

Review-Article

THE MOVING MIRRORS OF MUSIC: ROGER SCRUTON RESONATES WITH TRADITION

BY A. E. DENHAM

'PERHAPS WHAT is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express)', wrote Wittgenstein, 'is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning'.¹ Wittgenstein's remark is a useful reminder to all who attempt to write about the nature and the value of art, for there our powers of expression often seem inadequate to the phenomena we aim to describe. In such cases it is natural to direct attention to the 'background' of aesthetic experience itself. In consequence, many philosophical elucidations of art works will make good sense only to those who are already engaged with them on their own terms—engaged with their distinctive character and forms. That this is so is perhaps most evident when the philosopher's target is the art of music. Roger Scruton's latest contribution to philosophical aesthetics, *The Aesthetics of Music*,² is guided by a deep appreciation of the background of musical experience, and he often allows music to speak for itself, through musical example and illustration. This study is exceptionally, if not uniquely, informed by a wide and thorough acquaintance with its subject matter, and it is commendably replete with references to, and music examples illustrating, specific compositions.³ For this reason, among others, it should appeal not only (nor even principally) to philosophers but to those whose interest in the philosophy of music arises out of the practice and analysis of music itself.

The explicit shape of Scruton's study derives from its origins as a series of lectures, in which each chapter addresses an issue or issues raised by its predecessor. It is implicitly organized, however, around the four questions which have been the traditional focus of the philosophy of music. The first and most fundamental of these is the question of definition: What is music? (Chaps. 1–4). I say that this is the most fundamental question not because it is the one which philosophers have historically found most pressing (it isn't), or because it is the first which Scruton takes up (it is), but because it must be answered before conversation can proceed to any other. The second question is one of meaning: In what does the meaning or content of music consist? (Chaps. 5–8 and 11). Here, issues of the representational and expressive status of music are at the fore—issues which arise out of the common conviction that music is, *inter alia*, a mode of *communication*, coupled with the absence of common agreement about just *what* it is that music communicates. This leads naturally to the question of how it is that music conveys its meanings ('How does music mean?'), which involves the author in issues of musical form (Chap. 10), the merits of structural analysis and 'authentic' performance (Chaps. 13 and 14) and the status of tonality as a musical order (Chap. 9). Scruton's final question is a straightforwardly normative one: What determines the value of music? Or 'Why does music matter?' (Chaps. 12 and 15). Related, if subsidiary, questions appear under this head, including the question which most exercised Plato and with which the history of the philosophy of music

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, Oxford, 1980, p. 18.

² *The Aesthetics of Music*. By Roger Scruton. pp. xx + 530. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, £35. ISBN 0–19–816638–9.)

³ To survey some of the competitors, see: Peter Kivy, *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music*, Cambridge, 1993; idem, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections in Musical Representation*, Ithaca, NY, & London, 1991; Jerrold Levinson, *Music, Art and Metaphysics*, Ithaca, NY, & London, 1990; idem, 'Work and Oeuvre' and *Other Essays*, Ithaca, NY, & London, 1996; Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions: the Philosophical Theories*, 1985; idem, *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Art*, London, 1995.

began: What, if anything, does music contribute to other, extra-musical, human aspirations? This last question was very much sidelined by the formalism of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment aesthetics and largely remained so through the first half of this century. Yet even a cursory survey of recent literature—not only in the philosophy of music but also in music theory, ethnomusicology and historical musicology—reveals its current prominence, which has recently been encouraged, for better or worse, by enthusiasm for postmodernist critical theory. It is a virtue of Scruton's book that, unlike many others written in the analytic tradition, it takes them seriously. And unlike many of those who have left that tradition behind, his response to them is as interesting as it is controversial.

As this précis suggests, *The Aesthetics of Music* is a long and ambitious study. I will follow its implicit order, and treat each of these questions in turn.

WHAT IS MUSIC?

It is natural to think of the physical sciences as providing a kind of ontological catalogue—an accounting of what exists, in which shapes and forms, standing in which compositional and causal relations. This conception of the physical sciences may also determine one's larger ontology—one's general theory of what is. Such is the essence of physicalism, the view that a complete account of what exists would include all and only physical or material entities. Music is made up of sounds, and sounds are produced by waves: vibrations impacting on the ear. Moreover, sound-waves would seem to be physical entities, in at least two respects: they inhabit regions of physical space, and they enter into causal relations with other physical objects. Should we not, then, strictly speaking, identify music with the physical substrata—the patterns of vibrations which make it up?

Scruton's starting-point for his definition of music is to counter the intuitions which guide this simple piece of reasoning. He wishes to counter, that is, the intuitions which suggest that music can be elucidated in purely physicalist terms. His arguments on this subject provide the first evidence of his general resistance to *reductive* analyses, a resistance which runs throughout the book and which is, in the end, the key to his understanding of both the nature and the meaning of music. Reductive analyses come in many different forms, but in their most common form they attempt to reduce supervenient, phenomenal entities and properties (entities and properties *qua* objects of experience) to subvenient, material entities and properties (those licensed by the physical sciences and, in particular, by the science of physics). The account of 'music-as-sound-waves' mooted above exhibits two reductive moves of this kind: there is the move which characterizes sounds as physical things, and the move which characterizes musical tones as (nothing more than) patterns of sound.

To see what is wrong with this strategy, Scruton invites the reader to consider an analogy between sounds and other 'secondary qualities' such as colours which, as John Locke characterized them, are 'nothing in the objects themselves', but powers or dispositions to produce certain experiential effects.⁴ Appealing to the philosopher's favourite secondary quality, the colour red, Scruton writes:

To be red is to be disposed to produce in the normal observer the experience of seeing red . . . But, it might be said, you cannot stop there; dispositions must be 'grounded': there must be some structural feature of the object, by *virtue* of which it is disposed to present this appearance. And if that is so, should we not say that redness consists in possessing this structural feature, that this is what it is to *be* red? (p. 5)⁵

⁴ John Locke, *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding*, abridged edn., ed. John Yolton, Rutland, Vermont, 1991, Book II, Chap. 8.

⁵ Strictly speaking, sounds are not, Scruton claims, secondary qualities, but they are certainly secondary in an analogous sense: they are secondary objects which, like rainbows, are 'appearance dependent' without yet being mere appearances. That some sound or rainbow exists, here and now, is not, however, merely a fact about the mental states of those who perceive them; it is not comparable to the occurrence of a hallucination or a dream. For it is also a fact about the condition of the *world*, albeit the phenomenal world, the world as encountered in perceptual experience. A sound is, as Scruton puts it, a 'well-founded phenomenon' in Leibniz's sense—an appearance which is also real. By the same token, sounds are not physical objects nor constructions out of the primary qualities of objects as they exist independently of us; they are, as we say, 'intentional objections': objects of experience and thought, owing their existence to our capacity for responding to certain features of the world (vibrations) as sounds, and defined by the conscious states that 'intend' or focus on them.

The error here, Scruton argues, is to identify the phenomenal appearance, the redness as experienced by us, with its physical ground. It is, so to speak, a *conceptual* error, for it confuses the entity which we describe in phrases such as ‘that colour’ with the state of the world which *causes* that entity to be present in experience—in this case the reflectancy properties that are uniquely responsible for our seeing the colour red. For we identify redness on the basis of its distinctive phenomenal appearance, *not* on the basis of its underlying physical ground. Were scientists to discover that the underlying reflectancy properties of red things had altered overnight, while leaving all colour appearances exactly as they were, would we say that pillar-boxes are no longer red? Or would we say, rather, that red things were still red, but now had a different structural ground? If your intuitions match Scruton’s, then you will say the latter. Extending the point to the nature of sound:

we should no more identify the sound with the sound wave than we identify the redness of an object with the light that comes from it. There is no better case for eliminating the phenomenal reality of sound in favour of the primary qualities of sound waves than there is for eliminating the phenomenal reality of colours and rainbows. (p. 6)

Does it follow, then, that sounds enjoy no objective reality? One’s response to that question depends in part on what one means by ‘objective’. If the term is synonymous with ‘experience-independent’, then sounds are not objective. But if the term means, rather, ‘independent of any particular person’s experience’, then they are. Suppose that a sound of a certain kind exists if a person (or other creature) possessed of normal auditory capacities *would* have the requisite sound-experience, *were* he or she suitably placed. It is not necessary that anyone actually hear the sound, any more than it is necessary that a rainbow be perceived for it to cast its colours across the sky. Analogously, ‘Red things are *really* red, even though redness is a matter of appearance . . . [T]here is a distinction between being red and merely looking red, even though redness is a matter of how things look’ (p. 6). Scruton’s point here is in fact one of crucial importance to his subsequent arguments; it ramifies throughout his book, underpinning his responses to the further questions of musical meaning and value. (Indeed, it is unfortunate that he fails to make its broader significance more explicit at this early stage, for many readers will, I fear, react to these initial chapters as did a recent reviewer for the *Musical Times*, who described them as an ‘intimidatingly thorough, rather dry exercise in analytical philosophy’.⁶) Stated in quite general terms, the point is this: objective judgements—statements of belief which are plainly true or plainly false—may yet be judgements of conditions which are thoroughly dependent on our experiential responses to things. (It is an objective truth, for instance, that grass is green and a clear, midday sky is not yellow but blue, even though colour qualities are phenomenal properties, defined in terms of our experiential responses.) It is crucial that we appreciate this possibility if we are to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of physicalism and subjective idealism in our ontologies, not least in our ontology of music. For it is this possibility, as we shall see later, which ultimately makes sense of the search for standards of *correctness* by which to assess our judgements of musical meaning and value.⁷ Far from being a ‘dry exercise’, Scruton’s account of the nature of sound is a contribution to that search. And at this initial stage he is, I believe, very much on target.

