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Critical Reasoning and Critical Perception

Two Insights

An old issue in aesthetics concerns the nature of critical debate. On one side are those who see critical discussion as a form of argument like any other. In defending a critical judgment, be it of nature or art, we appeal to what Kant (who rejected the idea) called 'principles of taste'. These are general claims to the effect that anything possessing some feature F thereby, or at least to that extent, possesses a different feature G, where this second feature is of aesthetic interest. We can then argue that the object under discussion is G on the basis of both this general principle and the claim that the object is F (Beardsley 1962, 1969; Dickie 2006). The opponents of this view have usually made two claims in response. They have denied that there are any principles of taste from which aesthetic conclusions could be informatively derived. But they have also made a positive claim about what critical debate involves, that its purpose is to bring one's audience to see the object in a certain way. There are no critical arguments, if that means deductive reasoning from general claims, for no such claims are available. In any case, the point of critical discussion is not the formation of belief, but the engendering of perception (e.g. Isenberg 1949; Hampshire 1970; Strawson 1974; Sibley 2001*a*, 2001*b*; Mothersill 1984).

In my view, each side to this debate grasps an insight. The proper outcome of critical discussion is indeed a perception, and to that extent I condone the second position. But the first position also seeks to preserve a very appealing thought, namely that critical discussion is a rational activity – it counts as a form of argument, or reasoning. No doubt the proponents of this view were mistaken to construe its rationality as deduction from general principles. But perhaps they were driven to do so because they could not see how otherwise to preserve the rational status of critical discourse. Certainly their opponents can do little to accommodate this status. As they construe matters, the heart of critical discussion is the activity of pointing out features of the object to one's audience, with a wider penumbra of other actions one might perform to convey one's point, such as making comparisons and contrasts, or appealing to metaphors. But pointing out is not reasoning; it does not take the listener from what she already accepts to a conclusion she doubts. Rather, it is to direct the attention of one's companion so that her experience reveals one of the object's features to her. And the other activities this view makes available to the critic, whatever their benefits, have even less claim to count as appeals to rational connections. Thus it is a serious question whether the

advocates of critical perception can make sense of the idea of critical reasoning. For anyone sympathetic to both insights, it matters little whether there are ‘principles of taste’ sufficient to drive deductive arguments. The deeper issue is how to reconcile the rationality of critical discourse with its leading to perception. How can there be an argument with a perception as its conclusion?

Although much of the debate over principles of taste missed the fact that this is the issue at its core, at least some writers have addressed the problem. Frank Sibley, for one, sees the apparent tension. In ‘Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic’ his response is to abandon the first insight: “an activity the successful outcome of which is seeing or hearing cannot, I think, be called *reasoning*” (2001a: 40). He then devotes the paper to saying what the activity of critical discussion could be, *given that* it could not be reasoning in the sense the first insight requires. He does so by exploring the relation between aesthetic and non-aesthetic *properties*. Much of the debate over the possibility of critical reasons has taken the same line. My hope in what follows is to make progress where Sibley gives up. I explore the relations between the notions of perception and reason, leaving out of account any relations in the world which critical reasoning might exploit.

Roger Scruton, in *Art and Imagination*, clearly thinks he can hold on to both insights. He claims that knowledge of a piece of music may provide “reasons (and not just causes) for my hearing it in a certain way” (1974: 179). Later he is more explicit still: “There is such a thing as accepting a reason for an aesthetic experience; an aesthetic experience can feature as the conclusion of a... syllogism” (1974: 244). (The omitted phrase is important; I will introduce it below.) Scruton attempts to accommodate these claims within a view on which aesthetic engagement involves something like aspect perception. As such, aesthetic experience is in part an exercise of the imagination. As a form of thought, the imagination is subject to reason, but, as a form of thought able to enter into and transform experience, it is also one with consequences for perception. Thus it is, I think, that Scruton hopes to reconcile the two insights.

However, we will be in no position to gauge the success of this or any other response until we have a sharper conception of the problem it is intended to solve. What, precisely, is the difficulty with the idea of arguing for a perception?

Two Arguments for Incompatibility

The answer may seem to lie in the proper scope of reasoning. One might think that only certain things can be supported by arguments, and that perceptions plainly lie outside the relevant class. Perhaps it is not quite clear what does form that class, since beliefs, judgments, and propositions all seem *prima facie* candidates; but, whatever its precise membership, none of the candidates seem perceptual. Perhaps, then, it is simply obvious that perceptions are the wrong sort of thing to be

supported by reasoning. Unfortunately, this line is undermined by the fact that some think that items quite other than propositions and certain propositional attitudes can form the conclusions of arguments. In particular, Aristotle thought that practical reasoning could issue directly in *action*. If conclusions can be either propositions (or certain attitudes to them) or actions, it is not at all obvious that conclusions cannot also be perceptions. At the very least, it now appears reasonable to ask why not.

