HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (1828-1893)

Taine was arguably one of history's masters of the art of historical analysis and in particular, though not solely, of the history of art.. He was born into a cultured and historically conscious French family, in, of course, a nation which was a naturally historical tradition in the mode of awareness of itself as the fruition of a long past. In fact the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome had given birth to a natural assumption that the French inherited distinguished and remarkable gifts, when it came to giving an historical account of themselves. Homer's heavily historical perspective--after all his entire epic celebrates human events of great power which preceded his time by many centuries--and his frequent intimation that the warriors of fre present are but pygmies compared to those of the ancient past--these perspectives, well enough known to every French school boy, were easily enough transplanted into a Francophilia which included in itself the superiority of French Tradition. The historicity of the Greek tragedians, who employed myth to deepen their moral visions, translated into the present power of the Hellenic face in the most intense of contemporary situations.