Having noted that sounds are secondary objects, it is worth recording a qualification to the effect that they are not, on that account, Aristotelian substances (i.e., extended bodies). They are, rather, events—something which happens *to* substances, and which ‘lasts for a certain time and then vanishes’ (p. 8). Moreover, sounds are what Scruton terms ‘pure’ events: we do not distinguish the participants in sound events from what they do, as we may in other events such as a football match. In a football game the event is a matter of substances (e.g. the ball, the

⁶ Ivan Hewett, ‘A Tract for the Times’, *The Musical Times*, cxxxix (1998), 53–6, at p. 53.

⁷ We need not, and should not, suppose that in abandoning the perspective of the physical sciences we are consigned to a subjectivist free-for-all in which any judgement is as good as any other. If that were so, there would no longer be any call for the discipline of aesthetics (or, for that matter, of ethics). Its traditional subject matter would be assigned instead to an impartial, descriptive sociology in which the plurality of actual and possible evaluative judgements are merely registered and recorded, with no attempt made to adjudicate differences or to assess the merits of competing views. That this is, in fact, a course now favoured by not only popular sentiment but by many professional musicologists lends some urgency to the task of examining the assumptions from which it proceeds.

players) undergoing spatial and temporal transformations, and the substances can be distinguished from the event (the game) in which they participate. But in the case of sound

we are presented with pure events. Although the sound that I hear is produced by something, I am presented in hearing with the sound alone. The thing that produces the sound, even if it is 'something heard', is not the intentional object of hearing, but only the cause of what I hear. (p. 12)

The distinction marked here serves not only to refine the philosophical definition of sound but, more interestingly, to introduce the notion of *acousmatic* hearing and listening whereby the object of auditory attention is not, or is not essentially, assigned a location in ordinary, three-dimensional, physical space; sounds heard acousmatically are not heard as bodies within that space, but are, rather, heard as disembodied items whose primary dimension of individuation is not spatial but temporal.⁸ It is as if they occupied a single, unitary region which enjoys a quite independent existence. And indeed they do: they occupy the musical space which we construct in our imagination:

We are not *part* of the world of sound, as we are part of the visual world. I see things *before* me, spatially related to me. But I do not stand *in* the world of sound as I stand in the world of sight. Nor is this surprising, given that the world of sound contains events and processes only . . . The sound world is metaphysically apart from us. (p. 13)

I do not believe, as Scruton does, that we *must* experience sound in this way; Peter Strawson's famous attempt in the second chapter of his *Individuals*, for instance, sketches one alternative 'auditory universe' employing the notion of mind-independent sound objects which are located in specific regions of physical space.⁹ Be that as it may, Scruton is right to say that it is acousmatic hearing which characterizes our experience of music. To see why, we must leave behind the analysis of sound and turn to the question of what it is to hear sounds *as* music. Or as the author puts it, 'What distinguishes the sound of music?' (p. 16).

The most common answer to that question is that musical sound is distinguished by its organization. And the answer is right, so far as it goes, but it does not mark off music from poetry or even ordinary speech; nor does it capture the distinctive phenomenal quality of sound heard as music.¹⁰ Musical sounds are more accurately marked off, in Scruton's terms, as 'tones', where a tone is, first, a sound heard acousmatically ('heard apart from the everyday physical world'); secondly, a tone is a sound heard 'within a musical field of force' (p. 17). If this second criterion seems to you to suggest a circularity, then you are right: it does not help to define music in terms of tones, and tones in terms of musical fields. Nevertheless, we can perhaps make some better sense of 'tones' by noting other of Scruton's remarks on their nature, although these remain rather oblique and suggestive.

Consider the sound patterns which are heard when someone utters, for instance, the word 'bang'. These are clearly patterns which could occur in nature without having the character of a word. But if we hear a speaker utter the word, and if we ascribe to him or her the intention to communicate, and if, moreover, we speak the same language, then we hear the vocalization as occurring within an ordered, rule-governed system, a system within which individual instances are secured of meaning. In short, we do not hear the sound as blank, isolated noise, but as contributing to a pattern, organized by a mutually recognized set of conventions and produced with the intention that we shall grasp its meaning. And that, Scruton says, is how we hear sounds when we hear them as musical tones:

⁸ As Scruton notes, this observation echoes Pierre Schaeffer's account of musical experience in his *Traité des objets musicaux*, Paris, 1966. Schaeffer there argues that acousmatic hearing liberates music's sounds from assignments of spatial location; sounds the causal origins of which are differently located in physical space (say, in the first violin section and in that of the double basses) are heard as coinciding in the same musical space.

⁹ Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: an Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, London & New York, 1987, Chap. 2, *passim*.

¹⁰ In searching for a better demarcation, Scruton notes, it would be easy to get lost in consideration of anomalous modern exemplars of 'music' such as Cage's four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence, or George Crumb's *Music for a Summer Evening*. These he sets to one side, proposing to concentrate on what he calls 'our central instances of the art' (p. 17). There is some wisdom in this, but one test of the success of the strategy should be that it delivers an account which sheds some light on the anomalies. Scruton's does not. Nonetheless, it surely provides a valuable account of the traditional paradigm cases—of sounds which are heard as organized by our experience of pitch, rhythm, melody and harmony.

Every sound intentionally made is instinctively taken to be an attempt at communication. And this is as true of music as it is of speech. In the presence of sound intentionally produced, and intentionally organized, we feel ourselves within another person's ambit. And that feeling conditions our response to what we hear. (p. 18)

The analogy with a language is useful so far as it goes. But in Scruton's example it is crucial that one speaks the language in question oneself, for one hears a vocalization as a discrete word *only* if one is in a position to discern its meaning. Significance thus depends on an understanding of how the sounds refer to something beyond themselves. But this is not so in the case of musical tones: an individual tone may be heard as a part of the whole quite independently of any extra-musical, referential role.¹¹

Be that as it may, the more general idea that to hear a sound as a musical tone is to locate it within a perceptual Gestalt is neither new nor implausible: it featured prominently, for instance, in Leonard B. Meyer's account of melodic closure¹² and, as Scruton points out, has been used by many post-Schenkerian theorists to describe the goal-directed character of music. But the importance of the idea to Scruton's account should not be underestimated. He most often appeals to it under the rubric of 'aspect perception', in which the intentional object of immediate perception is properly characterized as an organizational whole—as when we perceive the pictorial subject in a portrait or landscape painting. As the idea is played out in Scruton's discussions of the main elements of musical organization, it becomes plain that our sensitivity to these, too, is to be understood as a mode of aspect perception. This way of describing what we hear when we hear music is, in fact, a cornerstone of his resistance to reductionism: beginning with the most basic phenomenon of hearing a sound as a tone and extending through to the more complex objects of musical perception such as melody and rhythm, he argues that the proper description of what one perceives there permits no analysis into wholly sub-intentional or sub-aspectual parts. Analysis can, of course, *identify* component parts of larger patterns. But if the components we thus isolate are components of music—parts of 'what we hear, when we hear sound as music'—they will themselves be organizational, Gestalt properties, the existence of which is always dependent on our human capacity to discern them, and which are irreducible to their underlying physical structures.

Scruton maintains his defence of the autonomy of music throughout his discussion of specific modes of 'the organization which turns sound to tone, and so permits us to hear music', namely, the organizational elements of pitch, rhythm, melody and harmony. (Readers will recognize these as Copland's 'four essential elements' of music, but with the addition of pitch and the exclusion of tone-colour, which Scruton sets to one side.¹³) In each case, Scruton is careful to distinguish the sub-intentional ground of the phenomenon from the phenomenon *as experienced* when we experience sounds as music. In the opening account of pitch, for instance, he observes that the pitch of a sound is produced by a vibration of a given frequency, and that these frequencies are ordered along a continuum. Moreover, in our experience of musical pitches we 'hear the pitch continuum as though it were a dimension; pitched sounds are higher or lower, and this impression varies strictly in accordance with their frequency' (p. 20). This

¹¹ For this reason, the way in which an organized musical pattern confers significance on its individual parts, transforming them into tones, is better captured by analogy with visual, rather than verbal, patterns. Consider, for example, this simple figure:



It is composed of points, each of which contributes to the shape of the whole. It is almost impossible to see any individual point as *just* a point in space, independent of its role in forming a line; it is equally difficult to see each line so composed as *just* a line, independent of its role in forming a cube. Rather, one is compelled to perceive each 'under the aspect' of the whole—in this case under the aspect of a cube. Likewise, when a sound is heard as a tone it is heard as a contribution to a larger pattern—a pattern within which its presence is heard as purposeful, as fulfilling a function. While a mere sound may be heard as arbitrary and accidental, what it is to hear a sound *as* a tone is, *inter alia*, to hear it as possessing a kind of teleology within a larger system—within Scruton's musical 'field of force' (p. 17).

