Taine was trying to strike a *balance* between the Classical and the Romantic, by means of a formula which combined both the concreteness and the universality characteristic of natural types. The concrete is characterized by complexity and development; the universal, by simplicity and force; and Taine fused both in his description of a masterpiece as a work in which 'the greatest force receives the greatest development'.[29]

We believe that such a combination, organically conceived, would indeed provide a truly fundamental and all-embracing criterion for aesthetic value. It supplies the philosophic basis, to cite a familiar example, for Coleridge's praise of Shakespeare's 'union and interpenetration of the universal and particular',[30] and cuts under more superficial classifications: 'A neo-classicist like Pope, in *The Rape of the Lock*, will be as particular as any romantic poet, only about different things, as Hazlitt so well describes his poetry, not about tempests but about tea-cups. *All great poetry would seem to be alike in respect to the concrete and the universal; it is a balance.*'[31]

Finally, this formula recalls the issues raised earlier by the metaphysics of Absolute Idealism.[32] As in the sciences, both the concrete individual and the abstract universal serve chiefly as *limits*, and thus perfect 'concrete universality' might be taken as indicating the unattainable ideal towards which all great works of art may be said to strive. Also, the concept gains in usefulness by being seen as another instance of the more general principle of polarity: neither extreme, either of particularity or generality,

makes much sense without the other. True, 'Romanticism' is an abstraction from the qualities of many artists and works of art; but neither these artists nor their works of art lived or came into being in an intellectual vacuum. The sensible critic will fall victim to neither type of extremism: in describing the rhythmic alternations of varying emphases in the history of literature and the arts, he will avoid the fallacies of overly neat classifications, and of laws of development which tend to distort both facts and judgments. But he will also find himself returning, persistently and with a kind of wonder, to the central truth that, in clear but somewhat mysterious fashion, *great works of art approximate the vitality of natural types in life by combining the highest degree of concreteness and individuality with the highest degree of universality.*

Some Aesthetic Conclusions

Despite the qualifications, then, made necessary by our increased awareness of the many semantic complexities involved in all communication (paralleled in recent decades by the shift in criticism from 'history' to the 'text'), there is a hard core of soundness in Taine's analytic method and in the approach to aesthetic judgment developed in *The Ideal in Art.* His 'ideal' provides a criterion which can be applied both to works of art, as has been already indicated, and to *critics.* Thus, the best critics have usually tried, each in his own fashion, to achieve a balance between romantic individuality and classic generality: to be aware simultaneously of the unique qualities of the work under consideration and of larger contexts which literary, artistic, and critical traditions, and biographical and historical problems, have suggested.

With minor modifications, Taine's analytic categories and criteria of value can also be applied to modern art, including the various schools of abstract painting.[33] However, recent developments in philosophy, and ways of feeling characteristic of 'modernism', have created new emphases strange to his somewhat Victorian faith in science. We have come to recognize more fully, especially in the social sciences, that universals, though efficient causes, cannot be separated from the ways in which they function for particular men in particular societies. Thus, the 'reality' of realism and the 'nature' of naturalism have taken on new dimensions of complexity, in which the focus is on the uses which man's free imagination chooses to make of his world and on the inter-

pretations which traditions place on nature by means of their elaborate structures of symbol and myth. One of the profound changes in psychology has been a full realization of the extent to which these uses and interpretations may be motivated by man's *unconscious*—in Jung, his 'racial' unconscious. Thus, Taine's Master Faculty has been driven underground, so to speak, to dwell with the Freudian Id.

We are also more consistently and persistently *pluralistic* than Taine; perhaps he would find us 'eclectic' and damn us to the same Hell with Victor Cousin and 'The True, the Good, and the Beautiful'. The relational concept of substance and universals makes it incumbent on today's critic to view his subject from many angles, to be aware of its many contexts (the 'perspectivism' advocated by Wellek and Warren). Only thus does he approach the full being of the work of art itself; rather, it is in the multiplicity of these possible relationships that the being of the work of art consists. This is the artist's version of human freedom: a richness of possibilities of human experience, disciplined and controlled, however, by the principles of organization contained in the works of art themselves and in their physical and social environments. These principles are true, substantial 'ideals', but they have no existence outside the men who cherish them and embody them in art: they are no more, and no less, concrete and universal than the 'archetypal patterns' of human experience and the forms of things which those patterns presuppose.[34]

Unfortunately, even today, we are perhaps more ready to accept the inevitability of relativity and hypothesis in the sciences than in literature and the arts. Aesthetic tastes, once formed, tend to become matters of habit and to assume a legislative certainty not so readily granted to scientific laws, since the scientist sometimes seems better geared for novelty. But that is a matter for education: both in the sciences and the arts, there are general truths subject to an infinite number of possible modifications and refinements; therein lies the adventure. In the latter, as in the former, the category of potentiality implies a need for constant experimentation, developing new patterns of relationships and new forms of experience, within whatever ultimate limits the nature of things may set.

Nor, finally, is this a spirit which Taine would have found alien. In one of his more Romantic moments he wrote: 'Literature which depicts the particular reality instead of depicting the ideal

and the general, has an unlimited future. Each change in society will renew it. In fifty years, we can have another Beyle and another Balzac.'[35] Similarly, his definition of art as 'employing a group of connected parts, the relationships of which it systematically *modifies*'[36] is capable of infinite extension; as we have seen, it seems applicable to the most extreme vagaries of modern art. Our *understanding* of the 'essential character' of things has room to grow in Taine's system, since he advocates a method of discovery and not a set of immutable essences; and the artist's *modifications* give him scope for using that understanding in a variety of forms and styles. Thus Taine, for all his limitations as a typical product of the late nineteenth century, has something to teach us in the twentieth, and will probably continue to be useful in the twenty-first.

NOTES

[1] Of which Cassirer writes that they 'create' relations (*Substance and Function*, p. 20).

[2] Natural objects also provide such 'momentary stays', but only as an incidental result of the teleological aspect of their functioning, unless we sentimentally ascribe value to them as 'artistic' products of God or a personified Nature. Stephen Pepper ascribes the *aesthetic* value of types (which he defines as 'systems that are intrinsic to their objects and repeatable in other objects') to 'a specific delight and glow in the recognition of something familiar' (*Aesthetic Quality*, pp. 147–150). His excellent chapter on 'Types, or Intrinsic-Extrinsic Modes of Organization' concludes: 'For a type is not merely an organizing tool, it has a character and a quality of its own. In excellent technique we identify this character with the personality of the artist, in excellent achievement of function with the quality of the interests served, in excellent representation with the essence of natural objects. If the fulfilment of type is excellent, the gap between organization and matter organized narrows and fills up, and the organization is the simple and inevitable movement of the matter, and the matter just the realization of the organization. *The hostility between intuition of quality and analysis of relations then ceases.* Discriminating analysis then reveals the quality and the quality is the revelation of the analysis.' (*Ibid.*, p. 167, our italics.)

[3] *Art as Experience*, Chapter VII, 'The Natural History of Form'.

[4] Our Chapter XI, p. 153.

[5] Notice, however, that Coleridge writes of a poem 'proposing to itself'. (Our Chapter XII, p. 170.)

[6] Something like this was the central point of Cassirer's criticism in *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften: Fünf Studien* (in an essay on 'Nature Concepts and Culture Concepts', Section 2, pp. 86–95, is devoted to a discussion of Taine). Thus: 'The culture object . . . requires another sort of consideration; for it is situated, so to speak, in our rear. . . . For the direction of the *reflexive*

process of comprehension is opposed to that of the *productive* process; both cannot be carried on at the same time and together. . . . The science of nature teaches us, as Kant put it, "to spell out phenomena, in order to be able to read them as experiences"; the science of culture teaches us to interpret symbols in order to decipher the contents which are locked up in them—in order to make visible again the life whence they had originally sprung' (p. 95, S. J. K.).

[7] See Patrick Mullahy, *Oedipus Myth and Complex*, which brings together in one volume the Sophoclean trilogy and the various psychoanalytic interpretations of the Oedipus myth.

[8] Thus, Herbert Read stresses the aesthetic distinctiveness of the artist's *will-to-form* as an 'act of creative will', but also asserts the universality of his intuitions: 'No one will deny the profound inter-relation of artist and community. The artist depends on the community—takes his tone, his tempo, his intensity from the society of which he is a member. But the individual character of the artist's work depends on more than these: it depends on a definite will-to-form which is a reflection of the artist's personality, and there is no significant art without this act of creative will. This might seem to involve us in a contradiction. If art is not entirely the product of surrounding circumstances, and is the expression of an individual will, how can we explain the striking similarity of works of art belonging to distinct periods of history?

'The paradox can only be explained metaphysically. The ultimate values of art transcend the individual and his time and circumstance. *They express an ideal proportion or harmony which the artist can grasp only in virtue of his intuitive powers.* . . . The true artist is indifferent to the materials and conditions imposed upon him. He accepts any conditions, so long as they express his will-to-form. Then in the wider mutations of history his efforts are magnified or diminished, taken up or dismissed, by forces which he cannot predict, and which have very little to do with the values of which he is the exponent. It is his faith that those values are nevertheless among the eternal attributes of humanity.' (*The Meaning of Art*, pp. 223–224, our italics.)

[9] *Personal Equation*, p. 108.

[10] Cf. our Chapter X, 'What Does a Critic Analyze?'

[11] In Greene (*op. cit.*), Part II treats 'Artistic Form', Part III treats 'Artistic Content'.

[12] Cf. Munro, *op. cit.*, on 'Style in the Arts'.

[13] Cf. our Chapter XII, 'Type Analysis in Literature and Art', and Chapter XI, *passim*.

[14] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 76.

[15] *Op. cit.*, p. 248 (from *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV).

[16] *V. & C.*, II, 46–47.

[17] Consider, by way of comparison, the remarks on art of another scientific philosopher who has done much to domesticate the organic principle in modern thought, A. N. Whitehead. These occur in the context of a discussion of the need for a balance between the general and the special in education, as one of the 'Requisites for Social Progress': '. . . There is no substitute for the direct perception of the concrete achievement of a thing in its actuality. We want concrete fact with a high light thrown on what is relevant to its preciousness. What I mean is art and aesthetic education. . . . We must foster the creative

initiative towards the maintenance of objective values. . . . Thus "art" in the general sense which I require is any selection by which the concrete facts are so arranged as to elicit attention to particular values which are realisable by them. . . . Accordingly, the true rationalism must always transcend itself by recurrence to the concrete in search of inspiration. . . . In the higher types, where life appears, there is greater complexity. Thus, though there is a complex, enduring pattern, it has retreated into deeper recesses of the total fact. In a sense, the self-identity of a human being is more abstract than that of a crystal. . . . In truth, the field of perception and the perceiving mind are abstractions which, in the concrete, combine into the successive bodily events' (*Science and the Modern World*, pp. 199–201). Whitehead sees in aesthetic experience a means of assuring that, despite the inevitability of abstraction, modern men will not lose sight of concreteness and immediacies.

[18] Cf. our Chapter X, Notes 13 and 40.

[19] Cf. our Chapter XII, p. 171.

[20] Cf. the criticisms of Ernst Cassirer (this chapter, Note 6) and Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Pelican Books, 1948, especially Chapter 9, 'The Genesis of Artistic Import': 'There is a widespread and familiar fallacy, known as the "genetic fallacy", which arises from the historical method in philosophy and criticism: the error of confusing the *origin* of a thing with its *import*, of tracing the thing to its most primitive form and then calling it "merely" this archaic phenomenon' (p. 201).

[21] Thus, in a recent anthology of critical essays, Mark Schorer organizes his selections around the concepts of Form, Source, and End, to which correspond, roughly, the philosophies which consider art chiefly as Imitation, Expression, and Communication (*Criticism*, p. viii). But since every work of art must necessarily have a form, a source, *and* an end, *all* of these relations may be, and *should* be, considered by the critic.

[22] John Fiske stressed the inadequacy of Taine's psychology: 'We think the foregoing explanation correct enough, so far as it goes, though it deals with the merest rudiments of the subject, and really does nothing toward elucidating the deeper mysteries of artistic production. For this is needed a profounder psychology than M. Taine's.' ('A Philosophy of Art', p. 301.) A more recent and thorough-going critique of Taine's psychology, from the viewpoint of Husserl's 'phenomenology', is contained in Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imagination*, *passim*, especially Chapter II. Also, cf. our Chapter IX, above, *passim*.

[23] 'The Aesthetic Analysis of a Work of Art: an Essay on the Structure and Superstructure of Poetry', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (June, 1949), pp. 275–293.

[24] 'We have tried to show by concrete example how the analysis of an aesthetic fact, as well as the experiments or comparisons that complete the analysis, leads us automatically to the judgment of the value of this fact.' (*Ibid.*, p. 293.)

[25] Among his predecessors in this scientific approach, he cites 'the "convergence of effects" to produce "the ideal in art" as prescribed in Taine's naturalism.' (*Ibid.*, p. 275.)

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 275, Lalo's italics. Cf. the first two sections of this chapter and the conclusion of Chapter X.

[27] *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (June, 1949), p. 283.

[28] Cf. our Chapter IV, 'Abstraction as Weakness'.

[29] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 353.

[30] Quoted in Wimsatt, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

[31] *Ibid.*, Note 24. Wimsatt and Elledge (*op. cit.*) have assembled many examples of the use of these criteria, especially in English and American literary criticism.

[32] Cf. our Chapter XI, 'The Issue of Absolute Idealism'.

[33] Appendix F, 'Taine's Criteria Applied to Modern Abstract Art'.

[34] See Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination*, which is indebted to the Jungian psychology.

[35] *V. & C.*, II, 48.

[36] *Lectures*, First Series, p. 76, our italics.

EPILOGUE

Our English critics their dull wits keep straining,
When—Enter Taine!—and all is entertaining.

(Alfred Ainger)

CHAPTER XIV

OUR HERITAGE FROM TAINE

Need for a Balanced View

Our journey through Taine's philosophy of criticism—starting with formulation of his central problem of the relation between science and judgment, passing through the philosophical foundations of his system and the chief categories of analysis he employed, and ending with a critical discussion of his proposed solution—is finished. However, after so long and intimate an acquaintance, it seems proper that we pause briefly for a backward glance and final estimate of his limitations and permanent value.

Unfortunately, discussions of Taine have too often been characterized by their heat rather than by their light; he has frequently been the subject of virulent attacks and ardent defences, rather than of balanced understanding. The habit of being a storm centre, characteristic of his entire career, was fully evident first in the polemical study of *The Classic Philosophers* (1857) and was renewed in his last decades with each additional volume of *The Origins of Contemporary France*; as a result, critics and scholars have tended to fall into opposite and mutually exclusive camps as Taineans and anti-Taineans. Many disciples and followers, though not given to slavish imitation, have paid Taine the high compliment of emulation, successful and unsuccessful, and thus his method tended to dominate two generations of literary study in Europe and America, producing such outstanding works as George Brandes' *Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature* and V. L. Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought.* At the opposite extreme, he has been subject to the less sincere flattery of abuse (similar to that which Irving Babbitt heaped on Rousseau as the scapegoat for attacks on Romanticism), and, in such a work as

Paul Bourget's novel, *The Disciple* (1889), Taine (or perhaps, rather, 'Tainism', though the personal reference was clear) was practically blamed for 'la débâcle' of 1870 and the difficulties which followed. Bourget's feeling 'that the soul of France had been terribly hurt in 1870, and that it must be helped, healed and cured',[1] has been paralleled in the United States, perhaps, by some critics who have blamed all the woes of depression, fascism, and war on the presumed cynicism and 'materialism' of the so-called 'lost generation' of writers in the post-war twenties.

But now that we have had the benefit of a generation of critics, many of them brilliant, 'emancipated' from the demands of Taine's historical method,[2] we are perhaps ready to achieve a more temperate and balanced view. From the perspective of a century, we should be able to cease lining up for him and against him and to do his contribution some measure of justice.

Taine's Personal Limitations

It is necessary, indeed, to begin with a full realization of Taine's limitations, since only from such a realization may we perhaps be able to avoid them, and their ill effects, in the future. Here, again, we may take a clue from his own method of presentation and classify our negative criticisms according to whether they spring primarily from his personality, from his environment and time, or from his method itself.[3]

One should, in all fairness, attempt to divorce judgment of Taine's method from feeling about him as a person, a difficult process, since so much of 'the style was the man'. In the Preface to the *Critical and Historical Essays* (1858), he made a plea for such a divorce, emphasizing that the kind of analysis he was trying to use had an inspiring ancestry.[4] Yet we have seen how even a contemporary admirer like Zola was bothered by the contradictions and inadequacies of his personality. For all his courage and honesty, there was something of the lonely misanthrope about him. He was far from humourless, as some of his delightfully satirical pieces reveal; but it was a dry, somewhat cynical, wit, with a touch of Swift and Voltaire. Called a pessimist, because of his sometimes harsh realism on political issues, he yet shared the optimism of his century where the progress of science was concerned; withal, he was not a bitter man, and that he was capable of much warmth in his friendships is evident to any reader of his *Life and Letters*. Professor Guérard sums up a familiar reaction, however, in a telling

note: 'Taine could be arresting and impressive: he never was lovable, for there was no love in him. My mother, when she caught me echoing the harsh doctrinaire tones of the Master, hummed a French hunting tune: *Je n'aime pas ton ton, je n'aime pas ton Taine, Tontaine, tonton. . . .*'[5]

Zola wrote of 'the strange fruit' of Taine's style, and reactions have been mixed to its curious blending of analysis and eloquence:

'Taine precludes indifference: if you have anything to say, you must be convinced it deeply matters. His seriousness is never passive, like that of the Dryasdusts. He feels intensely: not a page of his, even on the most abstruse subject, is without a tremor of intellectual excitement. But he scorns irresponsible passion: sentiment is no argument. He expresses himself in logical form. Every paragraph develops a single idea, stated in the opening sentence, redefined and enriched in the last. The paragraphs are linked with the same inevitability as the triple rhymes in Dante. But Taine is not satisfied with the abstract frigidity of Euclid or Spinoza. His logic is constantly supported by vivid, realistic instances. The blend of restrained passion, cool, masterly argument and telling, picturesque illustrations is extremely impressive.'[6]

This duality of judgment on Taine is reflected also by Edmund Wilson, who has wavered between dubious compliment[7] and sincere praise[8]; and Eugène Delacroix considered him 'a first class pedant'.[9] On the whole, Taine's prose, like his personality, was an impressive instrument, beautifully disciplined and with a wide range of effects, but characterized more by force than by grace.