These considerations hold even if we draw a distinction between conclusions of arguments, which we might think can only be propositions, and their targets – that is, the states they are intended to induce in the believer. We might take the latter to be the state of believing the proposition which forms the conclusion, or that of judging it to be the case. The distinction between conclusions and targets in no way blunts the force of the line above, which in effect claims that a perception is not the right sort of state to be the target of an argument. However, with or without the distinction, the line's appeal is considerably reduced by the Aristotelian view. In these terms, Aristotle took *actions* to be the targets of *practical* reasoning.

Of course, there are certain ways of construing perceptions on which they clearly cannot be supported by reasoning. Plausibly, there can only be rational connections where there are concepts, because concepts are nothing more than the articulations within states that make it possible for there to be rational transitions between them (Crane 1992). Thus, if we take perceptions to lack the sort of inner structure required for conceptual content, or, more radically, to lack content at all, it will not make sense to suggest that they might admit of rational support. But at least some thinkers consider it coherent to suppose that perceptions have conceptual content. Moreover, they do so with good reason. For only if perceptions have such content can they play a role that it is very plausible they do play: that of acting as *sources* of reasons. Our perceptions seem able to provide rational support, of a particularly strong kind, for our beliefs. If entering into rational relations requires the *relata* to be conceptually structured, there is every reason to think that perceptions are so structured (McDowell 1994; Brewer 1998). And then, of course, our problem is nicely sharpened. Not only have we rejected one explanation of why perceptions cannot be supported by reasons; we have also conceded not merely that perceptions *can* enter into rational relations, but that they do. Why, unlike many of the other items able to enter into such relations, can a perception only be the supporting *relatum*, and not the supported?

I offer two answers to this question. They are distinct, but not competing. It could be that the claims of both are true. If so, it would be overdetermined that perceptions cannot be supported by reason.

The first answer appeals to the special epistemic status of perceptions, and in particular to their

self-sufficiency. Anything that counts as a perception requires no epistemic support. That is why, however the perception is arrived at, and whatever the wider epistemic context, the perception itself is always sufficient to justify the appropriate belief (i.e. the belief that reflects the conceptual content of the perception). Of course, the wider context can lead one to doubt one's experience. But that is precisely to doubt that one has perceived that p . If the experience counts as a perception that p , then it needs no bolstering or support. But the job of argument, or reasoning, is to provide epistemic support for whatever plays the role of conclusion. Given the self-sufficiency claim, a perception is, by its very nature, the sort of state with respect to which there is nothing for argument to do. Hence there cannot be rational support for a perception.

If the first answer asserts that the nature of perception leaves it without any need of the services of reason, the other answer makes the opposite claim. The nature of reason leaves no room for anything like perception. The key claim is this:

Principle of Rational Sufficiency: any argument must be in principle sufficient to rationally motivate adoption of its conclusion.

Of course, not all argument is deductive, and deductive or not, not all argument is in context sufficient to render rational one's adopting the conclusion. There can be considerations for and against, and something is not denied the title 'argument' simply by the fact that something can also be said on the other side. But if there were no countervailing considerations (if the putative reasoning were the *only* consideration, either of an argumentative nature or otherwise, bearing on the matter), then how could anything recognizable as argument fail to bring rationally sensitive subjects to adopt the conclusion? (Perhaps we should distinguish between cases in which no countervailing considerations are known, and cases in which there are known to be no countervailing considerations. The Principle of Rational Sufficiency is more plausible for the latter.) An argument just is something the grasp of which rationally motivates adopting the claim supported, and a rational subject just is so constituted that when she grasps an argument she is appropriately motivated. Whatever the rational force thus exerted, if it is the only such force, it should be sufficient, in a rational subject, to bring about that result.

Now, it is hard to see how the Principle of Rational Sufficiency is consistent with the claim that the conclusion of an argument can be a perception. For perception essentially involves an element of what McDowell (1994) calls 'receptivity', or 'openness to the world'. We can make no sense of the idea that one is in perceptual contact with the environment unless we suppose that, at least to some degree, one's state is dictated by, and hence reflects, the nature of that environment. But if

perception requires receptivity, merely grasping an argument cannot be sufficient to be in a perceptual state. Something beyond one's own rationally interlinked states must play a role. Nothing with a perception as its outcome can meet the demand the Principle of Rational Sufficiency imposes.