¹² As in his *Explaining Music: Essays and Explanations*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1973, Chap. 4, *passim*.

¹³ Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music*, New York, 1939, p. 33.

parallelism notwithstanding, the continuum of frequencies which orders sounds according to the process that produces them is normally no part of what *we* notice and *we* attend to when we hear music: it is no part of the 'intentional object' of our *experience*. For

heard in, and imposed upon this continuum, is another: a quasi-spatial arrangement of tones, arranged in a pattern of discrete intervals, which repeats itself at the octave until vanishing at last over the horizon of perception. This . . . [quasi-spatial] order is part of what we hear, when we hear sound as music. (p. 22)

Scruton's accounts of pitch and of the other three selected elements of music (jointly comprising his account of tones in Chapter 2) will probably contain few surprises for the practising musician, critic or musicologist. Nonetheless, they seem to this reader a not inconsiderable achievement, and one invaluable to the fledgling theorist of musical aesthetics (including, no doubt, the philosophy students to whom these lectures were initially delivered). Scruton speaks plainly, sensibly and informatively about the traditional organizational structures featured in the vast majority of music, providing the reader with some basic analytical tools which might then be used to set about describing it. He provides, *inter alia*, a sophisticated version of the kind of guide to musical vocabulary which one might have expected but does not find in, for instance, a recently published 'very short' introduction to music.¹⁴ Finally, the elements Scruton selects are not only essential elements of music of the post-Renaissance, European tonal tradition; while his many examples are largely drawn from that tradition, what he has to say is equally applicable to Schoenberg, Indian ragas and heavy metal. The most broad-minded and liberal reader will find little to object to in these opening chapters (even if there is much that is disturbing later on).

I will not rehearse Scruton's account of each element, but his discussion of rhythm merits special mention. He first devotes individual sections to the components of rhythm: beat, metre, the divisibility of the temporal continuum, the distinction between down- and upbeats, grouping, accent and stress, and cross-rhythm. With these in place, he turns to the question of rhythmic *hierarchy*—the question of how rhythmic groupings at one level are reflected in and contribute to those at other levels. We are presented with a contrast between W. Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer's theory, according to which stress groupings at the basic level are reproduced at higher levels by extrapolation over larger time-spans, and that of H. C. Longuet-Higgins (with C. S. Lee), according to which metrical patterns are recursively applied to yield a generative hierarchy, in which all the lower levels can be derived from the highest ones.¹⁵ Both, Scruton argues, provide incomplete accounts. Cooper and Meyer's theory captures what Scruton terms the 'cumulative' hierarchy of rhythmic organization (in which lower-order elements are comprehended in themselves, and the higher-order elements understood in terms of them), but a cumulative hierarchy alone could never explain how it is that, having grasped the primary organization of a short passage of music, one can discern the rhythmic organization of the whole piece, in which it is reflected. Only a generative hierarchy could do that. Yet Longuet-Higgins's generative theory fails too, for it leans too exclusively on metre alone. It is true that metrical organization emerges through recursively repeated subdivisions of a temporal measure; hence our grasp of it is well explained in generative terms. By 'unconsciously latching on the generative hierarchy, I am able to assign a measure, a beat, and a temporal value to the notes that I hear, and so begin to "move with" the music as it steps across the charted territory of time' (p. 34). But metrical organization is not the *whole* of rhythm, and Scruton's verdict is that while each theory contributes something to our understanding of rhythm, neither succeeds in characterizing what we hear *in* rhythmically organized music.¹⁶

¹⁴ Nicholas Cook, *Music: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 1998 (reviewed in *Music & Letters*, lxxx (1999), 271–4 (Eds.)).

¹⁵ See W. Grosvenor Cooper & Leonard B. Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, Chicago, 1960, and H. C. Longuet-Higgins & C. S. Lee, 'The Perception of Musical Rhythm', *Perception*, ii (1982), 115–28.

¹⁶ These criticisms are not wholly new, but Scruton brings interest to them by clarifying what each is trying to do, and by locating their aims within the larger project of characterizing what we hear *in* rhythmically organized music: 'Longuet-Higgins's theory of rhythm is a piece of psychology . . . it offers to show how we perceive rhythmic organization in a sequence of sounds. The theory of Cooper and Meyer does not try to *explain* our experience of

What, then, is 'the experience of rhythm'? Scruton's answer appeals, again, to the observation that rhythm is but one component in a larger, organized whole only within which does it gain its sense and point. We hear rhythm as a part of a complete musical construction, and understand it so; that is, when we experience musical (rather than mechanical) rhythm we typically (if not unfailingly) do so in concert with the musical elements of melody, harmony, counterpoint and the rest. 'In concert with' does not here mean 'alongside', nor even 'simultaneous with': it means 'within' or 'under the aspect of' the whole structure. Hence rhythm, Scruton argues,

cannot, in the end, be studied as a thing apart . . . The subtle rhythmic organization achieved by such composers as Haydn, Schubert, and Brahms depends upon our understanding of melody, theme, and motif, which cause us to break down the metre of the music into many smaller pulses, crossing and reinforcing one another . . . Consider just one instance: the middle section of the slow movement of Schubert's String Quintet in C major, D956; and try to enumerate all the many pulses and accents that are synthesized in its extraordinary texture. (p. 36)

The experience of the elements of music, including rhythm, is an experience of a *unity* which cannot with impunity be dissected into its discrete components—or at least not without losing sight of what it is that makes it music at all. No single element can be properly characterized independently of the others, even if this perceived unity can be partly explained in terms of the regularities, hierarchical organization and repetitions in the sounds themselves. For ultimately it is we who draw these elements together in perception—who synthesize the sounds which every other animal hears into the music which only *we* hear. The question then naturally arises: however do we do that?

The answer given here is, in a word, by way of *metaphor* (p. 96). Scruton makes a fine attempt to give an account of our reliance on metaphors of space and movement in our description of music, and to identify the special capacity by which we are able to hear music at all, namely, the imagination. The view which he aims to defend is, summed in his own words, that

Music is the intentional object of an experience that only rational beings can have, and only through the exercise of imagination. To describe it we must have recourse to metaphor, not because music resides in an analogy with other things, but because the metaphor describes exactly *what* we hear, when we hear sounds as music. (p. 96)

Scruton's elucidation of this claim will, however, disappoint those interested in the psychology of musical perception; it draws on almost none of the contributions of cognitive psychology, even in its commentary on specific psychological functions such as reason and imagination, and has little to add to our stock of first-person, introspective evidence concerning *why* we respond to music as we do. Why, for instance do we find no mention here of Mark DeBellis's defence of cognitive accounts of music, and of the generative models of Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff?¹⁷ This reader, certainly, felt somewhat cheated—particularly after the careful, evidence-based treatment of tone in the preceding chapter.¹⁸

Nevertheless, what Scruton does have to offer seems correct enough, and probably needs saying in a scientific age in which many of our most respected philosophers regard the role of

rhythm. Rather, it attempts to amplify that experience, by showing how the organization of a rhythmic cell may be heard in ever larger time-spans. It is, one might say, a critical rather than a psychology theory . . . Both are deficient . . . Cooper and Meyer substitute stress for metre, in order to reach the iterative hierarchy which for them provides, so satisfying an account of musical order, at least of the order exhibited by the fifth of Bach's Little Preludes. But they achieve this result only by ignoring the generative hierarchy that is implied by metrical organization. Longuet-Higgins overlooks both grouping and stress, in order to provide a consistent theory of the remainder: a theory which treats music as perceptually organized sound . . . However, the experience of rhythm is something more than an experience of metrical structure' (p. 35).

¹⁷ Mark DeBellis, *Music and Conceptualization*, Cambridge, 1995; Fred Lerdahl & Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983.