Since, in many respects, Taine illustrates his own deterministic formula, many of the criticisms levelled at him should also be directed against the dominant trends of his Environment and Time. This applies to his nationalistic and racial ideas, which have since seen so much abuse; yet, as we have seen, he was anything but a chauvinist or 'racist', in the Nazi sense.[10] Nevertheless, it remains true that he shared the limitations of his age in biology, in psychology, and in his rather oversimplified conception of scientific method generally.

Politically, Taine was an intelligently stubborn conservative; more often than not, 'his most virulent prejudices seemed to him the objective truth',[11] which he then proceeded to 'demonstrate' scientifically; and for all his travels in Italy, England, and elsewhere, he never really ceased to think and write like a Frenchman.

But who ever expected a man, even a scientist, to jump out of his own skin? These limitations of personality, place, and time are such as all flesh is heir to. Perhaps in the case of Taine they made him somewhat less than a truly major figure; but he grappled with great issues, and his problems, and general formulations, tend to date less readily than his particular solutions of them.

Limitations of Method

Most important from a long-range point of view, however, are the limitations in the actual development and applications of his method itself, most of which have been touched upon in the course of our critical exposition. Some of these are perhaps inevitable for a philosophical criticism, and others may have been the result of personal and temperamental weaknesses in the man himself.

Among the former may be mentioned: his tendencies towards abstraction, deductive method, jumping to conclusions, abuse of analogy, and neglect of the work of art. None of these are fatal; all are to some extent inevitable; and Taine's degree of fallibility on these scores varies from occasion to occasion. Thus, if men wish to generalize at all, some abstraction is necessary. As to the element of deduction, even the sciences have given up Bacon's ideal of perfect induction, and, especially in aesthetic criticism, it is hard to conceive of a critic proceeding to analyse—even *look* at a painting or *read* a book—without some hypothesis already in mind, some notion of what to look for. Any mind that *reaches* a conclusion must make a *jump* somewhere; but Taine was especially guilty in this respect because he liked to see his facts fit into neat and coherent logical systems.[12] Use of analogy is natural enough in discussions of literature and art, which are filled with metaphors and symbols, but Taine overdid his fondness for seeing men as 'seeds' and paintings as 'flowers', because of his tendency towards monism, towards seeing all kinds and levels of phenomena as expressions of universal biological and psychological laws. Finally, short of telling the reader simply to read the poem and look at the painting, a critic must inevitably leave the work of art behind at times. Still, Taine's historical emphasis led him to extremes in his neglect of aesthetic form.[13]

Other, more personal, limitations in his method, most of them springing from his preference for Spinoza over Hegel, or from the struggle between the two philosophies in his mind, include his tendencies towards mechanism, towards a static logic, towards a

rigid set of concepts, and towards neglect of the subtle complexities and conventions involved in the processes of cultural communication. Hence his rather naïve assumptions that analysis of the effects of Race, Environment, and Time is 'but a mechanical problem'; that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the *Zeitgeist* and the spirit of an artist's work; and so forth. Despite the fact, pointed out by Brunetière,[14] that Taine was constantly making progress towards mastery of new areas of human experience, the essentials of his method and values were fixed by the age of twenty: growth after that age seems to have been more quantitative than qualitative, except perhaps after the crisis of 1870. His attempts at being all-embracing, and reconciling the opposites of permanence and change, led to uses of broad terms like 'abstraction', 'race', 'milieu', and 'moment' which were just vague enough to have provided grist for the mills of hundreds of commentators.[15]

Most serious of all, perhaps, from our point of view, is his oversimplification of the entire problem of culture and communication, which, as Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, has been the central concern of more recent criticism.[16] Though, as an historian, he had a rich awareness of the densities of facts, his Hegelian search for laws of history led him to take too many of his documents at their face values, without inquiring sufficiently into the special meanings terms and symbols may have had for various generations, as Professor Spitzer has done recently in his essays in 'historical semantics'. Curious enough, for a protagonist of historical method, in this respect he was *not historical enough.*

Taine's Permanent Contributions

Yet, with all these limitations, personal and methodological, there is a solidity to Taine's philosophy and achievement which makes it one of the permanent contributions in the history of criticism. He is one of those figures whom one cannot ignore, however much one may agree or disagree with him. Professor Guérard's experience is typical: 'My relations with Taine were intimate and acrimonious. I learned much from him, mostly through the process of fighting him.'[17] One way to correct the tendency to dismiss Taine because of his imperfections is to ask, not what he *fails to do*, but what he *succeeds* in doing. It is unfair to expect of any critic that he be all things to all men, perfect, like a God. What then are Taine's peculiar virtues?

It is important, first of all, to place him in the great and considerable tradition to which, as a Naturalist, he belongs. Taine's Positivism and Romanticism make him a complete child of the nineteenth century; but, since he was also constantly striving to balance his Romanticism and a Classical heritage, he incorporated many elements of the Aristotelian tradition.[18]

However one may judge these broad historical generalizations, which require further elaboration and documentation far beyond our present scope, certain more obvious contributions of Taine to our understanding of literature and art help define his significance for criticism today.

Primarily, of course, his work stands firm, not as the pioneer example, since the idea is at least as old as Plato and Aristotle, but as the great modern *crystallization* of the historical method. In Professor Levin's words, citing a comment by Gustave Flaubert, Taine's *History* got rid, once and for all, 'of the uncritical notion that books dropped like meteorites from the sky. The social basis of art might thereafter be overlooked, but it could hardly be disputed.'[19] He serves as a perpetual reminder of this fundamental fact to the many who still (such is the stubbornness of human nature!) persist in forgetting it. Professor Levin goes on to claim that 'Taine's introduction to his history of English literature, which abounds in dogmas . . ., is rather a manifesto than a methodology.'[20] We should prefer to say: rather a *general formulation* of the historical problem than a *complete* methodology. Taine was scientist enough to realize that he was bound to ask more questions than he could himself answer, that he was rather delineating and exemplifying a 'manner of working' than presenting a set of ready-made solutions.

Another way of stating this contribution is to say that Taine is outstanding among those who attempt the important and difficult task of relating (some would say: *confusing*!) literature and life. Here, again, he initiates more than he achieves, and, as one must freely admit, often neglects the complications of culture and its conventions.[21] But his solid strength comes from the fact that he keeps literature and the arts firmly where they belong: in the mainstream of social reality. In Professor Levin's excellent phrase, he treats 'Literature as an Institution', though the elementary character of his social science limits his usefulness today, except as a pioneering example in whose works we find a sound general approach to the problems of method. Paradoxically enough, for

he was 'a resolute foe of political democracy',[22] this is essentially a corollary of the democratic principle in the arts: 'So criticism, which is the valuation and history of poetry as an achievement, is impatient to reach its Homer, its Sophocles, its Shakespeare, as soon as it can; but the student of poetry as a social art, an institution, an element in human life, must turn to democratic and communal origins. . . .'[23]

In this respect, especially, Taine embodies the social values of the Romantic tradition. However, and here he seems particularly relevant to the needs of our day, his is a Romanticism with a minimum of sentimentality, grown critical of its own assumptions.[24] Francis B. Gummere's comparisons with Whitman are suggestive on this score: 'Whitman's poetic democracy, like Rousseau's, is not only redolent of the *ego*, of a kind of lawlessness; it is destructive and not constructive.'[25] In contrast, Taine is 'the most resolute and extreme representative of that democracy in science and in the theory of art, of that literary convention, which Whitman rejected and defied. What Taine hated, Whitman loved; and what Whitman despised, Taine defended to the utmost of his formidable resources.'[26] Perhaps, then, Taine helps restore a much-needed balance: his combination of a pluralistic democracy of contributory causes with hierarchies of ideal values (as in *The Ideal in Art*) may be just the synthesis towards which our generation is groping.[27]

Finally, Taine provides a frame of reference—indeed, the only possible frame of reference—for those who would labour in the vineyards of Comparative Literature, and towards a concept of World Literature, to which the comparative method must ultimately lead. Comparative studies cannot do without his categories of analysis—Race, Environment, Time, and Master Faculty—though they may perhaps add new ones and refine the applications of the old far beyond what Taine himself achieved. How else can the student proceed than from an analysis of the works produced by various nations, against the background of their historical experiences, seeking to discover and abstract their 'dominant traits'—and so forth?

Nor is there anything provincial or divisive about Taine's method: the universal always lurks behind his particulars. Consider, for example, the following criticisms by Professor Guérard: 'What Taine cannot explain is why Racine is not Pradon. Nor can he account for the fact that, in scorn of race, environment and

time, I enjoy Ecclesiastes and Jonah today far more than the latest American best seller.'[28] But, if the first question is taken literally, of course, Taine does not pretend to do any such thing; since he is interested in explaining discernible differences, and not ultimate mysteries, the only *possible* answer could be: God only knows! If this question means: 'Why is Racine great, and Pradon not?' then his essay on Racine seems a sufficient explanation.

As to the latter question, a very clear, if not final, answer is provided in *The Ideal in Art*. Ecclesiastes and Jonah, like any other works of literature and art, may be analyzed, more or less 'scientifically' or objectively, and judged to be great by some such objective scales of values as Taine has sketched. We say 'some such scales', because, here as elsewhere, there is room for much improvement; but there is no denying both the need for, and the pragmatic reality of, universal standards today. Increased ease of international communication makes possible an approach to national literatures which is increasingly just because increasingly comparative; in ever-widening circles of complex relationships, both the concrete individuality of nations and their essential, universal sameness becomes ever more clear. The goal towards which these circles are expanding must surely be a concept of world literature and a brotherhood of all men in the arts, as in life.

Indeed, brotherhood can be taken as a symbol of both concreteness and universality, since each brother is individual, but all have in common certain patterns of relationships, social as well as biological. Thus, Christian and Hindu, American and Frenchman, still retain their distinctive qualities, however much they mix and mingle and gain in mutual understanding; but, as in the sciences, the 'concrete universality' of natural types may function as an ideal limit for aesthetic investigation and, in human affairs, for practical planning.

1870 *and* 1950

'"No use," said Baxter to himself as, shrugging, he lifted the glass to his lips, "'ours is essentially a tragic age' for those who hold any attachment to the *ancien régime*. . . ." "And oh, Taine, Taine, Taine," he sighed, "and your study of La Fontaine," he almost cried, as ("Après moi le Bernstein!") he took a long pull at his whiskey and soda and set the glass down again.'

(Stephen Seley, *Baxter Bernstein: A Hero of Sorts*)

One final note to our revaluation of an aesthetic system which, though its implications are ultimately 'political', in the best sense of that much-abused word, may seem at the farthest possible remove from matters of state. It will be recalled that Taine's attempt to achieve a balance between such opposites as the concrete and the universal, the Romantic and the Classical, and empiricism and metaphysics, reflected a conception of France's rôle as a mediator in Europe between extremes represented by England and Germany.[29] It was with this in mind that, immediately after completing *On Intelligence* (late in 1869), he began collecting notes for a work on Germany and German literature, comparable to the *History of English Literature*, though more modest in scope.[30]

Analogies to the present situation, less than a century later, are not far to seek. Now the stakes are higher; weapons are more efficient, and the stage of war has been enlarged to include the entire globe of the earth; but, now as before, the conflict is between East and West, and men of science, reason, and good will are seeking to find a middle way—a 'third force'—to prevent the battle which many pessimists consider inevitable. In this respect, for example, the works of a man like F. S. C. Northrop present interesting parallels to those of Taine: he too has attempted to distinguish national and 'racial' traits (though, of course, he has left the *biological* fallacies, to which Taine fell victim, far behind) according to a principle which correlates intellectual, aesthetic, social, and other elements in organic wholes; he too has been attempting to bridge the gap which still yawns between the sciences and the humanities.[31]

But, unfortunately, Taine's enterprise did not stand to survive, much more than the proverbial snowball in Hell. When Prussian troops began their march to Paris in July of 1870—despite the fact that, as Taine wrote to his mother on 24 July: 'In my circle of friends and throughout my journey from the frontier, *everybody was against the war . . .*'[32]—Taine, with his fine sense of intellectual probity, gave up his immediate job of trying to understand the Germans: 'We can no longer be impartial.'[33] And, after the defeat of France and the unhappy events which followed establishment of the Commune in 1871, he resolved to turn all his thoughts and efforts homeward and wrote the *Origins of Contemporary France* in search of the causes of 'la débâcle'.

As our representatives talk in the councils of the United Nations

and unpopular conferences are held on the 'problem' of peace, one cannot but wonder whether the force of ideas and ideals is still as weak today, before those of guns and propaganda, as it was in the days of Taine. How many fine books—not to mention the more important lives—imbued with the spirit of international understanding, may be stifled by the next explosion of that dread hydrogen bomb? And who will be left, and what will be left, to warrant the writing of a sombre *Origins of Europe's Ruins*, analysing the causes of our world's madness?

These are other and more difficult questions: life itself is more important and more complex than art. But how well we can understand Taine's mood in 1870, 'desolated' by the march of events! His characteristic comments to his mother bespeak his civilized humanity:

'I know from experience what a man is worth and what trouble it is for his mother to raise him, and in this regard, as in many others, a German is worth as much as a Frenchman. I am trying to write my notes on England, which will make up a volume; but in this heat and with these preoccupations I can't do much work.'[34]

The record of a profound sensitivity and an uncompromising integrity are not the least part of our heritage from Taine.

NOTES

[1] Paul Bourget, *The Disciple*, p. v, 'Introduction'.

[2] See *Critiques and Essays in Criticism*, 1920–1948, *Representing the Achievement of Modern British and American Critics*, Selected by Robert Wooster Stallman, with a Foreword by Cleanth Brooks. This provides an excellent bird's-eye view and 'Selected Bibliography' of the 'new criticism', that general trend (if not quite a neatly defined 'school') which 'neglects the creative process', 'preoccupies itself almost wholly with the means and ends of poetry rather than with its sources, with the nature of the poem in relation to the reader rather than with the relation of the poem to the poet or maker', and 'has limited its centre of interest to the genres of poetry, drama, and criticism itself' (p. vi). Taine's method is discussed in this volume by Martin Turnell (*passim*, especially pp. 424–429) and by Edmund Wilson (pp. 451–452).

[3] Cf. our Chapter I, 'Biographical and Historical Explanations'.

[4] Cf. our Chapter IV, p. 56.

[5] *Personal Equation*, p. 106, Note 2. Ogden Nash has caught the same spirit of Taine's personal inadequacy in one of his satirical poems: 'If He Scholars, Let Him Go' (*Versus*, 1949).

[6] Guérard, *Personal Equation*, pp. 104–105.

[7] 'Taine had perfected one of the great modern mechanical styles. His books have the indefatigable exactitude, the monotonous force, of machinery . . .' (*To the Finland Station*, p. 45).

[8] Cf. our Chapter X, p. 135.

[9] Also, 'He always wants to say everything, and then he says it over again afterward' (*The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, p. 632, 27 July, 1858).

[10] Cf. our Chapter VII, 'Science and Pseudo-Science'.

[11] Guérard, *Personal Equation*, p. 105.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106. However, cf. Horace M. Kallen's judgment: 'A candid inspection of Taine's system and his judgments could lead to no denial of these critical allegations. But could they not be alleged of any *system*? True as they may be, they neither alter nor diminish the force of Taine's intent nor render his philosophy the less representative; and in so far as science is possible, less inescapable, though incomplete.' (*Art and Freedom*, p. 470.)

[13] Cf. Martin Turnell, in Stallman, ed. (*op. cit.*), pp. 426–427. Some excuse for this weakness may lie in the fact that it was usually deliberate, and thus not necessarily the result of insensitivity to aesthetic elements. Taine can hardly be censured for not finding what he was not looking for.

[14] Cf. our Chapter I, p. 8.

[15] Thus, cf. our Chapters IV, VI ('Art as Imitation and Expression'), VII, VIII, and *passim*.

[16] Stallman, ed. (*op. cit.*), 'Foreword', especially pp. xviii–xix. 'The rise of modern criticism is part of a general intensification of the study of language and symbolism' (p. xix).

[17] Guérard, *Personal Equation*, p. 104.

[18] Appendix G, 'Taine and the Naturalist Tradition'.

[19] 'Literature as an Institution', p. 546. Cf. Sainte-Beuve, our Chapter V, p. 72.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 547.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 550–551.

[22] Guérard, *Personal Equation*, p. 131.

[23] Gummere, 'Whitman and Taine', p. 148.

[24] 'According to Taine, we must forego the dream of "perfectibility"' (Cassirer, *Naturalistische* . . ., p. 25).

[25] *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[27] Note that Gummere saw Taine as a defender of 'literary convention', whereas Professor Levin rebukes him for insufficient attention to 'The Rôle of Convention'. Is not the real criticism that many of the conventions which Taine employs seem to us either *outmoded* or *oversimplified*? But such weaknesses may be corrected by later generations without loss to Taine's essential intention.

[28] Guérard, *Personal Equation*, p. 107.

[29] Cf. our Chapter I, 'Biographical and Historical Explanations', and VII, 'Geography . . .'.