(A simple form of the thought here is this. One can understand an argument in the absence of the thing it concerns; but one cannot have a perception of that thing in those conditions. Hence the conclusion of an argument cannot be a perception. This is a form of the appeal to receptivity because the reason why perception requires the presence of the thing perceived is that perception is openness to how the world is.)

I will make four observations about this second account of why perceptions cannot be supported by reason. First, it is genuinely independent of the first account. For it does not depend on any claim about the epistemological role of perception. Receptivity is integral to perception's having its epistemic role, but to say that perception involves receptivity does not itself amount to a claim about that role.

Second, although I find the Principle of Rational Sufficiency plausible, something weaker would suffice for the case against reasoning to a perception, namely:

Weakened Principle of Rational Sufficiency: anything capable of standing as the conclusion of an argument must be such that *some* argument could in principle be sufficient for its rational adoption.

The Weakened Principle allows for the existence of arguments which do not, even in ideal circumstances, suffice to rationally motivate adopting their conclusions. But the Weakened Principle *does* require that at least some possible argument be sufficient for that adoption. Since any perception involves receptivity, and no argument can provide that, the Weakened Principle still excludes perceptions from playing the role of conclusions.

Third, it is important to see the precise nature of the difficulty posed for receptivity by the Principle of Rational Sufficiency, in either form. The problem is not that there is more to perception than its conceptual content. That may be so. Perhaps some philosophers are right to claim that the phenomenology of perceptual experience is not fully determined by its conceptual content. If so, there is an aspect of perception that cannot be rationally motivated, and which thus renders perceptions unable to meet the demand the Principle imposes. Now, if that were the source of the real difficulty, we would expect it to hold for other states with equal claim to richer phenomenologies than their conceptual contents secure. Examples would be states of imagination, at least where that is not purely propositional, and experiential memories. Now, it may be that such states cannot be rationally supported any more than perceptions can. But, if so, the reason does not lie in the relation

of phenomenology to content. In the case of imaginings, the real obstacle is that their conceptual contents are not of the right kind. They are not, as it were, assertoric: they do not purport to capture how things really are (as both perceptions and beliefs claim to). Experiential memories are not similarly handicapped. But here the fundamental problem is the same as for perception. Whether or not there is more to these states than their assertoric conceptual contents, those contents involve the receptivity, the openness to things, which rational support cannot provide. Roughly speaking, in memory one is open to the past, as in perception one is open to the present. Not all assertoric conceptual content involves a contribution from the world in this way. That is how beliefs can be supported by reasoning. But the contents of perception and memory do require the world to play its role, and that is the real source of the second difficulty.

This allows us, as a fourth comment, to distinguish this difficulty from yet another possible problem for the idea of rationalized perception: that perceiving is somehow passive, whereas if argument is to operate on us, it needs to be targeted on states that are within our control. One might be able to argue for the incompatibility of reason and perception in that way, but it is not the line taken here. True, the above makes central use of the idea of receptivity, and McDowell himself sometimes terms that 'passivity'. We might think that that with respect to which we are passive lies beyond our control. However, even if this connection can be made, McDowell (following Kant in this as in everything else here) also takes perception essentially to involve an element of activity or 'spontaneity'. For McDowell, perception is both active and passive, and only thus able to play its epistemic role. This confronts the putative problem with a dilemma. If the states arguments aim to induce must be *partly* under our control, then, for all we have said, perception meets this condition. And if the requirement is for *complete* control, it is unclear that it is met by the paradigmatically rational states: beliefs or judgments. The argument from rational sufficiency need not negotiate a path between these obstacles. It need not take a stand on whether the states argument aims to induce involve elements outside the subject's control. The real difficulty requires no more than the thought that perception is partly passive, and appeals, not to control, but to the idea that argument should, in the right circumstances, be enough to bring about the state rationalized.

Responses to the Arguments

I have presented two arguments for thinking that the insights of the first section cannot be reconciled. What can be said in response? Is there a way to weaken one or other of the insights so as to achieve reconciliation? Or must we look for some more radical resolution of our difficulty?

Let us begin by attempting to weaken the insight that the outcome of critical reasoning is a perception. The arguments above turn on two features of perception: that it is epistemically self-

standing and that it involves receptivity. Can progress be made by rejecting these as features of the state forming the outcome of critical discussion?