¹⁸ To be just, however, Scruton does not claim to *explain why* we understand music as we do, but aims only to *describe what form* that understanding takes. (The question 'How do we do that?' is here typically interpreted as asking 'What is it like to do that?') This is in keeping with Scruton's broadly phenomenological approach throughout the study, which conceives of the philosopher's task as making perspicuous the structures of experience and its intentional objects, rather than investigating their causal history. Nonetheless, the distinction between description and explanation is a notoriously elusive one, and many will wish that the account had leant a little closer to the latter.

metaphor in the description of experience as, at best, dispensable and, at worst, misleading and pernicious.¹⁹ Scruton appreciates that, in some arenas of experience, the use of metaphor is neither: metaphors are necessary because they create a 'fusion' of responses, in which two independent things are connected in a single thought (p. 86). In Milton's figurative descriptions of Satan, for instance, 'Satan comes before us in another aspect; in his face we see the eclipsed and primeval menace, in which the light of nature glows black and half-extinguished, threatening the end of all' (p. 86). This is possible because we are capable of attending to the appearances of two distinct items at once, and imaginatively transferring our responses from one to the other, producing a kind of 'double intentionality':

We are able to attend not only to the inner reality of objects, but also to their appearance. In aesthetic experience our senses are saturated by the appearances of things . . . We are appreciating objects as they are *for us*, and so bringing them into a kind of personal relation . . . I come to vibrate in sympathy with both simultaneously. I thereby make a connection between them—a connection that is real in my emotions, but only imagined in the objects themselves . . . The resulting experience is one with a 'double intentionality', and forbids their separation. (p. 86)

The notion of 'double intentionality' may be unfamiliar to some readers, but it is best illustrated by the perception of pictorial aspects. When I look at a portrait of the Queen, for instance, I do not see a picture and *also* see the Queen. If the portrait is a good one, neither will I simply see a resemblance between the picture and the Queen. Rather,

the face and the picture are fused in my perception: which is not to say that I confuse the one with the other, or mistake the reality of either. I am presented with two simultaneous objects of perception: the *real* picture, and the *imaginary* face. And my response to each is fused with my response to the other. (p. 87)

This 'dualistic' perception of naturalistic paintings finds an analogy in the comprehension of music through metaphor.²⁰ Our *most basic* apprehension of music, Scruton argues, is an intrinsically metaphorical one, defining the intentional object of music, for which the primary metaphors are those of space and movement—of high and low, up and down, sweeping and staid, deep and shallow, fast and plodding. If you think that these metaphors are dispensable, then Scruton aims to show that you are mistaken. Were we to try to eradicate them entirely from our experience of music, he insists

we should then cease to hear orientation in music; tones would no longer move towards or away from each other; no phrase would mirror another, no leaps be bolder or larger than others, and so on. In short, the experience of music would involve neither melody nor counterpoint as we know them. Musical movement would have reduced to a static pulse: in which case, why should we continue to talk of music? If the metaphors are dispensable, it is only for the trivial reason that our world might not have contained the experience of music. (p. 93)

Is this overstating the case? In particular, does it reveal a confusion (not unknown to intellectuals) between being able to *have* an experience and being able to *describe* it? For my own part, I am unsure. I do know that small children are able to recognize, enjoy and move to music—even to dance to it with sensitivity and understanding—while remaining quite unable

¹⁹ Some things have not changed so very much since the time of John Locke, who wrote that 'all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement; and so indeed are perfect cheats'. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, p. 146.

²⁰ To dispute a point of philosophical logic: metaphors, Scruton says, do not identify properties which their referents actually possess, and so they are not used to represent reality. Is this true? Surely the groundwork which Scruton has already laid should permit us to say that metaphors *do* represent actual properties of their referents—namely, their aspectual properties—even if these properties can only be ascribed to things in relation to us who detect them. The role of imagination in the perception of aspects is to synthesize the given material in a way which renders visible (or audible) the aspects there to be seen (or heard). We need not think of imagination in this context as an exercise in 'unasserted thought' concerning non-actual, merely possible states of the world, as Scruton does. Why should we characterize the aspectual, mind-dependent features of things represented in metaphor as a kind of phantasmizing? Scruton is surely right to insist that, in art, the 'way the world seems depends upon an imaginative involvement with it' (p. 92), and that 'musical perception . . . could not exist in the mind of a creature incapable of imaginative thought' (p. 94). But it does not follow that the aspects of the world which we thereby encounter are no part of reality.

to articulate what it is to which they are responding. Of course, the metaphors are not available to them as a way of *conceptually* organizing what they hear, but all that follows from that fact is that what they hear is not conceptually organized. It does not follow that it is not *perceptually* organized according to some discriminatory, categorizing capacities they possess which are invisible to language—which are wholly non-conceptual, and hence neither metaphorical nor literal.²¹

Despite these concerns about Scruton's (very central) discussion of imagination and metaphor, it should be said that, all told, the response this book delivers to the question 'What is music?' is an insightful, if not fully satisfying one.²² Throughout these early chapters Scruton has aimed to remain true to the experience of much, if not all music; moreover, his claim that metaphor 'defines' the intentional object of the musical experience is, even if not unfaillingly true, nonetheless an apt description of how we very often *conceive of* music of the literate, Western canon. Most of all, Scruton has tried to resist the temptation to assimilate music to something else—something better understood—that it manifestly is not. However, that temptation promises to reappear, for a greater challenge lies ahead: to account for the communicative import or content of music without compromising the formal independence and uniqueness that he has so vigorously defended.

WHAT DOES MUSIC MEAN?

The very idea of 'musical meaning' will seem misguided to some, if by that phrase we mean to say that music refers to something beyond itself. Peter Williams, for instance, claims that he resists 'anything that appears to put music second: music as gesture, language, expression, intonation, symbol, sign, embodiment, life, always as or like something else . . . Only snare and delusion come from not seeing the worlds of experience and music as distinct.'²³ These are strong words—too strong, surely. But there is a sane and sober intuition which they exaggerate. It is this: while the project of 'explaining' how music speaks to us is destined to be pursued in terms of comparisons with some other thing (or, as Scruton has argued, in terms of analogy and metaphor), every such comparison threatens to compromise what is distinctive about music itself. To Scruton's credit, he approaches the question of musical meaning cautiously, asking whether there is 'anything, other than itself, that music means' (p. 118). Also to his credit, the answer one finds here abjures both Williams's neo-Hanslickian polemical formalism and the extremes of postmodernist critiques in which music expresses anything and everything—class struggle, gender conflict, capitalist ideology, and power relations of every other imaginable variety—everything, that is, save musicality itself. Scruton argues that music is not a representation but an expressive medium, and that what it expresses are the subjective aspects of human experience, of which human emotion is the paradigm case: music is, in a phrase, the mirror of our inner lives. He also offers a controversial analysis of just *how* musical form achieves this end, namely, through elaborations of tonal order and of triadic tonality in particular (Chaps. 9 and 10). This section and the next will address each point in turn.

It is commonly remarked that music, among all the arts, is distinguished as being primarily,

²¹ Scruton briefly mentions something akin to this objection, noting that a listener might, in principle, hear the movement of 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' as a unity, without discerning the 'upward movement' from C to G in the first bar and without hearing the [first three] quavers in the next bar as moving the melody in the 'same direction', and so on. But he replies that in such cases 'we should say that our listener, even if he has perceived a musical unity, has not perceived it *as music*. He has heard the outline, but not the substance, and the crucial act of recognition, which is a recognition of movement, has yet to occur (p. 95). Perhaps not every reader will find this response question-begging. This one does.

²² The reader may note that I have passed over in silence Chapter 4, entitled 'Ontology', which concerns the identity and individuation of musical works. My reasons for doing so are twofold. First, the topic is an intrinsically uninteresting one—a paradigm of the 'crossword puzzle' version of philosophy which has spawned so many papers concerning, for instance, how few hairs a man may have on his head before he is counted as bald, or whether the replacement of plank after plank in Theseus' ship yields the same ship or a new one. The second reason is that the author himself appears to find the topic as uninteresting as I do, and includes his discussion in the spirit of duty rather than as a contribution to his overall argument. Enthusiasts, however, may wish to pursue Jerrold Levinson's relentless pursuit of these and related issues in his *Music, Art and Metaphysics*, especially Part 2, 'Metaphysics of Art'.

²³ Peter Williams, 'A World of Delighted Imagining', *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 4959 (17 April 1998), 18–19, at p. 19.

if not exclusively, non-representational. Philosophers have long found the thought intriguing. Schopenhauer, for example, seized on this observation to underpin an entire metaphysics of music, arguing that, while other art forms (literature, painting and even architecture) provide us with 'copies' of Platonic ideas, music alone represents the fundamental life force (the noumenal reality of Will) in a wholly immediate way.²⁴ Whatever one may think of this rather wild twist on things, there is undeniably something right in the thought that music does not typically describe its subject matter, in the way that words do, or reproduce its phenomenal appearance, as non-abstract pictures do.

How, then, do we capture the essential difference? Scruton begins by distinguishing three ways in which a work of art can be related to its 'content': by representing, expressing and merely copying. While he claims to be making a 'fresh start' here, and while he takes his explicit lead from Benedetto Croce's philosophy of art, what he has to say is in fact heavily indebted to quite recent developments in aesthetic theory. In particular, it is indebted to the work of Nelson Goodman, the American analytic philosopher and author of the philosophical classic *Languages of Art*. Goodman argues that a work of art expresses something when it exemplifies that thing (where a work exemplifies some property when it refers to it by way of possessing it). Chopin's Nocturne in C minor, for instance, expresses wistfulness (among other things). But it does not do so by naming wistfulness, or by resembling it, but by being (metaphorically) wistful—it refers to wistfulness and it possesses itself the property of wistfulness, albeit not literally. Hence a piece of absolute music—like an abstract painting—can refer to something beyond or beside itself, but do so by, as it were, *manifesting* that to which it directs our attention. This fact is reflected in the way we speak about music: we do not say that the last movement of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' is about tragedy: we say that it is tragic, and we hear it as such.²⁵

Scruton marks a similar distinction between representation and expression, where the former term contrasts to, rather than includes, the latter—although he assiduously avoids any talk of 'exemplification'. The alert reader will note that Scruton also avoids ever defining 'representation', and he never arrives at a wholly settled use of the term. Indeed, this reader was left somewhat puzzled by claims such as that 'representation involves . . . the presentation of thoughts about a fictional world' (p. 127). While it is true that some representations represent thoughts about fictional worlds, Scruton's remark is simply false of 'representation in general' (as Scruton entitles the relevant section). For meaningful words and sentences and figurative pictures—paradigm instances of representation—all present thoughts, but very often these are thoughts about the *actual* world. Fictionality is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of the relation of representation, even by Scruton's own understanding of that term. He is on much firmer ground when he attempts to clarify the representational relation by contrasting it to abstraction, in the context of visual art. For instance, when we look at a Poussin landscape we are presented with a scene which, as Scruton says, contains an 'implicit narrative'; someone who sees the painting and understands it does so by 'recuperating *thoughts* about something other than [the painting itself]' (p. 123). That person will of course have thoughts about the material painting *as well*, but if he or she 'delighted in the shapes and colours displayed on the canvas, but did not see the landscape, [he or she] would be blind to the

²⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, New York, 1966, i, Book III, §52.