[30] See *V. & C.*, II, 354–374, which includes some of these preliminary notes.

[31] See especially *The Meeting of East and West, An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding; The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities;* and *Ideological Differences and World Order: Studies in the Philosophy and Science of the World's Cultures.*

[32] *V. & C.*, II, 356, Note 2, our italics.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 356.

[34] *Ibid.*, Note 2. This chapter, together with Appendix G, has appeared under the title, 'Taine's Historical Criticism', in *The French Review.*

FINIS

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TAINE'S STUDENT CORRESPONDENCE AND NOTEBOOKS

THE RATIONALIST TRADITION: SPINOZA AND DESCARTES (1848–1849)

Bourbon College

DURING his last year at Bourbon College, Taine plunged seriously into philosophic studies, producing, among others, an essay on Spinoza's pantheism[1] and a treatise 'On Human Destiny'.[2] In the 'Introduction' already referred to, he described how Guizot's lectures on *Civilization in Europe* started him on the search for laws of history and he became a 'sceptic in science and ethics'.[3] The philosophy of Spinoza came to his rescue:

'During the first months of the philosophy class, that state became insupportable to me. . . . Then, wearied by contradictions, I placed my spirit in the service of the newest and most poetical opinion; I defended pantheism to the death. . . . That was my salvation.'[4]

Pantheism, in this context and during that period of France's intellectual history, meant the 'intellectual love of God' of Benedictus Spinoza.[5] Taine's professor of philosophy during his last year at Bourbon College, Charles Bénard,[6] later wrote of his student as follows:

'Taine entered (1848) the philosophy class, a product of education in rhetoric, but already a philosopher, I mean a fervent disciple of Spinoza. His faith in Spinozism was already such that it was not possible to change it one iota. He had shut himself

within it as if within a fortress from which, moreover, he never emerged.'[7]

Spinoza's influence is especially evident in Taine's 'freshman' letters to his friend and former school-mate at Bourbon College, Lucien Anatole Prévost-Paradol (1829–1870), who did not join him at the Normal School until a year later. Taine had found in Spinoza, first, a metaphysics, and second, a method which he thought could lead to certain knowledge.[8] The metaphysics took the form, during those adolescent years, of a vision of perfection which 'tends towards general or ideal things, such as works of art, humanity in its entirety, and above all nature'[9]; but it was chiefly the latter that he rebuked his more politically minded friend for lacking: 'There is a method much higher, much clearer, much surer, that of Spinoza.'[10] In a letter which begins by mentioning Charles Fourier, Taine distinguished the three stages ('moments') in the history of philosophy as materialism, represented by Lucretius; spiritualism or 'psychology', represented by Descartes; and the unity of the two:

'The final stage is that in which man knows the radical unity of himself and all things, the fundamental identity of pleasure and duty, of liberty and necessity. That is called the philosophy of substance or of the absolute; Spinoza is one of its admirable interpreters.'[11]

And, recommending to his absent friend books of consolation, he mentioned, 'If you were a philosopher, the fifth part of the *Ethics*.'[12]

Criticisms of Spinoza and Descartes

Judging by a large body of 'Notes on Philosophy', begun shortly before Taine's entry into Normal School and completed the next summer (August, 1849),[13] he remained largely under Spinoza's spell during his freshman year. These 'Notes' were divided into two parts, 'On Being' and 'On Thought',[14] and were written as a 'metaphysical geometry', very much in the manner of Spinoza's *Ethics*, complete with axioms, propositions, proofs, and scholia. They were an attempt to develop *a priori*, absolute laws of thought:

'One sees that no part is played here by experience. We maintain ourselves solely in the region of pure reason. . . . We do not

take a single step outside of the region of ideas. . . . Hence it is not a Self which is writing this work, it is Thought.'[15]

However, despite his continued reliance on Spinoza's method and style, Taine was already diverging from him on important metaphysical points. First among these was a distinction between logic and metaphysics which was to have a profound effect on his method and his theory of causation. Thus, the propositions in his 'Notes' of 1848–1849 followed Spinoza, until they came to the following distinction between two manifestations of substance:

'God or substance, in so far as it manifests itself through an immediate action.

'The world or substance, in so far as it passes through an infinite series of finite and progressive actions, in order to arrive at an adequate action, that is to say, one which expresses its essence completely.'[16]

As a result of this distinction, it follows that:

'13. God is anterior to the world in his nature, in other words he is logically conceived before the world.[17]

'14. God is not the cause of the world at all.'[18]

God, though logically prior to the world, is not its cause (a proposition which denies the Creation).

The implications of this distinction were developed the following year in essays 'On Descartes' Method' (1850)[19] and on the Cartesian proofs of God's existence (May, 1850).[20] '. . . Descartes confused the *active cause* of a thing with its *raison d'être*.'[21] Concerning Descartes' third proof, the familiar ontological argument ('The idea of a perfect Being implies necessary existence, which is perfection. And thus God exists.'), Taine remarks:

'(a) The idea of a necessary being is self-contradictory,

'(b) The idea in this proof is taken hypothetically, and thus the conclusion is hypothetical.'[22]

Since Spinoza uses the same ontological argument, the same criticisms would apply to him: logical necessity does not imply causal or metaphysical necessity. As Victor Delbos put it, discussing logical necessity, Taine 'goes still further than Spinoza, since he excludes any ontological element from this notion of

necessity.'[23] Concerning metaphysical necessity, we have the following note which Taine inserted in his copy of Spinoza:

'Spinoza's fundamental error is that of having destroyed the world. At bottom, he absorbs it into God. His philosophy leads to this proposition that particular things are distinct only in comparison with the spirit and not in themselves.'[24]

Obviously, rehabilitation of 'the world' would have to be accomplished by means of the methods of the sciences.

A second criticism of Spinoza was contained in the characterization of the world as passing through 'an infinite series of finite and progressive actions'. Here we detect the impact of evolutionary and Hegelian philosophies, whose emphasis was on development: 'In Spinoza, movement lacks a cause. The prime mover of Aristotle does not exist.'[25] The distinction between a static and a dynamic universe was correlated with a further distinction between the absolute and the infinite; the world ('whose life is precisely this movement which causes new developments to issue perpetually from the womb of substance')[26] is plural, temporal, a never-ending process. The very affirmation of absolute substance limits its existence, 'reduces it to fragments and makes it fall into time and into extension, which is the determination and the poorest development of substance'[27]—whereas, for Spinoza, extension is one of the infinite attributes of God-Substance. Thus, another fundamental error of Spinoza's *Ethics* was that

'. . . he has given to the mode of existence which he adopts, at once the multiplicity of the world and the eternity of God. But multiplicity can only exist through succession, which, developing the essence, constitutes superior degrees of Being, for example, Extension, and thus permits the existence and the coexistence of distinct individuals. . . . The spinozistic world does not develop.'[28]

These distinctions, of causal versus logical necessity and of a dynamic infinite versus a static absolute, had been made within the framework of rationalistic, deductive procedure; but in the autumn of 1849, after the completion of his freshman 'Notes', Taine began to realize the necessity for a radical revision of his method. In the 'Notes', he had written a paraphrase of Spinoza's opening definition of 'that which is self-caused': 'For one calls necessary that which the Reason is *incapable* of not conceiving'.[29]

Sometime during the 1849–1850 school year, he added the following comment: 'This is pure Idealism, I have not yet made the distinction between *perception* and *conception*.'[30]

THE PROBLEM OF METHOD (1849–1851)

Perception and Conception

That the problem of method was Taine's central concern during his second year at the Normal School is clear from a notebook, entitled *Philosophy, Dogmatism*, dated 1849–1850[31]; another, dated November, 1849–March, 1850, in two parts, on the *Idea of Science* and *On the Absolute*[32]; two others from 1850, discussed by Chevrillon,[33] headed *Dogma* and *Metaphysics: Analytic and Abstract*.[34] These, together with a large number of other critical papers,[35] indicate that this year was a particularly active and crucial one for Taine.

The *Philosophy, Dogmatism* notebook began with the following observation: 'I am beginning to perceive that I shall have to recast the notebook which is the summary of all of my last year's work: it is the labour of Penelope. Each day one mounts on one's (own) shoulders.'[36] It opened with the distinction between perception and conception already cited:

'Everything depends on the method: so I return to that subject. By method, I mean the means of having true perceptions, in other words the necessary conditions for having a series of true perceptions.

'By the truth of a perception, I mean its agreeing with its object; I mean to say that it should be subjectively what the object is in itself.

'Every act of intelligence, all knowledge is a perception. Memory is a perception of a present modification, which implies a past perception. Conception is the perception of a modification of the same sort which one does not attribute to a past perception. . . .'[37]

Taine's problem had become one of how, from our perceptions, we arrive at true conceptions.[38]

Criticisms of Descartes and Aristotle

Concerning the problem of method, critical essays 'On Descartes' Method'[39] and on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*[40] are relevant.

Taine rebuked Descartes for developing concepts that applied only to mathematics, whereas Aristotle's *Analytics* were of more general application: 'This mathematical tendency prevented him from granting to the senses the authority that they ought to have, to the inductive method the power of which it is capable, to bodily extension the forces which are proper to them.'[41] As a result, Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* is 'infallible, but useless'.[42]

Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, though complete as a theory of demonstration,[43] were insufficient as a theory of science. Taine found Aristotle's theory of definition incomplete, by comparison with that of Spinoza, which went beyond the analysis of terms to the 'essences' of things, so that 'given the definition, one can deduce from it all the properties of the thing'.[44] A true definition will not express 'the position of the being in question in an arbitrary hierarchy of logical generalities [as in Hegel, S. J. K.] but its position in the real hierarchy of the development of Being; for example, it says of man that he is a rational animal'.[45] Since 'rationality' was a real characteristic of men which was added to the species in the course of its evolution, this definition both serves to differentiate him from other animals and expresses 'all the reality which is in him'.[46]

Not only was Aristotle's theory of definition incomplete, but he followed an 'Imperfect order in the solution of problems.'[47] So, to return to the *Philosophy, Dogmatism* notebook, under the heading of 'Theory of Science' we find: 'Aristotle grants at first the conclusion and afterwards seeks the minor and the major. We grant at first the notion and afterwards we seek the conclusion.'[48]

Induction and the Absolute

The relation between method and metaphysics is especially clear in Taine's notes 'On the Absolute':

'Now we know the cause of the question *why*? Having arrived at the perception that each essence has an equal right to existence, and admitting in principle that something exists, we ask ourselves: why this rather than that? . . . One cannot seek in the given essence a reason which makes it exist rather than not, . . . For the essence, separated by hypothesis from existence, no longer contains existence. . . . We conclude that the essence isn't the absolute primitive; it does not contain the last reason of things. The existing essence is anterior to the pure essence. Essence

expresses the same thing as existence, *but the former does it in relation to conception, and the latter, in relation to perception.* Thus, perception is anterior to conception.'[49]

He concluded the discussion as follows:

'This long labour has led us to discover the various meanings of the words *raison d'être*. Nothing is more important than this analysis. It is through the *raison d'être* that beings are bound to one another, and that, having possession of one, we can possess all the others. That is, truthfully speaking, the basis of philosophic science, since it is the means of knowing the whole. And I see no other means for that. The doctrine of real causality, of God as cause, being impossible, there remains only that of logical causality.'[50]

This was the same distinction between logical and metaphysical necessity which had been central to his criticism of Spinoza the previous year: 'I have been much in error on the nature of the absolute. I did not observe that the notion is not the intuition. . . . One does not arrive at anything by supposing at first a pure possibility, as Spinoza did.'[51] The further element that was necessary, if one were to pass from essence to existence, was that of 'power' or, as he usually named it in his later writings, 'force':

'It seems to me that here is the solution. What exists before Socrates is his power of existing at a determined moment, and not himself. . . . To be logical, it is necessary to destroy the divine world, as Hegel did, or the real world, as Spinoza did. Genera and types are neither *res* nor *nomina*, but powers, virtual modes of determination for the absolute. . . .'[52]

Schelling was also criticized on the same score.

However, that Taine thought of this 'power' as more than (his conception of) the Aristotelian 'potentiality' is clear from what he wrote near the conclusion of the *Philosophy, Dogmatism* notebook:

'It will be necessary to prove that induction gives me not only, as Schelling says, the Infinite-finite, nor, as Hegel says, the Idea in process, nor, as Aristotle says, the Idea in action; but indeed Being (absolute) made manifest (absolutely).'[53]

He might have added Spinoza to the list:

'The first idea ought to be concrete; it ought to be that of determinate being, in action, not that of pure being. Spinoza did

not see the question; he proves that substance does not imply any contradiction, but not that it exists in a determinate fashion. *He proves possibilities, not existences.*'[54]

But Taine has not left Spinoza behind through this criticism; rather, he was trying to give that philosopher's abstract system concreteness:

'Spinoza could prove that Substance exists, but not that it exists in a determinate fashion. . . . How indeed to draw the removed part from the part from which one has removed it and which no longer has it? The truth is that the two are nothing but one, that the one does not go without the other. . . . The solution is in the identity of Substance and the attributes.'[55]

Metaphysical Systems

During Taine's last year at Bourbon College, he still wrote in the accents of Platonic Idealism, as Chevrillon has noted,[56] but even then, under the influence of Spinoza, he was trying to link 'essence' with 'cause'.[57] The metaphysical issue emerges most clearly in an 1850 manuscript, his 'First Views on Hegel', which criticized the German thinker because, for him, 'All reality is in thought.'[58]

But reality is more than an unfolding Idea:

'An idea which does not get known has only its possibility of knowledge. In itself, it is a non-entity. Being, on the contrary, in our sense, far from being a possibility, is the absolute reality. The world does not emerge from it as from a seed, and does not realize it as action, virtuality. It is the world itself under the form of unity.'[59]

Taine accepted Hegel's dynamism, but found his dialectic lacking because it remained Platonic:

'We, on the contrary, consider Being, not as a mode of eternal and indeterminate existence (Plato), nor as a mode of existence originally distinct, and passing forever towards a greater determination, but as a general form of existence, which contains universal existence in action and under the aspect of absolute unity. Being is; that signifies for us: the whole is, every thing being a particularization, an aspect of Being.'[60]

Taine's methodological solution of *abstraction* here took on a metaphysical dimension, combining elements of Aristotelianism and Platonism, of nominalism and realism:

'These are abstractions, but they correspond to the general forms of reality and are not, as Aristotle says of them, simple ideal analogies. These are abstractions in the spirit as in Being, and in this respect I am a nominalist and Aristotelian. But these are real unities in the spirit as in Being, and in this respect I am a realist, Hegelian and Platonist.'[61]

He summed up his position as follows:

'Thus our opinion partakes of three systems: The general forms are abstractions (Aristotle). They are real unities in Being and actual (Plato). But Aristotle is wrong in saying that these are analogical abstractions; Plato, that these are distinct unities and exist in themselves; Hegel, that the Universe is to be reduced to a successive birth of determinations.'[62]

The 'Eternal Axiom'

Asked by a professor to reduce his postulate of causality to syllogistic form, Taine stated it in the form of a syllogism in 'Darii', i.e, a universal affirmative major premise, a particular affirmative minor premise, and a particular positive conclusion. The argument would run as follows:

'It is admitted (major) that the same cause always produces the same effects. Now (minor), taking into consideration in the body nothing but its weight, I see that there follows, from this single property, the fact that it falls with such and such an acceleration. I conclude that everywhere and always this effect will result from this cause, that is to say that, falling freely, every body with weight falls and will fall according to this mode of movement.

'More generally: if two facts are stripped of all the adjacent ones, reduced to themselves, if I begin to perceive a relation between them, it must derive from nothing but their *nature*. This relation is *universal*, because everywhere that they are their nature will be. It is *necessary* because it is contradictory to think that they should not have the relation which is in their nature. Therefore, in order to find a *law*, it suffices to exclude from consideration the particular element in a particular case, and to apply oneself to the single *abstract* element.'[63]

Of course, methods must be specified for isolating, or abstracting, the causes, and we do not pretend 'that we know the material substance and its activity in itself'.[64] But, by tracing causal relations among phenomena, we gradually discover the order of the universe.

'There results from this that the procedure of induction is the use of a series of syllogisms of which the minors are perceptible facts of experience, that is to say, in the last analysis, the affirmation of certain modifications of ourselves, caused by external objects, and which consequently *correspond* to them.'[65]

The major premise is our initial axiom of causality, in accordance with which we reason. If our abstractions are properly made, we can achieve our goal, which is not 'to arrive at the general from the particular, but to discover the essence and the universal under the particular.'[66] With Alfred Lord Tennyson, who wrote in England a generation later of the 'flower in the crannied wall', Taine believed that

> '. . . if *I could understand*
> *What you are, root and all, and all in all,*
> *I should know what God and man is.*'

Like most readers of Tennyson's poem, who fail to notice that the word 'if' is italicized, Taine's tendency was to translate this *hypothetical* statement into a *categorical* one.[67]

Historical and Natural Science

The analogy between historical and natural study which was so central to Taine's method was made in a notebook on the 'History of Philosophy', dated July, 1850,[68] on which he worked during the vacation period that summer in an attempt to summarize the previous year's remarkable studies:

'The History of Philosophy is entirely like natural History. Organic types like philosophic ideas have their development, their relations, their progress, their conditions of existence, their causes for perishing.'[69]

Here, too, we find a clear statement of the theory of *milieu* as a kind of 'moral temperature', which was later to be developed in *The Philosophy of Art*:

'The philosophic idea, left to itself, just like the organic idea, would go by a straight and uninterrupted movement towards its fixed goal. But the first is subject to a moral temperature, just as

the second is to a physical temperature. The moral, religious, artistic, and emotional state of the country determines the special production of such a philosophic idea. It is necessary to take it greatly into account in order to explain the reason, at such a given moment, for such a break, for such a failure, for such a development.'[70]

Thus, Taine assumed the existence of order or system in history, as in nature, but the particular powers under consideration were taken to exist '*hypothetically* in the nation in question'.[71]

This was followed by tentative outlines of the history of modern philosophy, and some notes on the 'subjective character of Christianity' and on 'general historic movements'. The centrality of psychology as Taine's 'principle for the classification of systems' was expressed as follows:

'(1) *Metaphysicians:* To have the definition of Being (of the Whole) and the order of what it contains.