The obvious move is simply to deny that such a state is genuinely self-standing or receptive to the world. Perhaps it merely seems to be so, as in the case of perceptual illusion. The claim need not be that the worldly contents of critical perceptions are illusory – just that, like illusions, the states themselves seem to have features in common with paradigmatic cases of perception, but which, in fact, they lack. However, this does not get us very far. It solves the problems of the previous section in their original form, but succumbs to revisions of them. For, even if I merely *take* my state to be epistemically self-standing, I can hardly also take it to allow for the sort of support reasons supply. And if I take it to be a form of receptivity to how things are, I can hardly allow that it meets the constraint imposed by the Principle of Rational Sufficiency (in either form) on states able to form the conclusions (or targets, if one prefers) of arguments. Thus, whether or not a third party can make sense of these states being supported by argument, I cannot. And an argument that in principle cannot move the subject of the states it is intended to induce, is not, in any recognizable sense, an argument at all.

Therefore, if this approach is to achieve anything significant, it seems it must take the more radical form of denying that critical perceptions even purport to have these two features. Scruton's view fits this rough characterization. Not that he conceives of his account in these terms. Since he does not explicitly discuss what is problematic about the idea of a rationalized perception, he does not construct his account so as to meet the current desiderata. Nonetheless, his main idea – that a critical perception is a form of, or analogous to, the perception of an aspect – can be naturally developed so as to fit this bill. For when I perceive an aspect, for instance in seeing Wittgenstein's triangle as having just fallen on its side (1953: II.xi), I do not take my state to be self-supporting, or to involve receptivity to the world, as I do with an ordinary perception. Insofar as my perception is of an aspect (as opposed, say, to being the perception of a triangle), it lacks these features.

However, there is a third feature that the discussion above has revealed to be essential if perceptions are to be supported by reasons: perceptions must have *assertoric* conceptual content. It is far from obvious that it is possible to jettison the two features above (receptivity and epistemic self-sufficiency) without also ejecting this third. The difficulty is not that no state could combine lacking the first two features with possessing the third. Belief does just that, and hence is unproblematically and paradigmatically open to support by reasoning. But what else can offer this combination? How can any state other than belief avoid laying claim to being epistemically self-standing, or to being a form of openness to the world, while nonetheless laying claim to representing how things really are? In the present context, the question is pressing. Where aspect perceptions lack receptivity and

epistemic self-sufficiency, they also lack assertoric content. When I see the triangle as having fallen over, my experience does not present itself as capturing how the world is. Moreover, this lack of assertoric content is intimately bound to the state's lacking the other two features. Now, the category of aspect perception is broad. Perhaps other cases will reintroduce assertoric content. Consider, for instance, my perception of the Necker cube. Arguably this does have assertoric content. Even if I am aware of the possibility of reversing the cube's orientation, it might be argued that my experience presents the world as containing a cube at the orientation I currently see it as having. It's just that, since I know I can reverse the cube at will, I know not to take the experience with this assertoric content at face value. The problem is to convince oneself that this is the right thing to say about assertoric content without thereby reintroducing receptivity and epistemic self-sufficiency – or rather, without reintroducing the state's purporting to have these features. In the absence of a clear case, it is far from obvious that appeal to aspects helps solve our current difficulty.

Thus it is difficult to construe critical perception as combining just the features required to avoid the two arguments against its being supported by reason, without disqualifying it on other grounds. Perhaps this claim would not unsettle Scruton. For although a state must possess assertoric content if it is to be supported by *theoretical* reason, there is no such requirement if the reason in question is practical. I can have good pragmatic reasons for imagining something (perhaps I think I will thereby immunize myself against irrational fears), for all that such states do not lay claim to revealing how the world is. And it is precisely practical rationality that Scruton takes to be available to critical perception. For above I quoted him rather selectively. His claim in full is that an aesthetic experience can be the conclusion of a *practical* syllogism (Scruton 1974: 244). In preferring 'experience' to 'perception' and in acknowledging that the rational support for such a state can only be practical, Scruton perhaps shows that he is alert to the difficulties in any stronger position.