²⁵ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: an Approach to the Theory of Symbols*, London, 1969, Chap. 2, §9. Goodman's distinction is between two ways in which a symbol can refer to something, namely, by denoting it and by expressing it. 'Denotation', Goodman wrote, 'is the core of representation'. The paradigm example of denotation is linguistic representation, for example between a name and what it names; another is the relation between a description and what it describes. The denotative relation is fixed by convention: the symbol ♀ denotes the female sex because we have come to use it in that way. But it might just as well have turned out to denote unicorns, or distant planets. No natural isomorphism obtains between the denotata and its denotatum. Some symbols, however, including abstract art, dance and instrumental music refer to their subject matter by way of actually possessing some of its properties. A standard case of exemplification is the tailor's swatch: it refers to a kind of cloth, and indeed denotes it, but it does so by way of possessing certain of its properties—for example its colour, texture and weave. Thus 'exemplification is possession plus reference. To have without symbolizing is merely to possess, while to symbolize without having is to refer in some other way than by exemplifying. The swatch exemplifies only those properties that it both has and refers to.' This leads Goodman directly to his conception of expression, in terms of which one thing expresses another just if it *metaphorically* exemplifies that thing (*ibid.*, p. 76).

representation, and blind to the painting's character as a work of art' (p. 121). Abstract paintings, by contrast, present no scene or story, although they are not on that account empty of content, or meaningless: 'there is something to be understood—namely the expression. And that is the content of the painting' (p. 121). Analogously, music presents forms and organizations that seem meaningful in themselves and are a paradigm of pure abstraction. That is, in large part, what is meant by the claim that music is non-representational.²⁶

To understand a representational work of art . . . I must grasp the represented content. In such a case the aesthetic interest lies in the representation, and cannot be detached from it. This is not true of music. We can have a . . . perfect understanding of a piece like *La mer* while being ignorant of, or dismissive towards, its representational claims. (p. 131)²⁷

What, then, of the alternative notion of musical meaning—expressive content? The reader in search of a definition of 'expression' or 'expressiveness' may here feel somewhat let down. But such disappointment would be in part unjustified, for while Scruton abjures the task of defining musical expression, he offers a rich and bold account of it according to which understanding music and understanding it as expressive are inseparable.

Consider a paradigmatic case of musical expression: 'Good Night' from Janáček's *On the Overgrown Path*. The alert listener will notice that there is more than one way of hearing the piece. If one focuses on the C major melody and the triadic harmony it suggests a 'serene tenderness' (p. 160); if, however, one attends to the persistent downward shift from C major to B minor and the 'pulsating heartbeat' of the semiquaver figure, a feeling of somewhat sinister apprehension and anxiety undermines that serenity (p. 161). The music itself invites both responses, and the sensitive listener will, in due course, be aware of both (if not simultaneously). As Scruton notes, it is part of Janáček's mastery that he is able to make both interpretations natural and compelling. But what exactly do we mean when we say that the music is now tender, now apprehensive? We of course cannot mean this strictly and literally, for only a person (or, at a stretch, some other sentient creature) can literally be tender or apprehensive. We must be working here—as Nelson Goodman originally suggested—with a metaphor of some kind. And so says Scruton. Indeed, although he has no kind word for Goodman's account of expression, he does not actually abandon or deviate from Goodman's basic conception of the meaning of 'express' in aesthetic contexts; after all, that basic conception simply tries to say what the words 'express' and 'expression' might mean on our lips as applied to works of art, and it succeeds in doing so. If there is cause for dissatisfaction it is that, in itself, Goodman's exercise in conceptual analysis tells us little more. Scruton, by

²⁶ Not all theorists would agree. Peter Kivy, for instance, has attempted to show that music is at least sometimes representational by reason of sounding like other things to which it refers (e.g., Honegger's *Pacific 231*, in which the sound of a steam locomotive is both imitated and denoted). Kivy's view depends on two thoughts. First, there is the thought that a piece of music can include sounds that resemble the sounds of extra-musical objects and events. This thought is plainly true, as Scruton himself illustrates with several examples (Couperin's *Le tic-toc-choe*, the bells in the finale of Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the musical insects in the slow movement of Bartók's Third Piano Concerto). Secondly, however, there is the thought that when we listen to these instances of music as music—when we hear these sounds as *tones*, in the sense of that term sketched earlier—we hear them as representing what they sound like.

²⁷ Does not some opera, however, stand as an exception to this claim? I do not have in mind that operatic music which stands easily on its own as music, independent of its narrative context (e.g., *Così fan tutte*), but works such as Wagner's *Ring* cycle, in which one's responsiveness to the music arguably depends on one's ability to recuperate the narrative content of the drama which unfolds within it. What, for instance, of the listener who has no idea that certain leitmotifs announce Siegfried, Wotan and Brünnhilde? Wagner is surely the hard case there, but similar claims may reasonably be pressed with regard to less 'difficult' operatic music, for example Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and Verdi's *La traviata*. I very much doubt that, in these cases, the distinction between representation and expression will be sustainable; and if it is (say, by turning just the right definitional pirouettes on those terms), it is not clear to me that it will be at all *useful*. Scruton, however, is unwilling to entertain compromise on this score. Indeed, he claims not only that if the Wagnerian leitmotifs mentioned are 'attached by convention [to its subject, as is a code] it must inevitably cease to be musically significant . . . We do not understand Wagner's music as we understand the representation: if we respond to it as expression, we could miss the meaning of all that happens on the stage and yet have a complete understanding of the music' (p. 137). This seems to me to carry the argument a step too far. Perhaps it also seems so to Scruton, who adds in passing: 'whether we wish to call [the leitmotiv] musical representation is a moot point' (loc. cit.). So it is. The philosopher's conceptual distinctions, here as elsewhere, should mark boundaries which help us to make sense of the territory—not erect barriers which obscure a sometimes anomalous landscape.

contrast, hopes to explain the background of experience which motivates such utterances. His is a 'theory' (a description, really) of what it is to *respond* to music as meaningful and, in particular, to respond to it as expressive. As he puts it, he is identifying a state of mind—the 'recognition of expression'—and locating it in a general theory of aesthetic experience.

For a theory to succeed in this aim, he argues, it must pass three tests.²⁸ First, it must explain the fact that we value expressiveness in music: expressiveness is not, in the normal case, an incidental feature, but one intrinsic to musical appreciation (the 'value' test). Secondly, it must account for the fact that expression is developed in and through 'musical argument'; that is, if a piece of music is to be genuinely expressive it must offer a specifically *musical* articulation of that which is expressed. Merely appending a title, or attaching some lyrics, or simulating some non-musical sounds (say, birdsong) may guide our identification of what the music expresses, but that does not make them features of the musical forms themselves (the 'structure' test). Finally, a theory of expression should be faithful to the fact that expression is part of what we understand when we listen and hear with understanding; it is not something which lies beneath the musical surface, or something identified through analysis, but is, rather, built into our experience of the music (the 'understanding' test). These tests may seem to place a large burden on the theorist, but in practice they here serve more as *constraints*, allowing Scruton to set to one side, if not to discredit, certain competitors. In particular, they permit him to set aside any theories of musical expression which threaten to identify a causal account of *why* we hear music as expressive with an account of *what it is* to hear music. Singled out for criticism in this respect are the theories of Susanne Langer, Deryck Cooke, Peter Kivy and Malcolm Budd. The alert reader, however, will appreciate that many of Scruton's criticisms of competing views are misplaced: where he wants us to believe that they offer the wrong answers to his own question, it would be more just to note that they are offering sensible answers to very different questions.