'(2) *Psychologists:* To have the definition of the soul and the order of all that it contains.

'(The intermediate solution would be: (1) To give a metaphysics where a psychology may be; (2) to arrive at metaphysics through psychology.)'[72]

Again, he felt that this new conception of method 'leads me to correct what I wrote last year', referring to the 'Notes' of August, 1849: 'The essence of philosophy is to be science, the total science, the summary of the others, the system of knowledge. This system embraces the objective and the subjective.'[73]

The influence of Hegel's dialectic was evident, but with a difference: 'Given a conception or hypothesis, one applies it to various cases, and one creates a system; there is its development. Then it reveals contradictions which throw up another hypothesis, and so forth.'[74] Here 'conceptions' were treated as hypotheses, and the goal had become to use scientific method in 'general philosophy or metaphysics'. However, philosophy could not be content 'to generalize the results of other sciences'; it was the science of the 'possible' and the 'necessary', rather than of the real and the accidental. As we have already seen, from his criticisms of Spinoza,[75] the distinguishing characteristic of philosophy for Taine lay in its attempt to pass from observation of reality to the absolute:

'(1) Its progress consists in substituting observation and *a priori* deduction for hypothesis.

'(2) Its progress consists in substituting the total definition of the absolute for its partial definition.

'These two propositions could already have been deduced from the very idea of philosophy. What is the true definition of the whole? *True definition* implies the deductive, analytic form. *The whole* implies the total absolute.'[76]

Thus, though Taine had begun the development of a theory of induction, the problem remained of whether, and how, 'the true definition of the whole' could be reached from our limited perceptions of reality.

SPINOZA VERSUS HEGEL (1851–1852)

Taine's Doctoral Theses

In the period of internal and external crisis which was 1851–1852, Taine was confronted with the choice of topics for his doctoral theses, and his more profound philosophical interests obviously received little encouragement. The subjects he wanted to write about were (1) a study of Hegel's *Logic*, and (2) a psychological thesis on 'The Sensations', along lines to be developed later in *On Intelligence*. Professor Vacherot had written Taine a long letter of consolation, after his rejection at the 'agrégation' and shortly before Vacherot's own dismissal from the post of Director of Studies at the Normal School:

'September, 1851

'My dear Taine,

'I was as surprised as I was moved by your defeat. I knew with which committee you had to deal. But the presence of my friend Bénard reassured me for you! I do not know what happened within the committee. But I am convinced that you owed your defeat to N., the narrowest and most arbitrary spirit that I know. . . . I do not advise you to take Hegel's *Logic* as your thesis subject. The subject would not be accepted by the Faculty. Psychology, even of the most elementary sort, has yet to be created for the most part. Concentrate all your readings and all your reflections this year on that branch, so novel and so interesting, of Science.'[77]

Taine tried to follow this advice during the following year.

Hegel was out of the question, but a psychological thesis too was 'dangerous', because of Taine's Spinozist position, which is clear in his letters to Prévost-Paradol:

'I too converse with you in your absence. While I gave you Spinoza, you gave me Burdach and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire; I became a naturalist and you a metaphysician; and today we are a single, same spirit. Do not fear lest I am giving way. We should be fighting together, even if we were alone. I am preparing all sorts of weapons. I shall make my first attack in psychology. In that there are admirable things to be said on the sensations, movements, origins of the passions, against the vision of God, and the soul separated from the body. An entire series of explications is to be substituted for final causes. Nature, which, in producing individuals, isolates one portion of matter from the others, re-establishes *unity* through the constitution of the senses. The eye is made with regard to light, exists only for it, just as the liver exists only for the stomach and is organized only to dissolve food. This relation constitutes its being.'[78]

Taine's political intransigence, as well as his opposition to final causes[79] and insistence on the unity of soul with body, presented insuperable obstacles to a reactionary and clerical-minded administration, and the blows came thick and fast. First, a menacing letter, over Fortoul's signature, indicated that, judging by the mere outline of his lessons in philosophy,[80] he had not yet returned from his errant ways, and he was therefore being transferred to the chair of rhetoric at Poitiers, 'a branch of education less dangerous to your future'.[81] Then, despite desperate attempts to legitimize his theses by linking them with the *entelechia* of Aristotle,[82] he was notified on 7 June, 1852, by the Dean at Poitiers, that his theses had been rejected, an indication that, again, he could not hope for the 'agrégation' that year.[83]

The Disillusion with Hegel

Since he had been considering the possibility of using Hegel's *Logic* as the subject of his doctoral thesis, Taine began by reading that work soon after arriving in Nevers:

'I am reading Hegel's *Logic*. It is an analysis of the principal modes of possible being, the definitions being ranged in order and

one producing the next. It is the only metaphysics which exists alongside that of Aristotle.'[84]

In less than a month, however, he was bored by the German:

'I am re-reading the classics, Homer above all and Marcus Aurelius. For Hegel is a puzzle and my personal investigations into psychology tire me little less.'[85]

He wrote of spending his time with psychology, physiology, history, and 'this Chinese puzzle, popularly called Hegel's *Logic*'.[86]

One of the grounds for this change of attitude can be seen in a series of analyses of Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, *Philosophy of Religion*, and *Philosophy of Law*, which were also written around this time. His notes were interrupted abruptly, as follows:

'(3) Legislative power. The prince, the officials, and the various classes of the nation take part . . . Useless to continue.—Toadyism; poor Hegel! this is humiliating for philosophy. Aristotle clearly demonstrated the right of the stronger in speaking to Alexander, but he did not indicate his political opinion. Hegel lacks the notion of right, of the individual will, of the inviolable person, he only knows the good, the reasonable, the best. The will is sacred, even when it desires the worst. In this book there is a wretched mixture of politics and equity. Legal right is an *a priori* geometry; politics is an empiricism.'[87]

Undoubtedly, some of Taine's personal humiliation at the hands of political and intellectual reaction was reflected in this comment.

By 25 February, 1852, the disillusion with Hegel was complete:

'I have . . . read the last volume of the Logic. Alas! another illusion destroyed! That is great, but it is not the true metaphysics; the method is artificial, and the construction of the absolute which is so highly praised is useless. Well, these are the materials of my thesis.'[88]

Writing to Prévost-Paradol on 28 March, Taine referred to the *Philosophy of History*, again, as 'pyramids of ideas to break the legs of all the Frenchmen who would like to scale them'.[89] He had come to realize that, in the France of the Second Empire, science was no longer possible except 'as a war'.[90]

Taine's 'Abstraction' versus Hegel's 'Begriff'

The really basic ground for Taine's criticisms of Hegel (like those of Spinoza) was methodological. As has been shown, his concern with the problem of induction first took the form of a recognition of the difference between conception and perception. He found in Hegel, too, the distinction between 'concept'[91] as a logical and as an ontological term; unlike Hegel, however, he did not develop the latter sense of concept, though Rosca thought some version of it underlay all his scientific thinking, culminating in the conclusion to *On Intelligence*.[92] Rosca's discussion contrasted Hegel's Begriff with Taine's method of 'abstraction':

'According to what has just been said and proven by means of texts, it is obvious that Taine's concept is not Hegel's concept. Obtained through generalization, through abstraction, as Taine would say, therefore through the elimination of what is particular, individual, Taine's concept supposes only identity and relations of extent. Intelligibility does not mean, according to Taine, conciliation of contraries, but absolute elimination of one of the terms and unreserved affirmation of the other, sacrifice of what is particular for the benefit of what is universal. . . . Taine's concept would therefore not be a true concept, in Hegel's eyes. Hegel would call it, unhesitatingly, an empty abstraction, destitute of that which properly constitutes, according to him, the very essence of the concept. Taine's concept is not the concrete universal, it is the abstract universal.'[93]

Or, as we should prefer to state it, Taine thought he could arrive at his universals by a route different from Hegel's; and he would not have admitted that, because they were the result of the kind of abstraction practised in the sciences, they were any the less concrete.

Underlying this difference in interpretation of *Begriff* is the fact that Taine refused to accept the distinction between Reason (*Vernunft*) and Understanding (*Verstand*) so fundamental to Hegel's position. As Rosca pointed out, his disillusion with Hegel's *Logic* came at the end of that work: he had been almost persuaded by the first two volumes, which treated of the Understanding (Volume I, 'Being'; Volume II, 'Essence') and only saw the artificiality of Hegel's method when he read the third volume, in which the doctrines of *Begriff* (notion or concept) and the *Vernunft*

(Reason) were more fully developed.[94] Agreeing with Hegel that existence was rational, and hence knowable, he saw no reason for invoking a separate 'faculty' for what was merely 'the power of constructing hypotheses'.[95]

NOTES

[1] *V. & C.*, I, 20, Note 1. This essay began: 'Spinoza's doctrine has its origin in its method. Acknowledge the method, and the system is invincible or nearly so.'

[2] Extracts are printed in Chevrillon, *Taine*, pp. 385–388.

[3] *V. & C.*, I, 23.

[4] *V. & C.*, I, 24–25.

[5] See Victor Delbos, 'Le spinozisme en France', which is devoted largely to a critical exposition of Taine's philosophy.

[6] Noted especially as the first French translator of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, published in English under the titles of *The Philosophy of Art* (Hastie, 1886) and *The Philosophy of Fine Art* (Osmaston, 1920).

[7] Giraud, *Essai sur Taine*, pp. 14–15, 289–290.

[8] '. . . as for me, I accept nothing without proof . . . I believe that an absolute, interconnected, geometrical science is possible' (*V. & C.*, 36, 47).

[9] *V. & C.*, I, 58–59.

[10] *V. & C.*, I, 48, 25 March, 1849.

[11] *V. & C.*, I, 63.

[12] *V. & C.*, I, 110.

[13] *V. & C.*, I, Appendix I, 347–353, prints excerpts. Chevrillon, *op. cit.*, refers to these 'Notes' (which began: 'We are creating here nothing more and nothing less than a metaphysical geometry') as the *Géometrie métaphysique* (p. 63) and also cites 'Notes on Spinoza' (p. 64).

[14] *V. & C.*, I, 115, Note 6.

[15] *V. & C.*, I, 347–348.

[16] *V. & C.*, I, 349–350.

[17] From an 'Observation' on Proposition 13: 'The world is contained in force in substance, not in substance considered purely and simply, but in substance considered as having already produced God' (*V. & C.*, I, 351).

[18] *V. & C.*, I, 350.

[19] Chevrillon, pp. 394–395.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 396–398.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 396.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 398.

[23] *Op. cit.*, p. 506.

[24] *V. & C.*, I, 44, Note 4.

[25] Another one of Taine's notes in his copy of Spinoza (*ibid.*).

[26] From 'Notes on Spinoza', Chevrillon, p. 64.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 65. This doctrine of the infinite, as against a static absolute, was

developed further the following year in an essay on the idea of space (Chevrillon, p. 110, Note).

29 *V. & C.*, I, 348.

30 *V. & C.*, I, 348, Note. The author of the *Life and Letters* (Chevrillon?) dates this note November, 1849 (p. 115; November, 1850, on p. 348, is an error), but in *Taine* Chevrillon suggests the spring of 1850 (pp. 91–93).

31 Extracts are printed in *V. & C.*, I, 116–118.

32 *V. & C.*, I, 115 (extracts from the *Idea of Science*, *ibid*, 352–353; from *On the Absolute*, Chevrillon, pp. 389–390).

33 Chevrillon, pp. 93–98.

34 Probably referred to in the *Life and Letters* as 'des recherches sur le dogme chrétien' and 'Métaphysique' (*V. & C.*, I, 119).

35 *V. & C.*, I, 118–120.

36 *V. & C.*, I, 116.

37 *Ibid.*

38 The *Idea of Science* notebook began with the definition that 'The true or perfect idea is that which agrees with its object' (*V. & C.*, I, 352).

The *Dogma*, *Metaphysics* notebooks began as follows: 'This is how I proceeded at first: suppose a veracious thought and, on all sides of that hypothesis, deduce what it will imply. But in order that it should affirm, it is necessary that what it affirms should actually be, which implies a second hypothesis' (Chevrillon, p. 93). This second hypothesis, of *material*, rather than *formal*, truth, would imply a theory of induction.

But Taine was still haunted by the absolute: 'Man (subject and author of science) is mobile, but the object of science will be immobile. It is the self which creates science, but it builds on the absolute. . . .

'Is there not a contradiction in this, and in that case how to resolve it? I have wearied myself since yesterday evening without finding anything. . . .

'It is necessary to guard against falling into the faults with which we reproach the experimental method. Science, we say, should include only affirmations which are eternally true. The two fundamental conditions are to perceive everything under the character of necessity and to exclude all possibility of error . . .' (*V. & C.*, I, 116).

He had not yet explored the view of truth as consisting of statements which are merely probable.

39 Cf. 'Criticisms of Spinoza and Descartes', this Appendix.

40 Extract in Chevrillon, pp. 401–402, where it is dated 1850 or 1851; 1850 seems more probable.

41 Chevrillon, p. 111, Note.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 394.

43 'And what is most excellent is that Aristotle provides the method necessary for finding the proof when he says that given terms must be found through the cause, that is to say through their analysis and definition. That is the true method and it is very superior to that of Descartes' (*ibid.*, pp. 401–402).

44 *Ibid.*, p. 402.

45 Chevrillon, p. 402.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

48 *V. & C.*, I, 117.

[49] Chevrillon, p. 389.
[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 389–390.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[53] *V. & C.*, I, 118.
[54] Chevrillon, p. 93, our italics.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 388.
[57] Chevrillon's summary: 'And he defines what he means by essence: the whole of the properties of a thing or of a being. He will say shortly: the fundamental property. And already, still, the essence is the cause' (p. 385, Note).
[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 391–393.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 391.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 392. Cf. Spinoza's Substance, with its attributes and modes.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 392–393.
[62] *Ibid.*, p. 393.
[63] Chevrillon, p. 103, our italics.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] But compare the conclusion of *The Evolution of Physics*, by Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld:

'The reality created by modern physics is, indeed, far removed from the reality of the early days. But the aim of every physical theory still remains the same.

'With the help of physical theories we try to find our way through the maze of observed facts, to order and understand the world of our sense impressions. We want the observed facts to follow logically from our concept of reality. Without the belief that it is possible to grasp the reality with our theoretical constructions, without the belief in the inner harmony of our world, there could be no science. This belief is and always will remain the fundamental motive for all scientific creation. Throughout all our efforts, in every dramatic struggle between old and new views, we recognize the eternal longing for understanding, the ever-firm belief in the harmony of our world, continually strengthened by the increasing obstacles to comprehension' (pp. 312–313).

[68] Extracts printed in *V. & C.*, I, 354–366.
[69] *V. & C.*, I, 354 (cf. Chevrillon, p. 121, where this passage appears in a slightly different version).
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*, our italics.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 359.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 360.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] This Appendix, 'Induction and the Absolute'.
[76] *V. & C.*, I, 361.
[77] *V. & C.*, I, 128–130. Charles Bénard had been Taine's professor of philosophy at Bourbon College.
[78] *V. & C.*, I, 152, 16 November, 1851.

[79] On Spinoza's denial of the existence of final causes in nature, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, I, 422–440.

[80] *V. & C.*, I, 366–368.

[81] *V. & C.*, I, 230–231, 30 March, 1852.

[82] On this point, Taine entered into correspondence with Professor Adolphe Garnier, defending himself against charges of scepticism and materialism and making a bow to the Scotch Realism of Reid, which he knew to be Garnier's interest (*V. & C.*, I, 249–250, 260–264).

[83] *V. & C.*, I, 264 ff.

[84] *V. & C.*, I, 162–163, 25 November, 1851.

[85] *V. & C.*, I, 172–173, 11 December, 1851.

[86] *V. & C.*, I, 179–180, 22 December, 1851.

[87] *V. & C.*, I, 179–180, Note 3.

[88] *V. & C.*, I, 217.

[89] *V. & C.*, I, 228.

[90] *V. & C.*, I, 229.

[91] Hegel's *Begriff*, translated both as 'concept', and 'notion'.

[92] *Op. cit.*, Chapter II, on 'Rapport de la pensée et de l'être.—Théorie de concept', especially pp. 134–170.

[93] *Ibid.*, pp. 183–184.

[94] *V. & C.*, I, 217 (cf. our Chapter XI, Notes 6–10).

[95] Rosca, pp. 305–306 (quoting the *History of English Literature*).

APPENDIX B

THE QUESTION OF TAINE'S 'POSITIVISM'

It is customary to classify Taine as a 'Positivist' and to link his name with that of Auguste Comte.[1] However, any parallels which might be found by a detailed comparison, and they no doubt exist, should probably be traced to common influences, and especially to developments in the natural sciences of which both were naturally aware.

Though it would have been difficult for a student in Paris around 1850 not to have heard Comte's name, Taine probably did not study Comte's works till long after his own key ideas had been formulated. Comte's *Course of Positive Philosophy* was published between 1830 and 1842, yet we have found no mention of it in the many documents which survive from Taine's formative student years. The evidence seems to indicate that he first read Comte's famous work in 1860–1861, and that he had not studied it carefully till 1864, when he wrote an article for the *Journal des Débats* on its second edition.[2]

Further, Taine never was a positivist, or, if he did incorporate some of the ideas of that school, he did it critically and with a difference. This is evident from his well-known essay on Mill, which first appeared as an article in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, March, 1861, and did not receive its later title, *Le Positivisme anglais* until its appearance in book form, 1864.