In any case, Scruton's own account offers too little to satisfy. In effect he has abandoned both insights. In abandoning the idea that the outcome of critical argument is something which at least purports to capture how things are, he betrays the insight about critical perception. When I am brought to see a work of art a certain way, I do not take my experience merely to reveal how the work can be seen, but to reveal, at least potentially, something about the work's nature. Compare in this respect two experiences of an operatic aria. One is the outcome of fruitful critical discussion; the other the effect of being prompted by some comic to hear joke English sentences in its lines. Both experiences reveal how the piece can be heard; but the former seems further to reveal something substantial about the nature of the work. In allowing his 'experiences' to lack assertoric content, and accepting that they need not even purport to exhibit receptivity and self-sufficiency, Scruton betrays the phenomenology which the second insight sought to capture.

Scruton fares no better with the other insight, that concerning critical reasoning. Of course practical reasoning is genuine reasoning. But is this the reasoning critical discussion standardly involves? Practical reasoning usually proceeds by spelling out how acting in a certain way will enable one to attain some goal or satisfy some desire. In the aesthetic case, the background desire or goal is presumably that of appreciating the object. But does ‘appreciating’ here mean something like *taking pleasure in*, or does it mean *grasping the nature of*? Scruton’s account can certainly appeal to the former, but that does not seem true to our critical practice. The comic might show me how to get pleasure from the aria just as surely as the critic does. Nonetheless, if he does so by offering me pragmatic justifications (‘approach it in such and such a way, and you will find it funny’), he is hardly offering the same kind of consideration, in pursuit of the same kind of end, as the critic. The critic seems concerned, not to maximize my positive states, but to make me aware of the work’s true nature. That is one reason why the activity is appropriately dubbed ‘criticism’: it seeks a balanced appraisal of both strengths and weaknesses, not merely to maximize whatever positive states of the viewer might be wrung from an encounter with the work. Hence the reasons the critic provides are not pragmatic but of another kind, the kind that, for want of any less tendentious term, we dub ‘theoretical’. The insight that there *is* critical reasoning is the recognition that critical discussion really does offer such reasons. In reconfiguring those reasons as pragmatic, Scruton has in effect set that insight aside.

Now, I do not deny that there is a sense in which Scruton’s experiences count as perceptions, and count as revealing something about the work’s nature. For such talk can be rendered appropriate provided merely that we can make sense of a standard of correctness, something making it the case that one of those experiences is right, or appropriate to the work. (‘Standard of correctness’ is Richard Wollheim’s phrase – Wollheim 1987: ch. 2. I here use the idea in a context rather broader than that in which he introduced it.) There are many possible sources of such a standard – examples include the intentions of the artist, or the pattern of responses on the part of the subject’s community, or perhaps of some privileged group within it. Provided some such standard can be found, we can make sense of there being a fact of the matter for an individual’s response to reflect, or fail to reflect. And with that notion can go that of perceiving the quality to which the response is a guide. However, whatever the merits of this model of objectivity, it will not allow Scruton to resuscitate his claim to capture the two insights. The insight about critical perception is not that there is some sense of ‘perception’ in which the outcome of critical argument is such a state. Rather, I have just argued, the insight is that critical discussion issues in something with the features discussed above, features which the appeal to a standard of correctness does nothing, by itself, to reinstate. And the insight about critical reasoning, we now see, is that it is explicitly reasoning aimed at the object’s nature, and hence

theoretical in form. The most the idea of a standard could suggest, within the context of Scruton's account, is that critical discussion offers us *practical* reasons for responding in certain ways, which responses can then be taken, given appropriate facts about intentions or patterns of response, to reveal the nature of the object. But this leaves the reasoning for the response still thoroughly practical, unsuitably disconnected from the thought that the responses reveal something about the object.

We are trying to reconcile two insights about criticism, by overcoming the problems presented above for the idea of arguing for a perception. The obvious strategies are to weaken one insight or the other. We began this section by trying to avoid the problems by watering down the insight about critical perception. That took us to Scruton's view, which, we now see, also ends up weakening the insight about critical reasoning. The upshot of our discussion is that Scruton reconciles the insights only by weakening both to such an extent that he betrays them. The failure of his account does not prove that either strategy is doomed to failure, but it does provide grounds for pessimism. Rather than exploring these strategies farther, I will briefly discuss just one other position in the literature – that offered, in a different but related context, by John McDowell.

In "Virtue and Reason", McDowell contrasts the case in which we engage in deductive reasoning with a second sort of case, in which "we explicitly appeal to appreciation of the particular instance in inviting acceptance of our judgements" (1998: 63-4). He then makes the following claim:

A skilfully presented characterization of an instance will sometimes bring someone to see it as one wants; or one can adduce general considerations, for instance about the point of the concept a particular application of which is in dispute. Given that the case is one of the second kind, any such arguments will fall short of rationally necessitating their conclusion in the way a proof does. But it is only the prejudice I am attacking that makes this seem to cast doubt on their status as arguments; that is, as appeals to reason. (1998: 65).