His own question ('What is it to respond to music as expressive?') is, nonetheless, a worthwhile one. So too is his answer, even if it is sometimes stated so rhetorically and so elliptically as to make it difficult for the reader to identify just what it comes to. That answer, put very simply, is that to respond to music as expressive is for one's experience to 'move with' the music with *Einfühlung*—with empathy. Music is 'the object of a metaphorical perception, whereby it is lifted from the physical realm of sound and placed in the intentional theatre of our sympathies', and the central metaphor which drives this response is, unsurprisingly, that of *movement* (p. 353). Even Eduard Hanslick, who famously argued in his *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854) that music can neither express any extra-musical entities nor communicate any determinate thoughts about them, characterized music as forms propelled or moved through tones, or 'forms moved through sounding' (p. 353). And it is certainly true that our descriptions of music seem to make an ineradicable appeal to metaphors of movement through space: cadences fall, melodies rise, rhythms accelerate and slow down; even the pitch spectrum is typically characterized in terms of high and low. At the same time, as Scruton points out, the idea of musical movement is somewhat paradoxical. 'For how can we speak of movement', he asks, 'when nothing moves? Musical space, and musical movement, are not even *analogous* to the space and movement of the physical world' (p. 51).²⁹ Even if they are not analogous, there is still surely something primitively compelling about our appeal to spatial metaphors, and Scruton maintains that the appeal is also ineliminable. Can it not be explained, however, in terms of the dynamic properties of tones, and hence in terms of the relations of tension and release featured in the diatonic scale itself (as Victor Zuckerkandl has argued)?³⁰ The suggestion is tempting, but the reader should agree with Scruton that, if this explanation were right, we would not hear atonal music in terms of metaphors of movement—which we manifestly do.³¹

²⁸ In a subsequent chapter, Scruton appends a fourth test: the 'semaphore' test according to which expressive qualities do not attach to music merely by virtue of some code or convention; musical meaning is perceived in, not read off, musical form (p. 344).

²⁹ However, Scruton here footnotes Ernst Kurth, who argued precisely that 'musical space is analogous to physical space—even though a feature of the purely psychic realm'. See Ernst Kurth, *Musikpsychologie*, Berne, 1947, pp. 116–36.

³⁰ Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol*, ii: *Man the Musician*, trans. Norbert Guterman, Princeton, 1973, Chap. 12.

³¹ 'The agonizing but beautiful opening of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* contains just as many boundaries in musical space, just as many beginnings and ends, soarings and leapings as any comparable tonal piece . . . In the sixth movement of the *Turangalila symphonie* . . . the strings and *ondes Martenot* sound an unbroken line, in dense F sharp

Scruton wants us to rest with the view that ‘movement and boundary are . . . intrinsic to the musical experience’ (p. 54). In saying that they are ‘intrinsic’ to musical experience, he means to emphasize that movement is not merely one way among others of identifying musical content but is, rather, indispensable to our experience of musical form: ‘The experience of musical form is an experience of movements and gestures, detached from the material world, and carried through to their musical completion’ (p. 357). Such remarks offer no *explanation* of the metaphorical scheme of movement, of course; indeed, they are just one way of expressing the belief that none is to be had.

Is this latest appeal to the ‘irreducibility’ of musical experience a bit too facile? Perhaps. In a study which trades so heavily on close association between our experience of music and of movement in space, it is disappointing, for instance, to find no reference at all to relevant works in experimental psychology.³² Nonetheless, the reader who is prepared to accept the metaphor of spatial movement as an unquestioned premiss will be well placed to embrace Scruton’s account of our response to musical expression as ‘a kind of latent dancing—a sublimated desire to “move with” the music, and so to focus on its moving forms’ (p. 357). Dancing, in fact, takes a surprisingly central role in Scruton’s account of expression (and later, of value), and it is through his appeal to the social character of dancing that he links hearing music as expressive with responding to others with *Einfühlung*—the ‘faculty whereby I adopt, as it were, the vestiges of your outward expression, and so come to feel in myself the subjective awareness that is yours’ (p. 361). Connections are forged between, firstly, hearing music as movement; secondly, responding to what we hear through sympathetic movements of our own (in dance); and thirdly, the ‘recognition of musical expression’ as a kind of psychological movement in which one’s sentiments are reordered and allied with their objects of awareness—the music, and the human actions and experiences it embodies.

At the heart of these connections lies the concept of *Einfühlung*. Appealing variously (and somewhat anecdotally) to Croce, Schopenhauer, Lipps, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, Scruton makes vivid the crucial asymmetry between understanding states of consciousness ‘from the inside’ (the first-person perspective) and observing their ‘outer’ manifestations (the third-person perspective). The former kind of awareness, he notes, requires an act of imagination, as when we imaginatively respond to a poem or a theatrical performance by grasping, from a subjective point of view, the experiences they convey. And this is possible even when we know that neither the poet nor the performer is himself the subject of such experiences, for we find them embodied in the poetry or the performance—or the music—*itself*:

Observing a gesture or expression we may have the experience of *Einfühlung*, or ‘knowing what it’s like’, whereby the gesture becomes, in imagination, our own. We then feel it, not from the observer’s, but from the subject’s point of view. This experience may provide an intimation of a whole state of mind, regardless of whether the state can be described; . . . regardless of whether we believe that there is another person into whose mental arena we have felt our way . . . It is a creation of the imagination, prompted by sympathy. (pp. 363–4)

A central and vivid instance of such imaginative and sympathetic responsiveness to music is, of course, the response of dance. One cannot dance naturally and well unless one feels *within* oneself the movements and gestures of the musical melody and rhythm; hence “‘moving with” expressive music’ is one form of the ‘recognition of expression’ (p. 357). And another such response is the inclination to describe the music in expressive terms as melancholy or bold or gentle: when offered thoughtfully and sincerely, such descriptions are a record of the psychic movements which music calls forth from the imaginative and sympathetic listener. ‘The description of the music as *expressive*’, Scruton writes, ‘is a record of the fact that *this* is how I respond to it—and perhaps a recommendation to others, that they respond in a similar way’ (p. 358). For music lovers everywhere these connections will, I believe, make good intuitive sense. For many theorists, however, they will remain here far too intuitive, and Scruton’s

major harmony, against an atonal background . . . But the beautiful effect that Messiaen achieves depends once again upon the spatial properties of music: the music seems to rest in tonal space, moving without effort among familiar things, like the undulating waters of a sun-spangled lake’ (pp. 53–4).

³² Anthony Storr, for instance, offers an eminently readable layman’s introduction to the psycho-physiology of musical experience in Chapter 2 of his *Music and the Mind*, New York & Oxford, 1992.

unwillingness (or inability) to take us beyond the analogies and metaphors on which they depend will leave many with a sense of dissatisfaction which cannot be remedied by any number of textual appeals to philosophical precedents, or by a fine-sounding German vocabulary. Scruton's narrative does, however, pass the tests he has set for it, and it undoubtedly coheres well with certain natural ways of describing instances of musical expression. That it succeeds in this way is best revealed in his appeals to specific musical examples:

When you move to music, the music takes charge of your response to it—you are being *led* by it, from gesture to gesture, and each new departure is dictated by the musical development . . . You are in *the hands* of the music; your sympathetic response moves in parallel to the musical development . . . When you hear the transition to the second subject in Schubert's String Quartet in G major D887, and that dance-like but strangely solitary melody breaks through the drama of the major–minor exposition, your sense that this is exactly *right* is generated within the music. This is the musical answer to that fearful opening statement. But it is right too in your response to it: you are being led by the most natural means to enact the lightness and wonder of life just at the point where you should recall it—the point in which fear and foreboding threaten to become morbid. (p. 358)

Commentary such as this constitutes an indispensable part of Scruton's case. And it is no bad thing if an aesthetic theory relies on illustrations and examples. But does Scruton finally just restate the very phenomenon he aims to elucidate (the phenomenon of musical expression)? A sympathetic reader, I believe, will feel that Scruton succeeds, at least, in gathering together into a coherent unity the metaphors of movement, emotion and meaning, metaphors which we shall probably always find ineradicable from our descriptions of music. Admittedly, this interweaving of metaphors does not amount to a diagnosis, in causal terms, of *why* we respond to music as we do. But Scruton does not aim at diagnosis: his object is to make more perspicuous, at the intentional level, the interdependencies of these different dimensions of musical experience, and to make them intelligible to us—providing, as it were, relief from the symptoms of obscurity and puzzlement. Just as a diagnosis of the clinical cause of some physical discomfort does not necessarily relieve it, so relief does not always require diagnosis.³³ Even in the absence of a causal psychology of music, then, our 'intentional understanding [of music] . . . may be improved—through a better grasp of concepts, or through a network of analogies and connections, which enable us to read the world and our interests more clearly' (p. 224).

A good example of such 'improved understanding' is Scruton's treatment of the claim that music is 'ineffable'. Philosophers typically use that term when a peculiar tension is set up by some object of experience (say, a striking balletic gesture)—a tension between, on the one hand, the distinct inclination to regard it as meaningful or significant, and, on the other hand, an equally distinct disinclination to accept any concept or combination of concepts as precisely and properly capturing just what the object means. Dreams, poems, paintings, facial expressions, gestures and postures all can be ineffable. But what is the origin of the ineffable in music?³⁴ In *Language, Music, and Mind*, Diana Raffman argues that the impression of confronting the ineffable in music arises from a kind of semantic disappointment: like natural language, most musical composition is rule-governed and most music traditionally exhibits an orderliness, systematicity and even, to a point, an internal generative structure.³⁵ This leads us to expect music to function like language in other respects as well; in particular, it leads us to search for some counterpart to the semantic dimension of language whereby phonemic combinations are secured by a convention of specific meanings. As Scruton neatly summarizes Raffman's thesis, 'We are inevitably led by our cognitive powers to hear syntactic order in

³³ As Malcolm Budd remarked of Wittgenstein's very similar (phenomenological) approach to explanation in aesthetics, 'the explanation is persuasive, rather than diagnostic, effecting a clarification or change in the perception of the work; it differs from the causal diagnosis of a headache, where the sufferer's acceptance of the diagnosis is unnecessary and leaves his headache unchanged'. Malcolm Budd, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein', *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David E. Cooper, Oxford, 1992, pp. 444–7, at p. 446.