Actually, Taine's development was moulded primarily by his early allegiance to Spinoza, modified by his studies in Hegel and others; the 'positivistic' elements in him, where they can be detected, are late and secondary.[3]

Perhaps a link to the movement can be found in the works of Charles Fourier, whose name Taine mentioned in a letter to Prévost-Paradol.[4] Horace M. Kallen treats Fourier and Comte

together in a section of his *Art and Freedom* headed 'Counter-Esthetics' (pp. 352–363); however, Taine is not mentioned among the positivists, whose motivation was so heavily social-reformist, but together with Zola in a section headed 'Philosophic Determinism as Rationalization of Esthetic Freedom'.[5] And, when Benedetto Croce discusses Taine in a chapter on 'Aesthetic Positivism and Naturalism', the latter's outstanding traits are found to place him *outside* the customary classification; the Hegelian Croce even finds Taine's thinking to be dialectical, but assumes that he either 'pretended or deluded' himself into ignoring the contradiction between his science and his idealism![6]

How, then, shall we account for the many references to Taine as a positivist? The answers may be fairly simple. First, he *did* share with Comte, and many others of his generation, a profound interest in the sciences. That many elements in his thought 'bear a close analogy to those of the evolutionary scientific system proposed by Comte'[7] does not prove either that he was indebted to Comte or that he was a 'positivist'.

Second, and perhaps most relevant for an understanding of changing tides of taste and thought in France, we must realize that the charge of 'positivist' was a ready battle-cry in the intellectual conflicts of the day, as with a critic like Ferdinand Brunetière—and the polemical aspect of Taine's career was especially prominent during his last two decades, when the *Origins* made him the target of much political controversy. As a matter of fact, critics of Taine can be placed in two groups: the idealists, who accuse him of being a positivist; and the materialists, to whom he is a benighted idealist. The truth is surely somewhere in between.[8]

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Joseph C. Sloane, 'The Tradition of Figure Painting and Concepts of Modern Art in France', p. 13, especially Note 58. L. J. A. Mercier, *The Challenge of Humanism*, adds 'to the pantheistic influence of Spinoza and Hegel, a scientific bent which came to him (Taine) through the lately developed positivism of Comte and Stuart Mill' (p. 48).

[2] See D. D. Rosca, *L'Influence de Hegel sur Taine*, pp. 261–264, note; and 354.

[3] See *ibid.*, pp. 244–280, where this issue is discussed in some detail.

[4] 25 March, 1849 (see Appendix A, 'Bourbon College').

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 462–471.

[6] *Aesthetic, As Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, pp. 392–394. Similarly, Cassirer, in *The Problem of Knowledge*, has a chapter headed 'Positivism and Its Ideal of Historical Knowledge: Taine', but he begins with the following qualification: 'He cannot be called a pupil of Comte in the strictest sense, for other influences connected with German romanticism were of much more effect in his education, influences diametrically opposite in trend to those of Comte. But it may have been his very endeavours to overcome these influences that drove him in the end to go beyond Comte in important particulars and throw himself unreservedly into the arms of "naturalism". Only there could he hope to find salvation from Hegel's metaphysics of history, which, unlike Comte, he understood thoroughly, and which had wholly captivated him in his youth' (p. 247).

[7] Sloane, *op. cit.*

[8] This section incorporates material from my discussion in 'Letters Pro and Con', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

APPENDIX C

TYPE ANALYSIS IN THE SCIENCES

LOGICALLY, the term *species* indicates 'A group of individuals having common attributes, and designated by a common name'; biologically, 'A category of classification lower than a genus or subgenus and above a subspecies or variety; a group of animals or plants which possess in common one or more characters distinguishing them from other similar groups, and do or may interbreed and reproduce their characters in their offspring, exhibiting between each other only minor differences bridged over by intermediate forms (see SUBSPECIES) and differences ascribable to age, sex, polymorphism, individual peculiarity or accident, or to selective breeding by man; a distinct kind or sort of animal or plant.'[1] The fact of interbreeding—i.e., of capacity for entering into a *productive relationship*—has usually been taken as the chief distinguishing characteristic of a biological species.[2]

Given a series of specimens, the procedure seems to be, first, one of gross description of their common elements. Then, assuming the specimens to possess a set of powers or potentialities as yet not completely known, the scientist places them in various experimental combinations, and the initial description is completed by specifying the kinds of *relations* into which the species is capable of entering. Thus, we discover that coal and diamonds are both carbon because they make the same compounds; hydrogen is a common element in acids; and, when in doubt, we can determine that two animals are both 'equine' by discovering if they interbreed.

The scientific goal is, if possible, to determine the definition of a type from its purest form. Thus, the common procedure in chemistry is to *isolate* the element out of the compounds in which it occurs, and, though hydrogen 'exists' in water, the chemist is

not satisfied that he knows its properties until he has examined the element in isolation and worked out its formula. We cannot do this with 'horse'; instead we perform the same process mentally, by *abstracting* the type or species from the particular horses examined, thus constructing an 'image' of an 'ideal' horse, such as is frequently found pictured in dictionaries.[3]

Thus, Morris R. Cohen makes the concept of *relations* central to scientific method: 'This search for laws of nature as *invariant relations* rather than statistical correlations is at the basis of the faith that where our readings persistently show variations which cannot be explained as within the "error" of our instruments, the variations must be due to the fact that what is measured is not homogeneous.'[4] 'But modern mathematical logic has taught us to avoid the old form of the issue between nominalism and (the older) realism by recognizing *the relational character of unity*.'[5]

What are some of the dangers and virtues of such abstraction of 'invariant relations' in science? Something is inevitably lost in the process. We no longer have individuals, with all their specific determinations: we have left behind Man O'War, the iceman's dray horse, the gangling colt, and the wild Arabian steed. 'For in isolating abstract elements we are apt to forget how they function in the actual totality from which they are abstracted.'[6] This is the gist of Bergson's critique of analysis and abstraction in metaphysics: '. . . the great error . . . lies in believing that while remaining on the same level we can find behind the word a thing. Such has been the error of those philosophers who have not been able to resign themselves to being only psychologists in psychology, Taine and Stuart Mill, for example. Psychologists in the method they apply, they have remained metaphysicians in the object they set before themselves. They desire an intuition, and by a strange inconsistency they seek this intuition in analysis which is the very negation of it.'[7] John Dewey's 'Instrumentalism' tends to link the concrete with the practical and criticize 'false' abstractions as lacking pragmatic, verifiable consequences.[8]

Further, the concepts we use in abstracting may be arbitrarily chosen and overlook the very clue needed for further progress in knowledge. Mill puts the requirements as follows: '. . . our general conceptions must be "clear" and "appropriate" to the matter in hand'[9]; and he analyses these criteria in terms of the correspondence of concepts to a real 'agreement' among the phenomena.[10] The importance of *clarity* has been stressed by

many thinkers, like Cohen, who have pointed out that the mind often travels 'not from the particular to the universal but from the vague to the definite.'[11] The only possible remedy for these inevitable dangers of abstraction would seem to be constant critical examination of our theoretical apparatus, to supplement the usual processes of empirical verification.

However, abstraction is surely necessary, since it is only through synthesis of knowledge, and through such concepts as 'atomic weight' and 'mammal', that science has been able to progress beyond its most primitive stages. As Cohen says in his discussion of 'Reason in Social Science': 'An intelligent use of type analysis therefore depends upon this very ability of neglecting in the phenomena before us all that is irrelevant and non-typical. . . . The weakness of the ordinary account of induction is that it minimizes this inventive genius.'[12]

The ultimate issue at stage is the *status* of the type, the rôle it plays in our understanding of nature. Though Darwin has made us wary of premature generalizations and aware of the fact of development, evolution has not destroyed the fact that species *exist*. That hydrogen is hydrogen and not carbon—'A rose is a rose is a rose'—is not a judgment of value, but a stubborn fact. There are discontinuities, as well as continuities in nature: 'Thus we could never recognize any biologic species if there were not gaps between certain classes of animals (or plants) and others.'[13]

NOTES

[1] *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Springfield, Mass., 1931.

[2] For some of the more recent complications of the species concept, see Ernst Mayr, *Systematics and the Origin of Species*, New York: Columbia, 1942, especially Chapter V, 'The Systematic Categories and the New Species Concept'.

[3] The original, scholastic meaning of the word *species* had to do with 'image' or 'idea', coming from the Latin word for 'look'.

[4] *Reason and Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of Scientific Method*, p. 98 (cf. our Chapter XI, Note 53).

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 390, our italics.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 365.

[7] *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, especially p. 27 ff. Quote from p. 34.

[8] Cf. *How We Think*, Chapter X, 'Concrete and Abstract Thinking'.

[9] *A System of Logic*, p. 427.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 429–433.

[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 124. Cf. our Chapter II, p. 20, where this idea is given an Hegelian formulation.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 366.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 154. Consider, on this subject, the concluding paragraphs of D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's classic biological treatise, *On Growth and Form* (Macmillan, 1948): 'A "principle of discontinuity", then, is inherent in all our classifications, whether mathematical, physical, or biological; and the infinitude of possible forms, always limited, may be further reduced and discontinuity further revealed by imposing conditions—As, for example, that our parameters must be whole numbers, or proceed by *quanta*, as the physicists say. The lines of the spectrum, the six families of crystals, Dalton's atomic law, the chemical elements themselves, all illustrate this principle of discontinuity. In short, nature proceeds *from one type to another* among organic as well as inorganic forms; and these types vary according to their own parameters, and are defined by physico-mathematical conditions of possibility. In natural history Cuvier's "types" may not be perfectly chosen nor numerous enough, but *types* they are: and to seek for stepping-stones across the gaps between them is to seek in vain, for ever.

'This is no argument against the theory of evolutionary descent. . . .' (p. 1094).

Recognition of types does not deny the possibilities of transformation and even 'creation', but sets rough limits to those possibilities. In the laboratory, man may, in a sense, *create* new elements out of combinations of the old, just as he has already learned to induce limited biological mutations; but probably he is thus merely hastening a natural process, *actualizing a potentiality* which was nature's own.

APPENDIX D

BOSANQUET'S HEGELIAN ANALYSIS OF 'THE CONCRETE UNIVERSAL'

A good statement of the organic principle (whether 'vicious' or not may be, ultimately, a matter of taste) is found in Bosanquet's Gifford Lectures (1911) published under the title of *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (especially in Lecture II, on 'The Concrete Universal'). Like Taine in the last book of *On Intelligence*,[1] Bosanquet uses the principle of non-contradiction: 'The endeavour to remove contradiction in experience is therefore more successful when it explicitly assumes a further shape, such as is indicated by the term "a whole of parts", "an organism", "a system", or more generally "a world".'[2] However, he goes further in the direction of accepting Hegel's dialectical principle: 'The universal in the form of a world refers to diversity of content within every member, as the universal in the form of a class neglects it. Such a *diversity recognized as a unity*, a macrocosm constituted by microcosms, is the type of the concrete universal.'[3] In this view, the only concrete universal is the individual itself, fully understood: 'We conclude, then, that the Individual is one in idea with *the true infinite*, and is the embodiment of the concrete universal, which is the universal as asserting itself to the full *through identity and through difference together*. It is complete and coherent—characters whose connection is established by the relation above drawn out between wholeness and non-contradiction. And in the ultimate sense *there can be only one Individual*.'[4] The last sentence points in the direction of a cosmic Absolute, which, in some versions, is called God.

In general, such an extension of the concrete universal concept seems to be most congenial to idealist-aesthetic philosophies, like that of Bosanquet (and of Hegel, from whom Bosanquet derives).

Thus, Bosanquet emphasizes the centrality of thought,[5] and his best examples are from the world of art. 'The true office of thought, we begin to see, is to build up, to inspire with meaning, to intensify, to "vivify".'[6] This tendency becomes especially clear in the concluding lecture ('Nature, the Self, and the Absolute') in which Dante's *Divine Comedy* is chosen as 'a remote analogue of the Absolute'.[7]

NOTES

[1] Cf. our Chapter XI, 'Taine's Position . . .'.

[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 36–37.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 38, our italics.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 72, our italics. On the problem of the relations between 'true' and 'false' *infinites* and 'true' and 'false' *abstractions*, see our Chapter II, Note 103.

[5] In sensation, feeling, free activity: 'The ultimate tendency of thought . . . is not to generalize, but to constitute a world.' (*Ibid.*, p. 55.)

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 379.

APPENDIX E

SCALES OF VALUE IN 'THE IDEAL IN ART'

NOTES

(1) The diagrams should be pictured as combining to form a *single* four-sided pyramid. At the centre is 'force' (or 'energy' or 'life') and the general unity of Real and Ideal which Taine assumes (IV). 'The Converging Degree of Effects' is necessarily slighted, since it is a dynamic element and a total Gestalt, which cannot very well be worked into a static diagram.

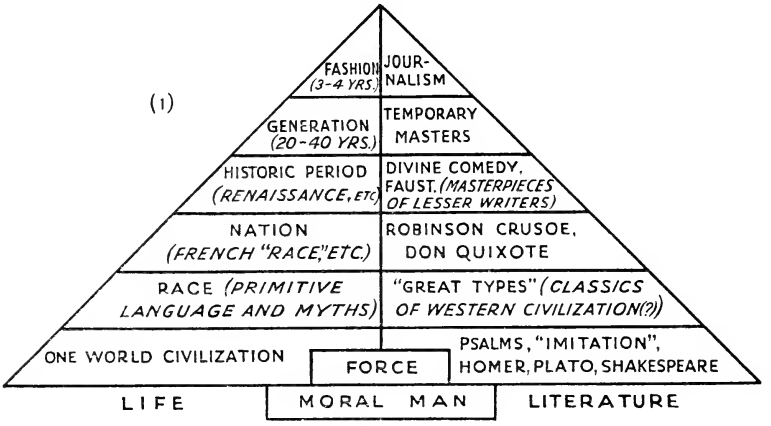
(2) A confusion which might result from the connotations of 'convergence' and 'higher and lower' must be avoided. The *bottom* and *centre* of the pyramid represents the *highest* value; and, instead of *converging* to a point, the forces should be pictured as *spreading out* to cover more area. In this way, *size* can be correlated with *value*.

(3) As has been noted (Chapter X, 'The Problem of Causation'), the truest symbol would be an organism, which unfortunately cannot be pictured in two dimensions. Thus, separation of the 'moral' man from the 'physical' man is perhaps unjust to Taine's ultimate intention, which was to consider these as 'one thing in two aspects', like the attributes of Spinoza's one Substance. There is no special validity claimed for any one of the diagrammatic forms, but, however they might be improved, they are all necessarily inadequate, since they must finally be pictured as combining to form *a living whole*.

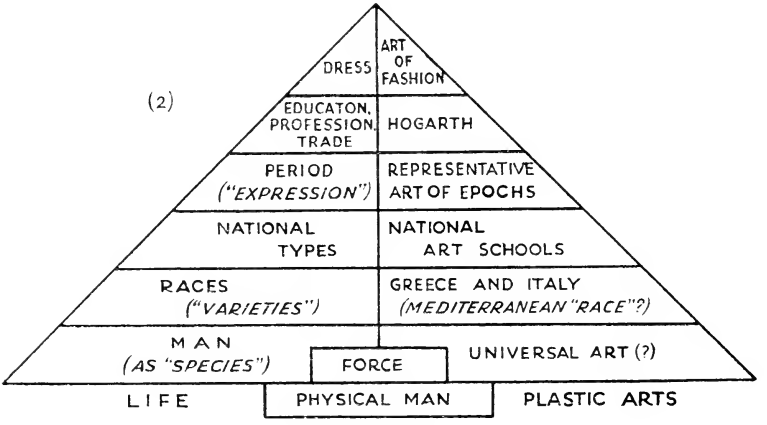
(4) In general, the up-and-down diagram has been used to represent more or less *static* relationships; left-to-right, dynamic relationships of *development*.

(5) Finally, Taine's development of these scales is not always systematic or complete. Items which have been *interpolated* are followed by a question mark (?).