McDowell is discussing morality, not aesthetics, but his observation bears directly on our present concerns. In effect, he is suggesting that ethical thinking, like aesthetic judgment, involves seeing matters a certain way. The outcome of ethical argument is thus, at least in some extended sense, a perception (1998: 56). And, to the worry that bringing someone to see something cannot readily be construed as the outcome of a rational process, McDowell has a radical response. Reasoning is the following of (certain) rules. But the moral of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule following is that it too, in the end, depends on such apparently brute and non-rational facts as seeing things a certain way. Thus it is only a 'prejudice' that allows something like explicit argument to count as reasoning, but denies that title to the many and various processes of bringing others to see things a certain way. In effect then, since following an argument is itself, at root, simply to see things a certain way, there is

no more difficulty with the idea of an argument for a perception than there is with the very idea of reasoning.

This radical move certainly promises to solve – perhaps ‘banish’ would be a better word – our difficulty. However, I would like to manage with something less extreme. There is a difference between, on the one hand, winning others round by appealing to what they already accept in order to bring them to what they as yet do not; and, on the other, simply getting them to see something. Indeed, critical discussion often involves both, but we need the distinction precisely to understand its nature at any particular point. McDowell’s radical move threatens to efface this difference. Let us, then, see how far we can get without playing this card.

Towards a Positive Account

Is there, then, no way to reconcile the two insights, that criticism involves reasoning, and that its outcome is a perception? Perhaps there is not. Perhaps the considerations above, if sound, in effect serve to articulate the depth of the problem facing the idea of critical argument directed at a perception. However, I will close on a more optimistic note, by exploring one way we might attempt to reconcile the insights. My suggestions will be very tentative, but I hope they are at least promising.

The difficulties to be overcome are those presented in the two arguments of the second section. Perception seems to leave no place for reasoning, since it is self-supporting. And reasoning seems to leave no place for the receptivity essential to perception, since reasons must in principle be sufficient to bring about adoption of the conclusion. How might we steer around these obstacles?

In the case of both obstacles, the manoeuvres needed to avoid them point us in the same direction. Receptivity can be reconciled with the sufficiency of reason if, in the cases in question, there is no grasp of reason in the absence of the openness to the world which perception requires. And the self-sufficiency of perception can be reconciled with its being supported by reasoning only if the reasoning is an element in that perception. Thus, we need to reconfigure the notion of perception that is in play. It is not an atomistic, momentary experience, with relatively little internal structure. Rather, it is a complex, one that can perhaps only be built up over time, and which itself contains the reasoning that supports it. In other words, we must reject the idea that we are trying to find something, an argument, which takes us to a perception from states – beliefs – both distinct from it and quite other in nature. The premises the subject is to grasp are themselves perceptions, and moreover they are perceptions incorporated in the more complex perceptual state which forms the conclusion.

What sense can be made of this idea? Let us try to proceed by considering an analogous case, one not involving aesthetic judgment. Suppose we are on a deer hunt. I have seen a deer, standing

quite still in the undergrowth. Although you are looking in exactly the right direction, you cannot make out the creature. Perhaps you express some doubt: am I sure that what I take to be a deer isn't just a play of shadows? What can I do to persuade you of my view? Of course, my best strategy is to bring you to see the deer for yourself. But how can I do this, and do any of the means available involve providing rational support for my claim?

In pursuit of my goal, I am liable to say things like the following: 'See that purple flower to the right, and the two patches of brown above and below it? The patches are parts of the flank. Higher, on the left, can you make out that patch of brown with white and brown wispy flecks? That is its ear.' And so on. I will point out various parts of the scene before you, separating those elements which form parts of the deer from those which do not; I will try to help you make sense of the former as parts of a larger whole, the deer. I will point out features in the undergrowth, either drawing your attention to parts you already perceive, or getting you to see them for the first time. And I try to help you to organize the patches of color thus attended to, by locating them as particular parts of the deer I want you to see. By getting you to see these things, and to see them as organized in these ways, I bring you, if I'm successful, to see the deer. But the subsidiary perceptions do not merely serve as causes of your seeing the deer. Rather, they form elements in the deer-perception itself. Seeing the deer involves, and does not merely require as a causal condition, seeing the two patches near the flower as part of the flank, or seeing the variegated patch higher on the left as an ear.