³⁴ The question matters not least because so many people (most notoriously Hanslick) have been led to deny the relevance of attempts to describe musical content (cf. that on Schubert's G major quartet, above).

³⁵ Diana Raffman, *Language, Music, and Mind*, Cambridge, Mass., & London, 1993.

music . . . but we look in vain for the semantic order that underlies and generates it: hence arises that peculiar bafflement, that sense of being led to a vast echoing space where meaning should reside, and finding only a scaffolding of tones' (p. 360). There is surely something right in Raffman's thought that we would not be tempted to treat music as meaningful were it not typically possessed of some syntactic order. But her theory sheds no light at all on why the 'ineffable somethings' we hear music as meaning are often generically identified as psychological kinds—as falling within the morphology of human emotions, sensory experiences and actions (rather than, say, the natural kinds of the physical sciences). By contrast, Scruton's appeal to *Einfühlung* yields a quite natural explanation of the ineffable in music, namely, that it is directly inherited from the ineffability of human experience itself, as grasped from the first-person point of view. Referring to Wagner's *Siegfried*, he writes:

Someone could have a purely theoretical knowledge of fear, as did Siegfried when he asked Mime to explain the feeling. But he may lack—as did Siegfried—the 'knowledge by acquaintance' which comes only with the *experience* of fear. How could Siegfried acquire this second kind of knowledge—'knowledge of what it is like'? One answer is by *Einfühlung*. There is a kind of response to your face and gestures which makes your first-person perspective available to me. I imagine what it is like to be you, feeling this; I then entertain your emotion within my own point of view. There is nothing to be *said* about what I thereby come to know, for there is no new proposition that I know. But . . . knowing your fear in *that* way I can understand your behaviour. (p. 362)

Just what it is we add to our understanding of, for instance, emotions when we move from an other-person perspective to the first-person one is *itself* 'ineffable'; we do not, strictly speaking, gain a new thought or belief, but arrive at a new way of grasping an old one. Scruton's suggestion is that in responding to music as expressive we are likewise responding with a first-person grasp of its content: we come to embody it ourselves. At the same time, our only way of saying what we thereby encounter is through concepts—words like 'apprehension', 'delight', 'awe' and the rest, which of course do not capture the specifically experiential aspect of those states. What we thereby express can only be fully specified ostensively, and this is equally true of what we identify when we identify expressive qualities in music as it is when we identify others' experiential states.³⁶

Whereas Raffman's thesis aims to uncover what it is about the structure of musical tones that makes music seem an apt candidate for assignments of meaning (while yet resisting them), Scruton's account aims to illuminate what it is about the structure of our responses to music that makes it so. So Raffman and Scruton are not, at this juncture, really explaining one phenomenon in two different ways and with differing degrees of success; they are offering explanations of two different phenomena. This is not to say, however, that there is no genuine disagreement between them elsewhere. There is. For Scruton's anti-reductionist stance leads him to deny that *any* account of 'musical content can be transferred from a musical to a non-musical expression' (p. 238). This commitment is made most plain when Scruton turns to the question of what it is about the structure of music that renders it apt for assignments of content—a question addressed in the chapters on language, tonality and form, to which I now turn.

HOW DOES MUSIC MEAN?

How can musical organization, Scruton asks, be a vehicle for meaning things? If music, like language, is correctly heard as meaningful, and in particular as possessed of expressive meaning, might that not be because music and language possess certain common structural features? Might there not be points of analogy between music and language at the syntactic as well as at the semantic level? The thought is an intriguing one, and in both the last century and this one considerable effort has been expended on its development. It is not difficult to understand the motivation behind such attempts. As Scruton remarks, it is difficult to 'rest with

³⁶ For this reason Scruton claims that the term 'expression' is properly used of music only intransitively; it is one thing to hear (intransitive) expression in a work, and another to say that it is (transitive) an expression of this or that emotion. Remarks of the latter kind suggest that the musical content can be specified independently of its musical embodiment, but this is just what the 'ineffability' of musical content, like the ineffability of subjective experience, forbids. See Chapter 6, 'Expression'.

the idea of musical form as a mere surface pattern, a decorative game, a 'beautiful play of sensations . . . We experience it as something *deep*, an organizing force which give sense, direction, and *meaning* to the musical surface' (p. 231). Contemporary theorists moved by thoughts such as this often look to Heinrich Schenker for their basic framework. Schenker devoted himself to the project of uncovering a single 'deep structure' of musical masterpieces in the period from Bach to Brahms, by which one could derive the musical surface (or 'foreground') from a constant 'background', by a series of 'middle-ground' expansions. Scruton argues that Schenker's project, and its contemporary progeny, are ultimately misguided; in his view there is no musical counterpart to Chomsky's 'deep structure' which, if only we could discern it, would provide us with its universal grammar. But to abandon that search is not to abandon the search for organization altogether: Scruton aims to show that 'music is organized, but not as language is organized' (p. 309). His negative argument against Schenkerians (e.g. Longuet-Higgins, Meyer, Lerdahl and Jackendoff) is thus complemented by a positive conception of musical form as residing in the musical surface, and in particular a surface for which 'there is a central phenomenon—tonality—which provides us with a paradigm of musical order' (p. 309).

The negative argument is developed through numerous examples, and reinforced by noting fundamental points of disanalogy between language and music, not only with respect to hierarchical accounts of harmony but of rhythm too. I cannot begin to represent the argument in full detail here. Happily, there is a key thought which drives very much of it. In effect, the thought is that 'deep structure' theorists are, for the most part, engaged in a project of description, and mistake their discoveries for contributions to genuine theoretical explanation. A genuine theoretical explanation should exhibit at least two features. First, it should permit the theorist to *deduce* observations from theory in a rule-governed manner, as scientific theory permits one to deduce observations of natural phenomena. An explanatory theory of harmony, for instance, should permit one to 'read off' the occurrence of a particular chord from the theoretical specification of its functional role in the harmonic system. Something analogous is possible in formal logic: where the function '&' links two sentences, the truth-value of the compound sentence which results can be 'read off' the truth-values of its parts. (As Scruton notes, the '&' identifies a function between truth-values, just as '+' identifies a function between numbers; hence in mathematics, once we understand the function of '+' we can read off the numerical value of 5 from the compound $2 + 3$.) Certainly, musical analysis makes use of the notion of a note or a chord fulfilling a 'function', but it is a notion which, as Scruton says, 'is a matter of primary musical observation' and does not yield (or require) a system of law-like 'operations' which can be stated in terms of *a priori* rules of transformation (p. 322).³⁷ And nor could we ever hope to discover such rules, insists Scruton, because the actual function of a particular note or chord is wholly context-dependent. Indeed, as Schenker himself noted, even our identifications of a synchronic combination of tones as this or that chord—or as a chord at all—is contextually determined.

We could never capture the perceived 'functionality' of musical elements by such 'rules of transformation', since it is a functionality that depends entirely upon context. Musical elements sometimes *sound* functional in the mathematical sense, and this fact contributes to the perceived distinction between structure and prolongation. But their function is derived not from *a priori* rules of transformation, but from *aposteriori* regularities established over time. (p. 321)

Linguistics, by contrast, *can* make use of the idea of a generative hierarchy in which the recursive application of *a priori* rules forming a deep grammatical structure systematically contribute to the construction of the linguistic 'surface'—the sentences we actually use. That is because, as Scruton points out, we 'understand the functionality of grammatical categories' in terms of a quite specific function, namely, the function each plays in contributing to the truth-value of the whole. If this were not so, we would have no way of showing that the deep structure of natural languages really possesses a generative function such that the surface utterances of our ordinary talk are derived from that structure—and not the other way around. In the case of

³⁷ Scruton uses this phrase to describe the method of Hugo Riemann's 'theory' of harmony. See Hugo Riemann, *Elementar-Schulbuch der Harmonielehre*, Leipzig, 1906.

music, however, Scruton argues that it precisely is the other way around. That is, where a theory such as Schenker's appears to be identifying rules from which a musical foreground is *deduced* from a basic background (moreover, one which is always moving toward a final V–I cadence), it is in fact merely describing regularities and relations which we hear between the two. Put differently, the background does not *explain* the foreground according to a generative hierarchy; at best, we may discover in it a cumulative hierarchy such that 'we read foreground movement into the background, and treat the background as though it were really a vastly stretched-out and ponderous kind of foreground' (p. 323).