I. SCALES OF PERMANENCE: A. Individual Force



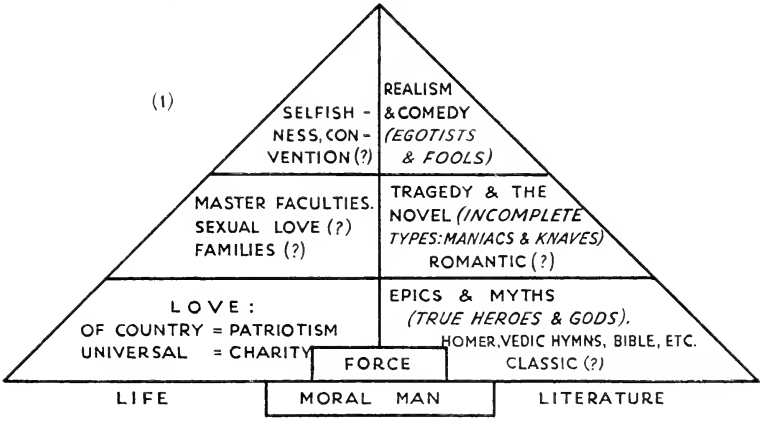
(pages 211–240)



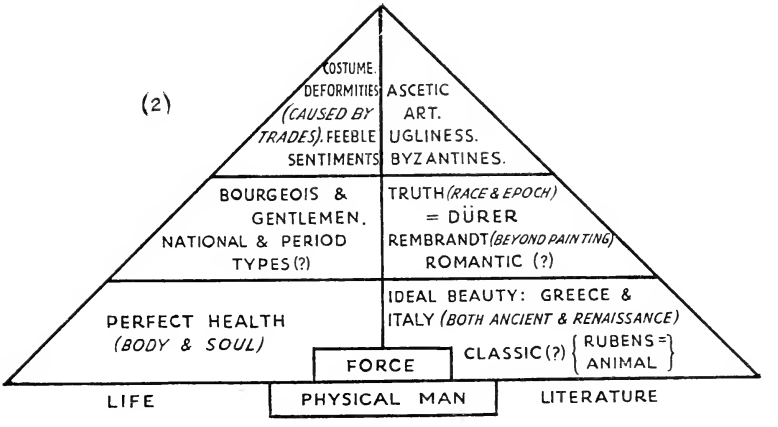
(pages 241–261)

IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER: Internal Relations

I. SCALES OF PERMANENCE : B. Social Force



(pages 266–285)

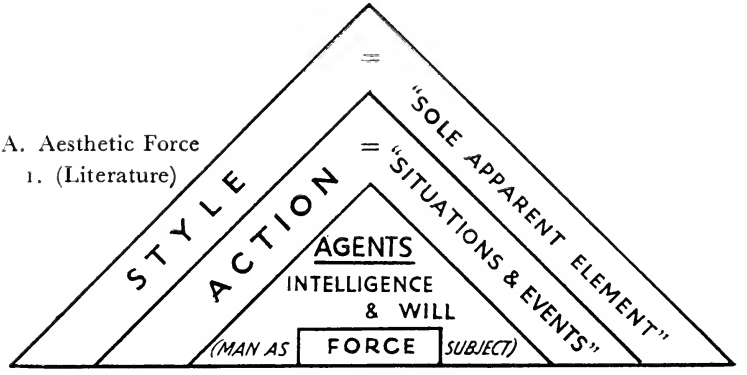


(pages 286–306)

BENEFICENCE OF CHARACTER : External Relations

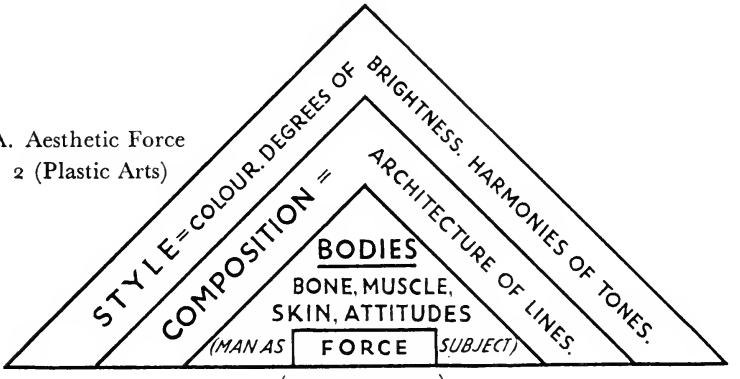
II. SCALES OF DEVELOPMENT:

A. Aesthetic Force
1. (Literature)



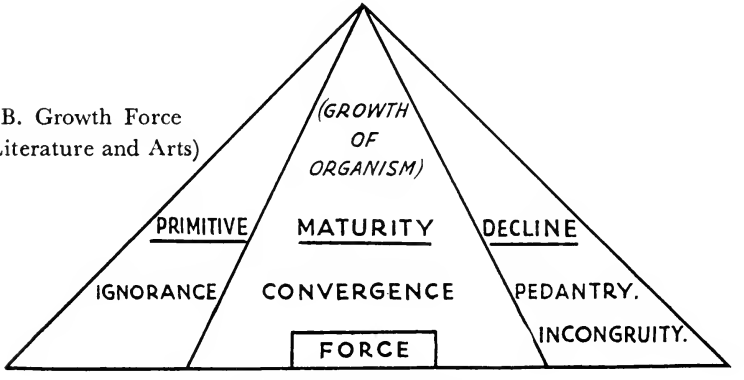
(pages 312–324)

A. Aesthetic Force
2 (Plastic Arts)



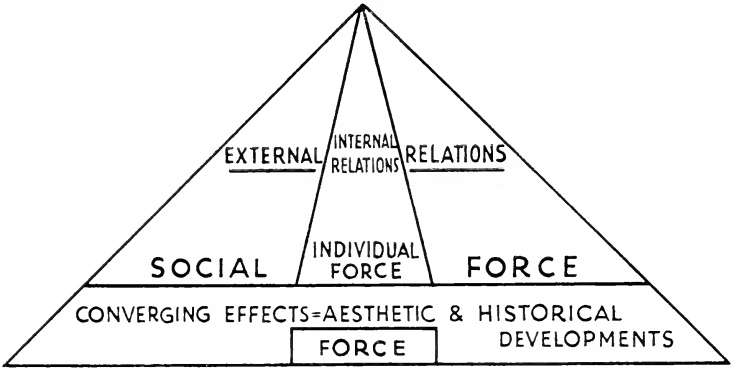
(pages 333–341)

B. Growth Force
(Literature and Arts)



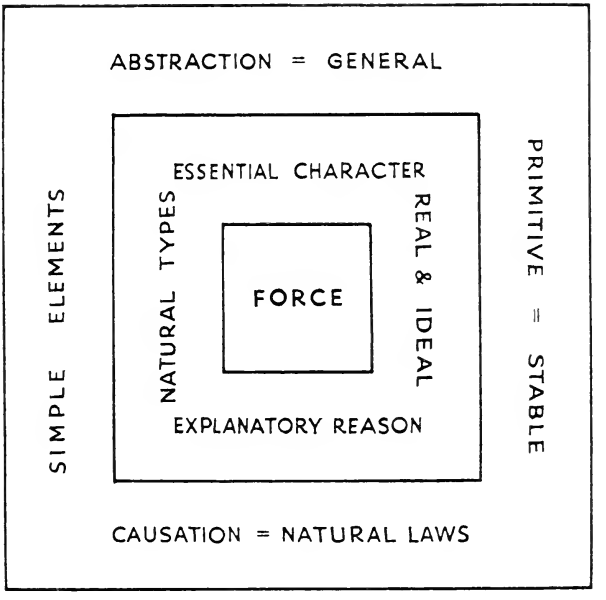
(pages 324–333; 342–351)

III. DIAGRAM OF TOTAL FORCES



Masterpiece : " the *greatest force* receives the *greatest development* " (p. 353)

IV. CENTRE AND BASE OF PYRAMID



APPENDIX F

TAINE'S CRITERIA APPLIED TO MODERN ABSTRACT ART

PERHAPS the permanent value of Taine's criteria can be illustrated by brief reference to an example of modern 'abstract' art, namely, Picasso's 'Guernica' mural. Analysis would reveal that the 'subject' of that painting is, not so much the people or animals portrayed, but rather the 'nightmare' of modern war—even more specifically, Picasso's feelings of revulsion at the bombing of the Spanish town after which the mural was named. The artist has communicated his feelings by means of more or less recognizable symbols and forms, one of them a horse, distorted in Picasso's special style so that it may fit into his total design, express animal terror, and so forth: the 'universal' horse has here been 'modified' so as to 'make predominant an essential character'. Thus, a complete analysis would neglect neither the objective nor the subjective experiential elements involved; and judgment would result both from realization of the profundity of Picasso's theme and the skill with which he has fused many elements to produce his overwhelming effect.

The need for such a balanced view has sometimes been lost sight of in modern criticism because of a misunderstanding of the significance of abstraction in art.[1] So-called 'abstract' art at its best (the cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque may be taken as examples) is not arbitrary, but rather a highly individualized interpretation of nature's forms, what Clement Greenberg has called 'a truer, completer imitation of nature'.[2] 'Thus the painter abandoned his interest in the concrete appearance, for example, of a glass and tried instead to approximate by analogy the way in which nature had married the straight contours that defined the glass vertically to the curved ones that defined it laterally.

Nature no longer offered *appearances* to imitate, but *principles* to parallel.'[3]

'As the poem, play, or novel depends for its final principle of form on the prevailing conception of *the essential structure that integrates an event or cluster of events in actuality*, so the form of a picture depends always on a similar conception of *the structure that integrates visual experience* "in nature". The spontaneous integrity and completeness of the event or thing seen guides the artist in forming the invented event or object that is the work of art.' Thus, because 'the integrity of objects in nature' is realized, 'The best modern painting, though it is mostly abstract painting, remains *naturalistic* in its core, despite all appearances to the contrary. *It refers to the structure of the given world both outside and inside human beings.* The artist who, like the Nabis, the later Kandinsky, and so many of the disciples of the Bauhaus, tries to refer to anything else walks in a void.'[4] 'Structure' and 'principles' here are close in meaning to Taine's 'ideal', and the ultimate criterion of value, even for many of the more extreme forms of modern art, may still be their combination of concreteness and universality.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Rudolf Arnheim on the element of abstraction found even in representational art: '. . . the form element which is so prominent in highly abstract art is indispensable and exactly of the same kind in any naturalistic representation which deserves the name of art'.

'The two types of representation are nothing but the extreme ends of a scale which allows all possible styles of art to be arranged in a sequence leading from the pure ornament through all degrees of abstractness to extreme realism.' ('Perceptual Abstraction and Art', p. 74.)

[2] 'The Role of Nature in Modern Painting', *Partisan Review*, January 1949, p. 79.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 81, our italics.

[4] *Ibid.*, our italics.

APPENDIX G

TAINE AND THE NATURALIST TRADITION

As Professor John H. Randall, Jr., has pointed out, 'Nature' is, in fact, 'the oldest idea in the Western intellectual tradition'.[1] The chief characteristic which seems to have persisted through the centuries as a link among the various naturalisms has been their opposition or relative indifference to any supernatural or transcendental principle as a category or source of explanation; the naturalist has been, generally, one who has insisted on seeking the 'nature of things' in the things themselves, and not in any principle external to them. Negatively, this has precluded acceptance of the Bible, for example, as divine revelation; positively, it has tended to stress the social, or 'environmental', explanation. In the field of criticism, as in that of philosophy generally, this temper of thought has had three compellingly influential formulations: the Aristotelian, the Romantic, and the scientific (the last being distinguished as Naturalism, properly so called, with a large 'N').[2]

Without pretending to do more than skim the surface of many centuries of intellectual history, we may briefly recall some of the ways in which 'nature' provided criteria for criticism in each of these systems. The Aristotelian *imitated* nature; *realized* the nature, i.e. potentialities, of an art, in terms of object, means, and manner of imitation; *valued* nature, in the sense of *normality*, as a 'golden mean' between the excesses possible to each kind of thing; and was most influential in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The Romantic also sought the 'natural', but stressed *originality* and *individuality*, rather than typicality; he valued *growth* or progress and began to think in terms of *organic* unity and the reconciliation of opposites. Then, 'Taking over the romantic interest in origins, in historical change, in the

conception of development, science worked out the idea of organic evolution and placed man in nature, not spiritually, as the romantics had sought to do, but physically',[3] producing late nineteenth-century Naturalism. Professor Foerster states the continuity of these three traditions succinctly by speaking of 'another Renaissance, the naturistic Renaissance, composed of two movements, the romantic and the scientific'.[4]

Speaking very broadly, Taine combined elements from all three of these traditions. His Positivism seems obvious, but it was the most superficial layer of his thinking.[5] Professor Levin stresses his individualism and Romanticism[6]; Irving Babbitt reproaches him for following the 'cult of energy' of Balzac and Stendhal[7]; and nothing could be more Romantic than his critical treatment of Shakespeare, for example.[8] His ideas of imitation, of the ideal as normal or typical, of essential character, of analysis of the work of art into its parts, and of health as a criterion of the ideal in the plastic arts—all these are Aristotelian in essence; and the spirit of *The Philosophy of Art* is quite in harmony with that of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Compare to Taine, for example, the manner in which Aristotle combines analysis of poetry with rules for its judgment; his discussion of the origin of poetry in imitation and the various manners of that imitation (Chapters 3 and 4); his analysis of the qualitative parts of a tragedy (Chapter 6), which Taine follows in his breakdown of literature into agents, actions, and style (*The Ideal in Art*, Chapter I, Part 3). Not only are there such interesting parallels of detail, fully explicable by Taine's classical training, but the Stagirite would surely have appreciated Taine's neat logic and precise style.[9]

NOTES

[1] 'The Nature of Naturalism', pp. 354–382, in *Naturalism and the Human Spirit* (ed. by Y. H. Krikorian), p. 354.

[2] One of those who has recently attempted a revaluation of Taine is Harry Levin, in an essay on 'Literature as an Institution' (first printed in *Accent*, Spring, 1946; referred to as reprinted in Schorer's *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*). Professor Levin similarly distinguishes three movements which stressed the relations between literature and society: Renaissance humanism, which developed the historical point of view; Romantic nationalism, which developed the importance of geography (and, in Taine, race); and scientific positivism, led by Taine, which formulated a sociological approach

(p. 546). We have rather stressed the importance, for Taine, of *psychology*, which Professor Levin characterizes as 'a loose system' (p. 547).

[3] Norman Foerster, *Towards Standards*, p. 36.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[5] Cf. Appendix B, 'The Question of Taine's "Positivism".'

[6] *Op. cit.*, pp. 547–548.

[7] *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, p. 223.

[8] *History of English Literature*, Book II, Chapter IV.

[9] For elaboration of some of these tendencies and categories, which unite Taine to the Aristotelian tradition, see Professor Pepper's discussion of 'Formistic Criticism', Chapter 5 in *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*. A footnote on p. 111 discusses Taine's *History* and *The Ideal in Art*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. SELECTED LIST OF TAINE'S WORKS, WITH BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

This list makes no claim to completeness, but is designed rather to further the aims of our study by providing a minimum of information which should be included in a genetic account of Taine's development. For more complete data the reader should consult:

1. *H. Taine, Sa Vie et sa correspondance*, Paris: Hachette, 1908 (3rd edition), in 4 volumes (referred to as '*V. & C.*'). The introductory chapters list Taine's important works and discuss the circumstances under which they were written.[1]

2. 'Bibliographie des œuvres de Taine', Appendix I (pp. 161–204) in Victor Giraud's *Essai sur Taine: son œuvre et son influence*, Paris: Hachette, 1901. Appendix II (pp. 209–219) is an out-of-date 'Bibliographie des travaux sur Taine'.

3. A. Laborde-Milaà, *Hippolyte Taine: Essai d'une biographie intellectuelle*, Paris, 1909, 223 pages, contains a useful 'Schéma logique et chronologique de l'œuvre de Taine' (Appendix I, pp. 216–217) and a 'Bibliographie des *Essais*, *Nouveaux Essais*, *Derniers Essais de critique et d'histoire*, et des articles non recueillis' (Appendix II, pp. 219–223). This last was based on the *definitive* editions and has therefore been used for our listings of the essays.

4. For the latest and most complete listing of works by and about Taine, see Hugo P. Thieme, *Bibliographie de la littérature française de* 1800 *à* 1930, Paris, 1933, in 3 volumes, Vol. II, pp. 835–845.

In our own bibliography, only Taine's major works are included, and an attempt is made to list them in the order of their composition. In cases where they were written over a period of years, as with the *History of English Literature* and the collections of essays, such an order can only be approximated.

The following items are given in each case:

(1) The date or dates of composition, the title of the book as it will most probably be available to a reader today, and an English translation of the title.

(2) A brief account of the circumstances under which it was written, and a description of its contents, where relevant. Dates of essays are dates of first publication, given in Giraud's 'Bibliographie'.

(3) A listing of the first French edition.

(4) A brief account of its later publishing history, where relevant.

(5) Where one is available, the English translation will be listed.

[1] English: *Life and Letters* of H. Taine, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., etc. 1902–1908, 3 vols. Vol. 1–2, translated by Mrs. R. L. Devonshire; Vol. 3, abridged and translated by E. Sparvel-Bayly. Contents: Vol. I, 1828–1852; Vol. II, 1853–1870; Vol. III, 1870–1892.

For the purposes of this study, all page references have been to the 'Uniform Library Edition' of *Taine's Works*, published in New York by Henry Holt and Company, as follows (in the order of their appearance in our Bibliography):

A Tour Through the Pyrenees (tr. J. S. Fiske), 1876, 349 pages.

History of English Literature (tr. H. van Laun), in 2 vols., 1882, 620 and 658 pages.

Notes on Paris (tr. J. A. Stevens), 1879, 372 pages.

Italy: Rome and Naples (tr. J. Durand), Fourth Edition, 363 pages.

Italy: Florence and Venice (tr. J. Durand), 1883, 385 pages.

Lectures on Art (tr. J. Durand), *First Series*, 1883, 354 pages; *Second Series*, 1884, 540 pages.

On Intelligence (tr. T. D. Haye), in 2 vols., 1884, 266 and 289 pages.

Notes on England (tr. W. F. Rae), 1885, 377 pages.

The Ancient Regime (tr. J. Durand), 1885, 421 pages.

The French Revolution (tr. J. Durand), in 3 vols., 1878, 356 pages; 1885, 358 pages; 1885, 509 pages.

In all other cases the French edition used has been specified. All other translations in the text and footnotes are by this author and, unless listed in Chapter II, Note 2, are designated 'S. J. K.'

1852 (July)–1853 (February)

La Fontaine et ses fables [La Fontaine and His Fables]

First mentioned as a thesis topic on 17 July, 1852 (*V. & C.*, I, 289), and finished by 19 February, 1853 (*V. & C.*, I, 325). The materials for this study had been gathered as part of Taine's studies for the 'agrégation' in letters (*V. & C.*, I, 308), for which he had been preparing since the beginning of 1852, shortly after the *Coup d'état* and abolition of the 'agrégation' in philosophy.

1853 (May).—*Essai sur les fables de La Fontaine*, thèse pour le doctorat ès lettres présentée à la Faculté de Paris par H. Taine, licencié ès lettres, ancien élève de l'École normale, Paris: Vve Joubert, 1853, 200 pages.