It is for this reason that the deer case admits of something like argument. You might counter one of my supporting claims: 'An ear? Are you sure? It looks more like a dead leaf to me.' In so doing you do not merely manifest a refusal to succumb to causal influence. Rather, you challenge my view of things. If that isn't an ear, perhaps the whole complex of undergrowth and anything that might be lurking in it needs to be seen differently. If I accept or seriously consider your response, then I myself am under threat of having to reconfigure what lies before me, since I am now deprived of an essential element in the organization I had perceptually imposed.

It is clear that something similar can occur in the context of critical discussion. Trying to persuade you that a Botticelli is prissy, I point to the extreme delicacy of the represented figures. I am trying not merely to get you to see the delicacy en route to appreciating the prissiness: seeing the former is part of the total experience of the painting I want to bring about in you. Just as in the deer case, you might counter by denying that the figures are delicate. They are elegant for sure, and in a way fragile, but there is also a robust health to them, manifest in their firm, wiry postures and the flush in their cheeks. This disagreement, just as in the deer case, challenges me to rethink. If we see the figures in this light instead, how does the whole look? Perhaps it now appears differently, and the

charge of prissiness is ill-founded.

Now, there are certainly differences between the two sorts of case. In the deer example, the supporting perceptions were of spatial parts of the deer. They formed elements in the complex perception towards which we were being persuaded, *qua* perceptions of parts of a larger whole. For instance, the two patches of brown had to be seen as parts of a single surface, if the surface thus glimpsed was to be seen as the flank of a deer caught in profile. In contrast, in the Botticelli case to see the delicacy of the figures is not in any interesting sense to see a spatial part of the painting. Seeing the prissiness of the whole cannot therefore involve seeing those parts as integrated into a whole the distinctive organization of which is itself spatial. However, this difference between the two cases seems to me unimportant. The notion of one perception forming a component in another does not only make sense when the objects the two perceptions present stand in the relation of spatial part to whole. Non-aesthetic examples might take other forms, as when seeing a found object of great antiquity as a digging tool requires me to see it as *amenable to being used* in certain ways. In any event, the notion of one perception involving another is no less clear in the Botticelli case than it is in the case of the deer.

How far does this view of things accommodate reasoning in critical discussion? How far does it allow us to carry out the manoeuvres described above, in order to avoid the two obstacles to the very idea of reasoning to a perception?

The problem of epistemic self-sufficiency is that a perception cannot be supported by an argument (or anything else) because a perception is self-supporting. The solution I sketched was to suppose that the perception incorporates the argument. The current proposal makes sense of this as follows. The complex perception that is the outcome of critical discussion itself incorporates the more specific perceptions appealed to as 'premises'. More than this, the overall perception will include the relation between those premise-perceptions and the conclusion. That is, seeing the daintiness moves one to see the prissiness, and not just as a factor external to the perception. The prissiness one sees is presented, in perception, as a consequence, in part, of the daintiness.

The problem of the sufficiency of reason is that an argument cannot support a perception, because the former, *qua* sufficient, leaves no room for the receptivity essential to the latter. The suggested solution was that grasping the argument involves perceiving the object it concerns, and thus grasping the argument itself incorporates receptivity to how things are. Now, it is a fair question quite what this suggestion amounts to. Is it that one must perceive the object to understand the premises? Or that one must do so to understand the conclusion? Or that one must do so to understand the rational connection between them, that is, how the one follows from the other? My suspicion is that the solution must appeal to all three ideas here. For all three elements are involved in feeling the

suasive force of reasoning, and the suggestion should be that *that*, one's *responsiveness* to the rational power of the argument, involves a receptiveness to how the object is.

Fortunately there are materials we can appeal to in order to establish the connection between perceiving and understanding at all three points. For it is one of the central ideas of the tradition which insists that critical discussion is directed to a perception that such discussion appeals to features not *qua* instances of a general type, but in the precise form in which they are instantiated in the context of the work. Thus the daintiness to which I appeal in an effort to persuade you that the Botticelli is prissy, and indeed the prissiness which I am trying to bring you to see, is in each case this particular property, as it presents itself in the context of the painting. In other words, I direct your attention to features of the work by using words which, of necessity, fail to capture the precise features I want you to attend to. Words fail to complete this task, and only perception can complete it. And if this is true of the features the relation between which I hope to exploit, how much more true will it be of that relation itself.

Thus there are at least the bones here of an account able to circumvent the two major obstacles to the idea that critical discussion might be an argument for perceiving the work a certain way. Let me close by assessing how far what the proposal has secured merits the name 'argument'. Have I really shown how there can be *rational* support for a perception?