The 2nd edition (1854) was the only one which included the following preface: 'Le lecteur dira: Ceci n'est pas un essai sur les fables de La Fontaine. En effet, c'est une étude sur le Beau, et bien pis, une thèse de *Sorbonne*. De là les raisonnements, les abstractions, le système; la poésie est en fort mauvaise compagnie. Si parmi les syllogismes croissent quelques pauvres fleurs, c'est la faute ou le mérite de La Fontaine; où n'en ferait-il pas naître? Allez dans la cour humide du triste et régulier monument, vous verrez des volubilis et des giroflées demi-flétries grimper le long d'une croisée grillée et du mur verdi d'où l'eau suinte. On n'en doit pas demander de plus belles à la critique. Lisez d'ailleurs l'inscription que nous mettons sur la porte: *Salle de Doctorat*' (Giraud, *Essai sur Taine*, p. 161).

The 3rd edition (Paris: Hachette, 1861) bore the book's present title and was prefaced as follows: 'Ce livre, comme le *Voyage aux Pyrénées*, a été refondu et

récrit presque en entier'; the changes in this edition are analyzed by Rosca (pp. 339–340, Note 3).

The 'Preface', which is found in the definitive 6th edition (1875), may have been written for either the 4th or 5th editions, neither of which has survived. By 1901, in its 15th edition. We have used a 1947 reprint, no edition indicated, vi–346 pages.

1852 (July)–1853 (February)

De personis platonicis [On Plato's People]

Taine's Latin thesis was written during the same period as, and submitted simultaneously with, the *La Fontaine*.

1853 (May).—*De personis platonicis*, commentationem scripsit H. Taine ad doctoris gradum promovendum. Parisiis, apud Vam Joubert bibliopolam. Via dicta des Grès, No. 14, 1853, 86 pages.

The contents of this essay were later used for an article on 'Les jeunes gens de Platon', which was included in the *Critical and Historical Essays*.

1853 (March)–(December)

Essai sur Tite-Live [Essay on Livy]

By 24 July Taine had 'lu une cinquantaine de volumes, plus les quinze cent soixante-dix-sept pages de Tite-Live' (*V. & C.*, II, 6), and the book was finished by the end of the year (*V. & C.*, II, 2).

This volume was written as Taine's entry in a competition announced by the French Academy, for a prize to be awarded in 1855, on the following subject:

> Étude critique et oratoire sur la génie de Tite Live; faire connaître, par quelques traits essentiels de la société romaine au siècle d'Auguste, dans quelles conditions de lumières et de liberté écrivit Tite Live, et rechercher ce qu'on peut savoir des circonstances de sa vie.
>
> Résumer les présomptions d'erreur et de vérité qu'on peut attacher à ses récits, d'après les sources qu'il a consultées et d'après sa méthode de composition historique, et, sous ce rapport, apprécier surtout les jugements qu'ont portés de son ouvrage Machiavel, Montesquieu, de Beaufort et Niebuhr.
>
> Faire ressortir par des analyses, des exemples bien choisis et des fragments étendus de traduction, les principaux mérites et le grand caractère de sa narration, ses vues morales et politiques, et son génie d'expression, en marquant aussi quel rang il occupe entre les grands modèles de l'antiquité, et quelle étude féconde il peut encore offrir à l'art historique de notre siècle. (*Essai sur Tite-Live*, p. 1.)

In July, Taine outlined his work as follows:

> Voici mon Tite-Live en abrégé. Trois parties: 1° biographie de Tite-Live, et son temps (il reste deux phrases et demie sur son compte, et le coquin ne dit pas un mot de lui-même dans ses 1500 pages); 2° l'histoire considerée comme une science: au point de vue de la vérité des faits (Tite-Live,

Beaufort, Niebuhr), au point de vue des généralizations (Tite-Live, Machiavel, Montesquieu); 3° l'histoire considerée comme un art: caractères des nations et des individus—narrations et discours—style et langue. C'est exactement le plan du programme.

La difficulté pour moi, dans une recherche, est de trouver un trait caractéristique et dominant duquel tout peut se déduire géometriquement, en un mot d'avoir la formule de la chose. Il me semble que celle de Tite-Live est la suivante: un *orateur* qui se fait historien. (*V. & C.*, II, 7.)

As a result of his steady grind of work, he fell ill with laryngitis in October, a turn for the worse in his health which continued and led to his trip to the Pyrenees the following year.

There was a struggle within the French Academy in 1854 for and against giving Taine's *Essay on Livy* the prize. William Guizot, the historian and statesman, liked it, but it became a bone of political contention (*V. & C.*, II, 37). It was criticized as showing too much inclination for modern schools of philosophy of history; among those who did not approve was Victor Cousin (*V. & C.*, II, 56–60). After some minor revisions had been made, to suit the objectors, the prize was finally awarded in May of 1855 (*V. & C.*, II, 100).

1856 (April).—*Essai sur Tite-Live*, par H. Taine, ancien élève de l'École normale, docteur ès lettres. Ouvrage couronné par l'Académie française, Paris: Hachette, 1856, 348 pages.

The 5th edition (1890) was reviewed and corrected; we have used the 11th edition (no date, viii–364 pages).

1854 (May–December)

Voyage aux Pyrénées [Voyage to the Pyrenees]

Suggested to Hachette in May (*V. & C.*, II, 53) and completed by the end of the year.

Because of Taine's ill-health, his friend, Doctor Gueneau de Mussy, suggested in the Spring that he travel south to Saint-Sauveur. By a happy coincidence, Hachette was looking for some one at the time to write a short Guide to the Pyrenees. On the recommendation of Jules Simon, this assignment was given to Taine (*V. & C.*, II, 5), who made the trip that summer, putting his impressions into long letters to his mother and sisters. The book was finished by the end of the year. It was through this volume that Taine began his long association with the 'Librairie Hachette'.

1855 (April).—*Voyage aux eaux des Pyrénées*, par H. Taine. Illustré de 65 vignettes sur bois par G. Doré, Paris: Hachette, 1855, 274 pages.

This was before most of Gustave Doré's major works of illustration (Dante, Cervantes, Milton, La Fontaine, Rabelais, and the Bible), but already his facility and magnificent style were evident. The second edition (1858) saw the title changed to its present form, together with a thorough rewriting of the text. By 1907, in its 17th edition.

English: *A Tour Through the Pyrenees*, by H. A. Taine, translated by J. Safford Fiske, with illustrations by G. Doré. New York: H. Holt and Co., 1874, xvi–523 pages.

1855 (February)–1858 (January)

Essais de critique et d'histoire [Critical and Historical Essays]

Beginning early in 1855, soon after completion of the *Voyage to the Pyrenees*, and continuing more or less unabated for the rest of his life, a steady stream of critical essays flowed from Taine's pen, appearing chiefly in the *Revue de l'Instruction Publique*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and the *Journal des Débats*. During the eight years which immediately followed (1855–1863), however, there were three main themes evident in these articles, providing the raw materials for as many books: first, philosophy of history, most strongly evident in this first collection of his essays; second, French philosophy, contemporary and of the recent past; and third, English literature.

These interests were all being pursued simultaneously and were, of course, closely interrelated: thus, an article on the historian, Michelet, appeared in February, 1855; two on Macaulay, in March, 1855; and the first on the French philosophers, a review of Laromiguière, in June, 1855 (Giraud, pp. 163–164). Despite the fact that the book on French philosophy appeared first (1857), the *Critical and Historical Essays* are listed first, since most of these had been written before the more strictly philosophical book appeared, and they provide a natural transition from Taine's concern with philosophy of history in the *Essay on Livy*.

1858 (February).—*Essais de critique et d'histoire*, par H. Taine, Paris: Hachette, 1858, 412 pages.

This volume underwent many changes in subsequent editions, as essays were taken out for incorporation in other volumes (chiefly the *History of English Literature* and the *New Critical and Historical Essays*) and replaced by others. The definitive 10th edition (1904), which we have used, included the prefaces of both the 1st and the 2nd (1866) editions, together with the following essays: '*Les Caractères* de La Bruyère' (February, 1855); 'Philosophie religieuse' (August, 1855); 'Les jeunes gens de Platon' (September, 1855); 'M. Michelet' (March, 1856); 'M. Guizot' (June, 1856); 'Xenophon' (July, 1856); 'Saint-Simon' (July-August, 1856); 'Fléchier' (November, 1856); 'Madame de la Fayette' (February, 1857); 'M. Troplong et M. de Montalembert' (April, 1857).

1855 (June)–1856 (October)

Les Philosophes classiques du XIXme siècle en France [The Classic Philosophers of the 19th Century in France]

The first chapter appeared as a review of Laromiguière (June, 1855); the concluding chapters (later headed 'De la méthode'), as 'L'analyse' (11 September, 1856) and 'Le Système' (9 October, 1856).

The fact that he had published three successful books gave Taine the courage to write this devastating polemic against Victor Cousin's 'eclecticism'. As he made clear in the autobiographical 'Preface' to the 2nd edition (1860):

> Le lecteur me pardonnera s'il considère qu'il s'agissait non de spéculation pure, mais d'une philosophie régnante, officielle, qui forme les esprits depuis un quart de siècle, qui les formera encore pendant un quart de siècle, qui

les prend du moment ou ils s'ouvrent, qui pèse sur eux avec toute la force d'une institution, qui dure en eux, qui les tient dans le rest de leur carrière, qui, sous toutes les formes et par toutes les bouches, vient à toute minute heurter ou étouffer toute invention et tout effort. Je l'ai subie moi-même, et je sens bien que je n'aurais pu en parler autrement. (p. iii.)

1857 (January).—*Les Philosophes français du XIXme siècle*, par H. Taine, ancien élève de l'École normale, docteur ès lettres, Paris: Hachette, 1857, 367 pages.

The 3rd, definitive edition (October, 1868), bore the present title, and it was revised, not so much in content, as in tone, which was softened somewhat throughout. We have used the 13th edition, no date.

1855 (March)–1863 (December)

Histoire de la littérature anglaise [History of English Literature]. Dedicated to F. Guizot, French historian and statesman.

Taine's labours on his masterpiece lasted over eight years, beginning with articles on Macaulay (March, 1855) and ending with the famous 'Introduction', which first appeared as an article on 'L'Histoire, son présent et son avenir' (December, 1863). The story of its composition is not easily summarized, since, though Taine had his method clearly in mind from the beginning, he shuttled back and forth between the modern and earlier writers, and there were frequent interruptions.

At first Taine had thought of a study of Shakespeare (*V. & C.*, II, 83, 5 November, 1854), and a Shakespeare article was among the early products (July, 1856). Some of the best articles were published in 1856: Anglo-Saxons (January), Normans (February), Dickens (February), Chaucer (March), Macaulay (April), Shakespeare (July), Ben Jonson (November), and Spenser (December).

Taine's writing then began to slacken off because of ill health: in 1857, he published for the *History* only on Thackeray (January) and Milton (June); in 1858, on Swift (August) and Dryden (December); and 1859 was a total blank. The voyage to the Pyrenees (1854) had cured his laryngitis, but subsequent overwork—as a result of which Taine had achieved remarkable success for a young man in his late twenties—led in 1857 to 'une crise de fatigue cérébrale et de dépression nerveuse qui dura pendant plus de deux ans' (*V. & C.*, II, 149). This forced him to suspend his philosophic labours completely and to work at literary study only intermittently: there were periods when he could not even read.

By the beginning of 1858, Taine was capable of working two or three hours a day, and it was during this period that he wrote his important essay on Balzac and the studies of Swift and Dryden. In the autumn of that year, he travelled in Belgium, Holland, the Rhine valley, and western Germany, but, despite these diversions, his illness continued, and 1859 was 'la plus triste et la plus stérile de sa vie' (*V. & C.*, II, 153). By the end of the year he was working again; he was subsequently subject to occasional periods of nervous fatigue, though they were never again so painfully severe as during these three years.

In 1860, Taine published on Addison (January), the Restoration (May), and Carlyle (October–November). In 1861: Mill (March) and Tennyson (April). After the summer he turned his attention to the 18th century (December, 1861, and January, 1862). In 1862: the Saxons (March), Reformation (April–May), Modern Life (September), Byron (October), and Chaucer (December). In 1863: Renaissance poets (January–March), Renaissance theatre (April–May), Milton (April), Renaissance prose (June), Sheridan (November); and the conclusion of the fourth volume, originally entitled 'Voyage en Angleterre' (October–November).

At times Taine was discouraged by the magnitude of his undertaking. Thus, he wrote to Suckau in January, 1861:

> Par contre-coup, cela m'a fait réfléchir sur mon *Histoire de la Littérature anglaise*; j'hésite à la faire, ce sera trop long, il faudra entrer dans des jugements sur de trop petits personnages. Les idées générales se trouvent dans les grands hommes, et l'on n'a qu'à les répéter, quand on recontre les petits ou les genres accessoires. Peut-être ne ferai-je qu'une suite d'articles sur les grands hommes et les grands genres, une série de specimens au lieu d'une carte détaillée. Quel est ton avis? Je suis incertain, c'est l'état que j'aime le moins. . . . (*V. & C.*, II, 207–208.)

It took a strenuous effort of the will to bring his monumental work to completion.

Taine made two trips to England during the summers of 1860 and 1862 to gather background material for the *History*; some of the notes he took on these occasions were later published in his *Notes on England* (1871).

1863 (end of December).—*Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, par H. Taine, Paris: Hachette, 1863, 3 vols., xlviii–527 pages; 706 pages; 677 pages. (Though bearing the date 1863, these volumes probably did not appear till January, 1864.—Cf. Giraud, p. 179, Note.)

The *History* had a long and complicated publishing history. The 4th volume (including the studies of Dickens, Thackeray, Macaulay, Mill, and Tennyson) did not appear till October, 1864, and was also published separately as 'Les Écrivains anglais contemporains'. The 2nd edition (1866) was also in four volumes. The 3rd edition (1873) was 'revue et augmentée' and appeared in five volumes. The 8th, definitive edition, appeared in 1892, shortly before Taine's death, with a bibliographical appendix and index, to which J. Jusserand contributed. By 1900, in its 10th edition.

Despite its undoubted merits, the *History* was refused the Bordin Prize by vote of the French Academy: Guizot and Sainte-Beuve defended it, and De Falloux and Dupanloup opposed it. Because no other work of comparable merit had been published, no prize was awarded at all that year (1864).

English: *History of English Literature*, by H. A. Taine, translated by H. van Laun, one of the masters at the Edinburgh Academy, with a preface by the author, Edinburgh, 1871, 2 vols., xii–531 pages and 550 pages.

The Dickens essay was included as an appendix (pp. 215–264) in Frederic Beecher Perkins' *Charles Dickens: a sketch of his life and works*, New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1870, 264 pages.

1860 (October)–(November)

L'Idéalisme anglais, étude sur Carlyle [English Idealism, essay on Carlyle].

First appeared as a series of articles on 'Carlyle' in the *Journal des Débats* (1860): 'I, II. Son style et son esprit' (30–31 October), 'III. De l'introduction des idées allemandes en Europe et en Angleterre' (6 November), 'IV. Le philosophe' (7 November), 'V. L'historien' (8 November).

Republished as a book, under the above title, with a 'Préface' (Paris: Germer Baillière, February, 1864, 191 pages). Later incorporated in the concluding volume of the *History of English Literature*, as the chapter on 'Philosophy and History.—Carlyle'.

1861 (March)

Le Positivisme anglais, étude sur Stuart Mill [English Positivism, essay on Stuart Mill]

First appeared as an article: 'John Stuart Mill et son Système de logique', *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, 1 March, 1861.

Republished as a book, under the above title, with a 'Préface' (Paris: Germer Baillière, January, 1864, 157 pages). Later incorporated in the concluding volume of the *History*, as the chapter on 'Philosophy.—Stuart Mill'.

English: *English Positivism* (*St. Mill*), translated by T. D. Haye, London, 1870.

1861

Étienne Mayran

This was a novel, largely autobiographical, which Taine began in 1861 and never finished (see our Chapter II, Notes 10, 11, 17). Published *posthumously* by Paul Bourget, it undoubtedly casts some light on the causes of Taine's illness during the years 1857–1860. A number of self-analytic notes that Taine wrote in 1862 (*V. & C.*, II, 259–264) also throw some light on the conflict in him between the scientist-critic and the would-be artist:

> Ma forme d'esprit est française et latine: classer les idées en files régulières avec progression à la façon des naturalistes, selon les règles des idéologues, bref oratoirement. . . .
>
> Le surplus vient de la philosophie: mon effort est d'atteindre l'essence, comme disent les Allemands, non de prime assaut, mais par une grande route unie, carrossable. Remplacer l'intuition (insight), l'abstraction subite (Geist Vernunft) par l'analyse oratoire. Mais cette route est dure à creuser.
>
> Depuis dix ans (24 à 34) tout le courant de ma réflexion et de mon éducation a tendu à transformer l'idée abstraite, sèche, en idée développée et vivante. C'est le passage de la formule à la vie; il y avait un squelette qui a pris de la chair.
>
> De là, inconvénients et avantages (p. 259).
>
> Quand je me regarde intérieurement, il me semble que mon état d'esprit a changé, que j'ai détruit en moi un talent, celui de l'orateur et du rhétori-

cien. Mes idées ne s'alignent plus par files comme autre-fois, j'ai des éclairs, des sensations véhémentes, des élans, des mots, des images; bref, mon état d'esprit est bien plutôt celui d'un artiste que d'un écrivain. Je lutte entre les deux tendances, celle d'autrefois et celle d'aujourd'hui. Je tâche, par principe, d'aligner les idées à la Macaulay, et en même temps je veux avoir l'impression vive de Stendhal, des poètes et des reconstructeurs. Cela fait que je cherche beaucoup; je ne trouve pas toujours; et ordinairement l'état nécessaire, quand j'y arrive, ne dure qu'une heure, une demi-heure; en tout cas il me tue. Probablement j'ai voulu allier deux facultés inconciliables. Il faut choisir, être artiste ou orateur (p. 261).