First, I make the positive case. Consider again the possibility of rejecting the supporting statement. The figures are elegant, but not excessively delicate. The threat of having to rethink how one sees the whole is thus imposed. Or consider a different situation. One accepts that the figures are extremely delicate, but disagrees that seeing them as so requires one to see the whole as prissy. The figures are delicate in a particular way, and their delicacy is not prissy. Or, while in another context such delicacy as this might be prissy, in this context it is not. (Perhaps it is redeemed by the firm working of the brushstrokes through which these effete characters are conveyed.) The structure of these various machinations reflects that of the paradigm cases of argument. One can resist a conclusion by rejecting a premise. Or one can accept the premises but deny that the conclusion follows from them.

Now, this structural isomorphism by itself proves nothing. Mere causal connections could exhibit that. I could respond to your attempt to push me off the see-saw by pushing back myself, thus forcing a different 'conclusion'. I could simply resist your push, rejecting your 'premise'. Or I could allow you to push on, given that you are not in fact grasping my clothing at all, but that of the person behind me. But in the case of critical discussion, unlike the manifestly causal one, resistance, acquiescence, and the like essentially operate through one's engaging with the truth or falsity of the claims offered in support. I reject your claim about the figures' delicacy; I do not simply ignore it.

Or, if I accept your claim, I can dispute its connection to the feature it is intended to support. That truth and falsity occupy this central place provides grounds for thinking that the connections here described merit the name of justification or support.

What are the grounds for skepticism? These are best directed at the idea that the proposal really accommodates a connection, between the putative premises and the putative conclusion, which is *rational*. This (and hence the claim that the various perceptions really are premises and conclusion) might be doubted on several grounds. I discuss just one.

We are asked to accept that the connection between the ‘premise’–perceptions and the ‘conclusion’ is rational. But is the holding of this connection constituted simply by the conceptual contents of those perceptual states, or not? If it is, then it ought to be possible to find other states, such as beliefs, that have the same contents, and are similarly connected. But then why can someone not grasp those conceptual contents, and the relation between them, in the absence of the object they concern? If they can, we have abandoned the centerpiece of the solution to the problem posed by rational sufficiency, the idea that in these cases the reasons cannot be grasped without the openness to the world involved in perception. If, on the other hand, the connection between ‘premise’ and ‘conclusion’ is not constituted by their having the conceptual contents they do, then how is the connection rational? After all, we are supposing that conceptual contents just are the complements of the rational connections between states, and vice versa. The two notions stand or fall together.

To respond it seems I must deny that it follows from the fact that the particular content of a given perceptual state is conceptual that it can be the content of a state of another kind, here a belief. Rather, at least in the case of the conceptual contents of perceptual states, some of those contents cannot be shared by belief states. At least, they cannot be so shared in the absence of the perceptual state – I see no reason to deny that a perceptual belief can reflect the content of *any* of my perceptual states, provided the perceptual state is, as it were, present to give the belief its content. So the contents of perceptual states outstrip our ability to express them, that is, to formulate them in a form that could provide the content for beliefs. At least, the contents outstrip our ability to express them except by using expressions (demonstratives such as ‘this daintiness’) which themselves advert to the object currently before me. Thus there are conceptual contents for perceptions which cannot be shared by non-demonstrative beliefs, beliefs one can form in the absence of the object they concern.

Perhaps this response can be made good. Certainly some of those who defend the conceptual content of perception, including McDowell, are already committed to something like these claims. However, there are two qualifications to any optimism here. First, McDowell is committed to the idea that for a given perception there may be no non-demonstrative expression (and hence non-demonstrative belief) currently available to us which captures its content. I seem committed to the

stronger claim that there may be no such expression (and hence belief) in principle available to us. For even the possibility of such an expression or belief threatens to show that the reasoning involved in the critical case can be grasped independently of receptivity to the object. Second, McDowell is already forced to make claims of this broad nature only because his stance on the content of perception is particularly strong. He not only accepts that such content can be conceptual; he denies that it can be anything else. There is no non-conceptual content to perception. Nothing I have said earlier in this paper commits me to this denial; and it is a denial I would like to avoid. Thus the response I have sketched cannot find support from McDowell's position without forcing on me views I would like to resist. It must, if possible, stand alone. Whether it can do so is another question. In this, as in many other respects, the reply given, and indeed the proposal sketched, are, at most, first moves towards a resolution of our difficulties.

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