1858 (February)–1865 (May)

Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire [New Critical and Historical Essays]

The definitive edition included: 'Balzac' (February–March, 1858), 'Marc-Aurèle' (March, 1858), 'Racine' (July–August, 1858), 'Sylvestre de Sacy' (November, 1858), 'Les Mormons' (January, 1861), 'Jefferson' (September, 1861), 'Stendhal' (March, 1864), 'Le Bouddhisme' (March, 1864), 'Franz Woepke' (May, 1864: Woepke, a close friend, to whom Taine later dedicated his *On Intelligence*, had died in April, while Taine was in Italy), 'Renaud de Montauban' (December, 1864), 'Leonard de Vinci' (May, 1865).

1865 (October).—*Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire*, par H. Taine, Paris: Hachette, 1865, 396 pages.

By 1897 in its 6th edition. We have used the 4th edition (1886).

English: The essay on Balzac was translated by Lorenzo O'Rourke as *Balzac, A Critical Study*, New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906, 240 pages. This volume included 'An Appreciation of Taine' by the translator (pp. 9–82).

1863 (January)–1865 (December)

Notes sur Paris [Notes on Paris]

These notes began in the first issue (3 January, 1863) of *La Vie Parisienne*, which was founded and edited by Taine's friend, Lucien Prévost-Paradol. In 1866 they stopped appearing, presumably because Taine was busy with his *Voyage in Italy*. The name of M. Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge, the fictitious American author of the volume, was added later.

1867 (May).—*Notes sur Paris, vie et opinions de M. Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge*, docteur en philosophie de l'Université d'Iena, principal associé commanditaire de la maison Graindorge and Co (Huiles et porc salé, à Cincinnati, États-Unis d'Amérique). Recueillies et publiées par H. Taine, son executeur testamentaire. Paris: Hachette, 1867, 420 pages.

By 1913 in its 18th edition.

English: *Notes on Paris*, with notes, translated by John Austin Stevens, New York: H. Holt & Co., 1875, ix–372 pages.

1863–1866

Carnets de voyages: Notes sur la province [Travel Notebooks: Notes on the provinces]

These notes had been written by Taine during the period (1863–1866) when he was in charge of examinations for admission to Saint-Cyr, and, since he had expressed the intention of publishing them, they were printed *posthumously*.

1896 (December).—H. Taine, de l'Académie française *Carnets de voyage: Notes sur la province*, 1863–1865, Paris: Hachette, 1897, vi–351 pages.

1864 (February)–1866 (May)

Voyage en Italie [Voyage in Italy]

Shortly after publication of the *History*, Taine left on a trip to Italy, returning to Paris in May, his notebooks crammed with notes which later were reworked into a volume. Much of this material was first published as articles in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, starting in December, 1864, and continuing through May, 1866.

1866 (January).—*Voyage en Italie*, par H. Taine, Vol. I: *Naples et Rome*, Paris: Hachette, 1866, 528 pages.

1866 (November).—*Voyage en Italie*, par H. Taine, Vol. II: *Florence et Vénise*, Paris: Hachette, 1866, 562 pages.

These volumes continued to appear separately in France; by 1901–1902, in their 10th edition.

English: (1) *Italy: Naples and Rome*, translated by J. Durand, London, 1867; corrected, New York, 1869.

(2) *Italy: Florence and Venice*, translated by J. Durand, New York, 1869.

(3) The 3rd edition (New York: Leypoldt & Holt, 1871) was *Taine's Italy*, 'two volumes in one, with corrections and indices'.

1864–1865 (Winter)

Philosophie de l'art [The Philosophy of Art]

'. . . a course of Lectures delivered during the winter of 1864, before the students of Art of the *École des Beaux Arts at Paris*, by H. Taine, *Professeur d'Ésthetique et d'Histoire de l'Art* in that institution' (from 'Preface' to John Durand's translation, p. 11). Despite continued opposition in the conservative French Academy, Taine had at long last received official recognition.

1865 (August).—*Philosophie de l'art*, par H. Taine, Leçons professées à l'École des Beaux-Arts, Paris: Germer Baillière, 1865, 173 pages.

Later incorporated in a two-volume *Philosophie de l'art* (Paris: Hachette, 1880, ii–330 and 415 pages), which was in its 9th edition by 1901.

English: (1) As a separate volume: *The Philosophy of Art*, translated by J. Durand, revised by the author, London: H. Baillière, 1865, xiv–167 pages.

(2) In the two-volume edition: *Lectures on Art*, translated by J. Durand, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1883–1884 (First and Second Series).

1865–1866 (Winter)

Philosophie de l'art en Italie [Philosophy of Art in Italy]

'Last year, at the beginning of this course of lectures, I set before you the general law according to which works of art are at all times produced, that is to say, the exact and necessary correspondence which is always seen between a work and the medium out of which it is evolved. This year, in pursuing the history of painting in Italy I find a striking instance which allows me to apply and verify the law in question.'

(*Lectures on Art*, Second Series, p. 9.)

1866 (October).—*Philosophie de l'art* en Italie, Leçons professées à l'École des Beaux-Arts, par H. Taine, Paris: Germer Baillière, 1866, 184 pages.

Same history as *Philosophie de l'art*.

1866–1867 (Winter)

De l'idéal dans l'art [The Ideal in Art]

'Dedicated to M. Sainte-Beuve.'

'NOTICE: *The Ideal in Art*, forms the substance of two lectures, delivered during the past year to the students of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, in Paris, by M. Taine, Professor of the History of Art in that institution. The subject is treated in accordance with the principles laid down by this distinguished writer in *The Philosophy of Art*, the theory of which it may be said to complete.' (*Lectures on Art*, First Series, p. 169.)

1867 (June).—*De l'idéal dans l'art*, Leçons professées à l'École des Beaux-Arts, par H. Taine, Paris: Germer Baillière, 1867, 185 pages.

Same history as *Philosophie de l'art*. As a single volume in English: *The Ideal in Art*, translated by J. Durand, New York, 1870.

1867–1868 (Winter)

Philosophie de l'art dans les Pays-Bas [Philosophy of Art in the Netherlands]

'To Gustave Flaubert.'

'During the last three years I have explained to you the history of painting in Italy; this year I propose to set before you the history of painting in the Netherlands.' (*Lectures on Art*, Second Series, p. 167.)

1868 (October).—*Philosophie de l'art dans les Pays-Bas*, Leçons professées à l'École des Beaux-Arts, par H. Taine, Paris: Germer Baillière, 1868.

Same history as *Philosophie de l'art*. As a single volume in English: *Art in the Netherlands*, translated by J. Durand, New York: H. Holt & Co., 1871, 190 pages.

1868–1869 (Winter)

Philosophie de l'art en Grèce [Philosophy of Art in Greece]

Dedicated 'To Henri Lehmann, Painter'.

'In the preceding years I have presented to you the history of the two great original schools which, in modern times, have treated the human form, those

of Italy and the Netherlands. I have now to complete this study by familiarizing you with the greatest and most original of all, the ancient Greek school. This time I shall not discourse on painting. . . . Greek sculpture . . . will be the subject of this course.' (*Lectures on Art*, Second Series, pp. 359–360.)

1869 (October).—*Philosophie de l'art en Grèce*, Leçons professées à l'École des Beaux-Arts, par H. Taine, Paris: Germer Baillière, 1869, 204 pages.

Same history as *Philosophie de l'art*. As a single volume in English: *Art in Greece*, translated by J. Durand, New York: Leypoldt & Holt, 1871, vi–188 pages.

1867–1869

De l'Intelligence [On Intelligence]

In a sense, Taine had been working on this *opus* at least since 1851–1852, when his thesis on *The Sensations* had been rejected; in November, 1853, he wrote of it as the work on which he had been working for three years, i.e., since 1850, his second year at Normal School (*V. & C.*, II, 22). In his later letters it was referred to as a *Traité de la Connaissance*, and, especially during the first years after his return from Poitiers, its subject was constantly being pursued by means of scientific studies at the Sorbonne, the Museum and Medical School of the University of Paris, and the Sâlpetrière (asylum in Paris for aged and mentally afflicted women, the scene of Charcot's famous and influential studies in hysteria).

Starting in 1867, after a decade of interruption which had been caused by his illness in 1857, most of Taine's energies were again given to the study of psychology, broken only by interludes necessary for preparation of his lectures at the *École des beaux-arts*. He had hoped to complete the study *On Intelligence* with a comparable study *On the Will* (see the 'Plan du Traité de la Connaissance', Appendix I, *V. & C.*, II, 377–380), but doubted his ability to complete the task, and, in any case, the Franco-Prussian War intervened and led to a radical change in his interests. From the 'Preface', dated December, 1869:

'Between psychology thus conceived and history as it is now written, the relationship is very close. For history is applied psychology, psychology applied to more complex cases. The historian notes and traces the total transformation presented by a particular human molecule, or group of human molecules; and, to explain these transformations, writes the psychology of the molecule or group; Carlyle has written that of Cromwell; Sainte-Beuve that of Port Royal; Stendhal has made twenty attempts on that of the Italians; M. Renan has given us that of the Semitic race. Every perspicacious and philosophical historian labours at that of a man, an epoch, a people, or a race; the researches of linguists, mythologists, and ethnographers have no other aim; the task is invariably the description of a human mind, or of the characteristics common to a group of human minds; and, what historians do with respect to the past, the great novelists and dramatists do with the present. For fifteen years I have contributed to these special and concrete psychologies; I now attempt general and abstract psychology. To comprise it exhaustively, there would be required a theory of the Will in addition to the theory of the Intelligence; if I

may judge of the work I do not venture to undertake by that which I have attempted to accomplish, my strength is not equal to this; all that I venture to hope is that the reader will grant me his indulgence, in consideration of the difficulty of the task and the length of the effort.' (pp. ix–x.)

1870 (April).—*De l'Intelligence*, par H. Taine, Paris: Hachette, 1870, 2 vols., 1008 pages.

Modifications in the 3rd edition (1878) were numerous,[1] including four 'notes' or appendices, and a brief discussion of 'la nouvelle loi méchanique sur la conservation de l'energie' was supplemented by the following note: 'Ceci est le point de vue scientifique. Il en est deux autres *qu'il est inutile de presenter ici, le point de vue ésthetique et le point de vue moral.* On y considère non plus les elements, mais la direction des choses; on y regarde l'effet final comme un but primordial, *et ce nouveau point de vue est aussi légitime que l'autre*' (Giraud, p. 193, probably Giraud's italics). This note was suppressed in the definitive 4th edition (1883), which underwent many corrections and additions, the latter being frequently of a metaphysical nature (see the end of the 'Preface'). By 1900 in its 9th edition.

English: *Taine's On Intelligence*, translated from the French by T. D. Haye, and revised by the Author, Parts I and II, London: Reeve & Co., 1871.

1860, 1862, 1871

Notes sur l'Angleterre [Notes on England]

Early in 1870, while correcting the proofs of *On Intelligence*, Taine was already making plans for a study of German literature comparable to his *History of English Literature*; in the month of June he began a voyage of exploration, first to Frankfort and then to Weimar and Dresden. [See the notes, published posthumously, on his 'Voyages en Allemagne (1870)', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Paris, 1920, Vol. 60, p. 449–489.] However, his trip was interrupted by a death in the family, which called him back to France on 12 July, and followed by declaration of the Franco-Prussian War on 15 July; the Second Empire was replaced by a Government of National Defence (The Third Republic) in September; Paris capitulated on 28 January, 1871; the Commune was established in March; the Treaty of Frankfort was signed on 10 May, 1871.

In 1871 Taine was called to England to take part in a series of conferences on the history of French literature. He lectured on 'Corneille et Racine, et les mœurs sous Louis XIII et Louis XIV'; and, together with the German Döllinger, was granted the degree of Doctor *in jure civili, honoris causa* by Oxford University (Giraud, pp. 193–194, Note 3).

[1] For example, he added the following note, in the concluding section, where he had posed the problem of seeking the elements and conditions of real existence: 'Hegel l'a fait, mais avec des imprudences énormes; peut-être un autre, avec plus de mesure, renouvellera sa tentative avec plus de succès. Ici, nous sommes au seuil de la métaphysique; a mon sens, elle n'est pas imposible. Si je m'arrete, c'est par sentiment de mon insuffisance; je vois les limites de mon esprit, je ne vois pas celles de l'esprit humain' (Giraud, *Essai sur Taine*, p. 193, Note 1).

The *Notes on England* probably also incorporated observations Taine had made during his two previous trips to England (see discussion of the *History of English Literature*). They appeared first as a series of articles in *Le Temps* (August–October, 1871).

1871 (December).—*Notes sur l'Angleterre*, par H. Taine, Paris: Hachette, 1872, viii–395 pages.

By 1895, in its 10th edition.

English: *Notes on England*, by H. Taine, D. C. L. Oxon, etc., translated with an Introductory chapter, by W. F. Rae, with a portrait of the author, NewYork: Holt & Williams, 1872, lix–377 pages (London: Strahan & Co., 1872).

1866–1889

Derniers essais de critique et d'histoire [Last Critical and Historical Essays]

The essays in this volume had been chosen by Taine and were published *posthumously*. The definitive edition included: 'Mme. d'Aulnoy' (November, 1866), 'Paul de Saint-Victor' (January, 1867), 'L'École des Beaux-Arts' (April, 1867), 'Les Ardennes' (November, 1867), 'Sainte-Beuve' (October, 1869), 'E. Boutmy' (January, 1870), 'L'opinion en Allemagne et les conditions de la paix' (October, 1870), 'L'intervention des Neutres' (October, 1870), 'Fondation de l'École libres des sciences politiques' (October, 1871), 'Du suffrage universel et de la manière de voter' (December, 1871), 'Th. Ribot' (November, 1873), 'Prosper Merimée' (December, 1873), 'Ribot, Bain et Spencer' (March, 1874), 'George Sand' (July, 1876), 'Charles Clement: *Gleyre*' (April, 1878), 'Louis de Lomenie' (Taine's speech, on the occasion of his reception into the French Academy, January, 1880), 'Préface d'une anthologie anglaise, intitulée depuis *L'Art*' (February, 1880), 'Mallet du Pan' (March, 1884), 'Marcelin' (May, 1888), 'Édouard Bertin' (May, 1889).

1894.—*Derniers essais de critique et d'histoire*, par H. Taine, de l'Académie française, Paris: Hachette, 1894, viii–396 pages.

1871 (December)

Du suffrage universel et de la manière de voter [On Universal Suffrage and On the Manner of Voting]

This brochure, which first appeared as an article (*Le Temps*, 5 December, 1871), is indicative of the transition in Taine's interests from literature, art, and science to practical concerns of politics.

1871 (December).—*Du suffrage universel et de la manière de voter*, par H. Taine, Paris: Hachette, 1872, 62 pages.

Finally incorporated in the *Last Essays*.

1872–1893

Les Origines de la France contemporaine [Origins of Contemporary France]

Taine devoted his last two decades almost exclusively to this *magnum opus*, in which he attempted to arrive at some understanding of the causes of the

debacle of 1870. Since our study is not concerned with Taine as an historian of France, but with his method as a critic of literature and art, no detailed account of the composition of *Les Origines* will be attempted here.

This work originally appeared in six volumes:

1875 (December).—*L'Ancien Régime*, Paris: Hachette, 1876, viii–553 pages.

1878 (March).—*La Révolution*, Vol. I: *L'Anarchie*, Paris: Hachette, 1878, iii–467 pages.

1881 (May).—*La Révolution*, Vol. II: *La Conquête jacobine*, Paris: Hachette, 1881, ii–487 pages.

1884 (November).—*La Révolution*, Vol. III: *Le Gouvernement révolutionnaire*, Paris: Hachette, 1884, iv–646 pages.

1890 (November).—*Le Régime moderne*, Vol. I, Paris: Hachette, 1891, iii–448 pages.

The concluding volume was published *posthumously*. 1893 (November).—*Le Régime moderne*, Vol. II, Paris: Hachette, 1893, xv–406 pages.

In 1899 Hachette reissued *Les Origines* in eleven volumes; by that date, the first volume, 'L'Ancien Régime', was in its 23rd edition.

These volumes were translated into English by John Durand, and published in New York by Henry Holt and Company as they appeared.

B. SECONDARY WORKS CITED[1]

Since the literature of our subject is enormous, and constantly growing, the following includes only books and articles which have been referred to in the footnotes. Still, I cannot let this opportunity slip of paying my respects to the important contributions of Dr. I. A. Richards, especially his *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*, from which I have profited and to which reference might frequently have been made in the course of my argument. Though I find his works more suggestive than thorough—more stimulating in their fresh insights which open up new problems and possibilities than systematic in their attempted solutions—it would be difficult to over-estimate their salutary therapeutic effect on the criticism of our generation; and I have tried to indicate in the text to what extent I agree with his position that 'good reading, in the end, is the whole secret of "good judgment".'

A carefully reasoned discussion of our subject is Professor Herbert Dingle's *Science and Literary Criticism* (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1949), which I discovered after completion of my manuscript: Part One includes challenging analyses of the principles of Taine and Dr. Richards. A recent example of superb criticism which preserves a proper balance between textual analysis and biographical-social-historical considerations is Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der Abendlandischen Literatur* (The Representation of Reality in Western Literature), chapters of which have appeared in *Partisan Review* under

[1] Books and briefer references on Taine are prefixed with an asterisk (*).

the titles: 'The Scar of Ulysses' (May–June, 1950); 'The World in Pantagruel's Mouth' (September–October, 1950); and 'In the Hotel de la Mole' (May–June, 1951), dealing with Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert. However, each reader will surely want to extend the list for himself.—S. J. K.

* * *

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