These observations point to the second feature of genuine, theoretical explanations—and so to the second way in which deep structure theories of musical organization fail to be genuinely explanatory: they 'fail to *distinguish* [the] real functionality [in the depths] from the apparent functionality that we hear in the surface' (p. 323). Although Scruton's discussion of this objection will be less than transparent to the non-philosophical reader, the point is essentially quite a simple one. In a genuinely explanatory science such as physics a theorist rightly expects that the terms and principles constituting some *explananda* will not be the very same as those in terms of which the *explanandum* is identified. So, for instance, in explaining *why* some stone has fallen to the ground at a greater speed than some feather, to say only that, in general, stones fall faster than feathers does not count as an adequate explanation. That is, at best, an *a posteriori* inductive generalization from observations of the very phenomenon to be explained. A genuine explanation (rather than a generalized description) will appeal to terms and principles which are not themselves part of the characterization of the phenomenon to be explained—for example, where the *explananda* is the velocity of falling objects, it should appeal to the terms of classical mechanics. But when we look at the theoretical terms of Schenker's theory, we find that it uses the very observation terms (the 'rules' of harmony and counterpoint) which characterize the *explanandum* (the musical surface) to state the *explananda* (the structural depths). Hence Scruton complains that 'the music is doing in the depths exactly what it is doing on the surface; in which case, why say that the foreground is generated by the deep structure, rather than the other way round?' (p. 323).

These two objections to hierarchical accounts of musical organization are complemented by several others, but they lie at the heart of the author's resistance to any attempt to 'reduce' the musical surface to some more basic elements from which it is putatively developed in a generative manner. They are instructive objections, too, for they draw attention to how very difficult it would be actually to *explain*, in anything like a scientific manner, why any music (or even, as for Schenker, a sub-category of tonal music of a particular place and time) has the structure that it has. Is that, however, really what Schenker's followers have been trying to do? The answer to that question is at the very least not obvious. Meyer, for instance, attempted to identify a hierarchical order which was non-generative. His treatments of rhythm, melody and harmony all turn on the way in which small-scale patterns are reproduced and developed in a larger scale, and they do so in search of 'closure'. He argued that an individual musical event such as a motif or phrase is patterned in relation to others in such a way that 'reasonable inferences' can be made about its relations to preceding and succeeding events—inferences ultimately cashed out in terms of the probability of the event.³⁸ Certainly Meyer's analyses would seem, at least in principle, to be able to address the problem of context-dependence noted above. Moreover, we need not (as does Scruton) take Meyer's 'reasonable inferences' to be offered as an instance of scientific inference (wherein an event A implies event B to the extent that B is probable, given A). It is more natural to take a 'reasonable inference' to be a register of subjective, rather than objective, probability—a register of a subject's aural expectations, in which case it is no objection to the theory that the probability assigned to a musical event 'does not explain our feelings of anticipation and release but is explained by them' (p. 331). We would then be in a position to see Meyer as not so much excavating a 'hidden grammar' which lies beyond what we hear in music, but elucidating what is 'present or latent in the musical surface' (p. 426). In short, if we do not ascribe to Meyer reductive, explanatory aspirations he does not really need, then his theories surely can be exempted from criticism for failing to meet them. We are then poised to make use of his observations as

³⁸ See Meyer, *Explaining Music*, Chaps. 7–8, *passim*.

descriptions—descriptions which might, in fact, serve as excellent guides to a more alert and more sensitive musical perception.

Scruton himself recognizes that Schenkerian analyses can be viewed and exploited as a descriptive tool. This is possible, not because tonal music is organized by a generative hierarchy, but because ‘the deep grammar proposed by Schenker turns out, in fact, to be the surface grammar of classical music: the theory of harmony and counterpoint’ (p. 318). Conjoin this thought with Scruton’s conception of musical form as what we hear in the musical surface when we hear with understanding, and ‘Schenkerian theory may be used in order to emphasise and bring into the foreground features of the musical *Gestalt* which might otherwise remain merely latent in our perception; it can be used, in other words, in the emendation of the intentional understanding’ (p. 325).³⁹ So in the end, Scruton is not arguing that Schenker, Meyer and their protégés fail to identify at least some structural rules and principles which can be discerned in music. He is, rather, disputing the status and origins of those rules and principles. They do not explain, but presuppose, our grasp of the musical surface—the phenomenal, experienced orders of sounds as movement and gesture, an order which is owed to our imaginative acts of metaphorical transfer. ‘Both Meyer and Schenker’, Scruton concludes, ‘attempt to find structural rules and principles which are internal to music—which assume no prior organization of the musical surface. But sounds become music only when organized through concepts taken from another sphere [of movement, life, and gesture]’ (p. 333). Much music does, then, instantiate formal structural principles, but these neither exist nor result from a ‘grammar’ below the surface. They are purely phenomenal.

Scruton’s resistance to any attempt to account for musical meaning in reductive terms—in terms which would explain the tones that we hear in terms of mind-independent features of sounds and their relations—is perhaps here carried to its furthest extreme. For he is effectively claiming that every attempt to analyse musical structure independently of our experience of music (and, in particular, of our metaphorically ordered experience of music as movement) will fail, for it is only from *within* that experience that the terms of analysis (e.g., prolongation, foreground and background, continuity, boundary and closure) make sense to us in the first place. I have no doubt that many readers will find the argument at best unconvincing, and at worst obscure. If they do, that will be in part because Scruton’s objection too often seems to be that the musical grammar to which deep structure theorists attend provides only a very partial and local description of some music, rather than a global account of all musical form. That objection on its own does not cut very deep, and the theorist can accommodate it by simply restricting the scope of claims. Scruton’s real worry, however, is not (as his emphasis sometimes suggests) that all deep structure analyses are either mistaken or impoverished. In their detail, they may be neither. His point is rather that the analyses are *subservient* to, and *follow on* from, the ‘movement that we hear in tones which shapes the musical events into coherent gestures’ (p. 337). The deep structure theorist, Scruton insists, is not offering a scientific explanation of why we hear what we do, but contributing a detailed description of *some* of what we hear in terms which are only *sometimes* adequate to its complexity. But surely that is in itself a worthwhile achievement? Need a structural analysis aspire to more than that to be of interest and importance? If not, then the dismissive (even contemptuous) tone which Scruton sometimes adopts in his critique is unjustified: we may yet have much to learn and gain from Schenker’s lead.

What, then, of Scruton’s positive thesis—his alternative account of ‘how music means’? We have seen that Scruton is committed to a conception of musical form as the form heard in the musical surface when we hear with understanding. This commitment is now put to work as a premiss of his positive account of ‘how music means’—a premiss which sets the course for a defence of *tonality* as the paradigm of musical order, and as the primary vehicle of the ‘metaphorical hearing’ which marks the appreciation of almost all music—not only music in the Western art tradition. Or so Scruton attempts to argue. This position is foreshadowed in Chapter 2 of his book, in which he tries to demonstrate that unpitched noises cannot be tones to which we attend in the appropriately acousmatic mode; it is then developed later in his lengthy

³⁹ Scruton goes on to identify specific features of the surface of tonal music which account for the organization we discern in it, one of which is that, in the small scale, classical music is often organized just as Schenker says (p. 329).

treatment of tonality (Chap. 10), culminating in a forceful, if inconclusive, argument for a return to tonality in contemporary composition. Let us assess Scruton's case.

In 1939 Ernst Krenek wrote that 'The bold harmonic accomplishments of Richard Wagner have long since been incorporated into the normal stock-in-trade of all kinds of *Gebrauchsmusik*; and the clear and exquisite tone marvels of Debussy . . . have become primitive tools in the hands of the swing music arrangers of Tin Pan Alley'.⁴⁰ Krenek agrees with Schoenberg, Adorno and Bloch in their despair of the possibility of originality and innovation in tonal music in the twentieth century. It was, they all concluded (albeit for different reasons), 'used up', and something else was destined to supplant it. Two distinct thoughts are mooted here: the first is that traditional tonal forms are now banal; the second is that something else *could* replace tonality. (As Schoenberg observed, 'It is evident that abandoning tonality can be contemplated only if other satisfactory means for coherence and articulation present themselves'.⁴¹) Scruton attempts to refute both thoughts. It is surprising to note that, despite the many pages he devotes to the project, he finally offers just two arguments—one for each thought. His first argument again appeals to the context-dependence of the meaning of musical parts. No note, no chord, no progression can become banal or used up *in itself*, because what it is and says depends wholly on its musical surroundings. Hence any musical element can be re-presented in the right (imaginative, original, unfamiliar) context as something entirely new. Certainly, examples of such transformations are legion. Consider, for example, the diminished seventh chord, condemned by the early critics of tonality and described by Schoenberg as now 'retired a philistine'.⁴² Against this view Scruton points out that, even as Schoenberg was writing those words,

composers were still devising fresh uses for his 'undependable guest' who appears as dependable in the lush harmonies of *Rosenkavalier*, as in the tear-stained pages of Janáček . . . Schoenberg and Adorno are right to say that there are musical clichés. But can a *chord* be one of them? . . . That is not how the chord is used by Strauss or Janáček. Nor is it how Schnittke uses it. (pp. 289–90)

Most readers will not need to be persuaded that it is odd to suppose that any musical element so local as a chord can in itself, in isolation, become banal. As Scruton observes, that idea is just as absurd as the idea that an individual colour, independent of any context at all, could become banal and useless to the visual artist: 'Matisse's shade of red [in *Red Room*] does not appear as it would on a tie, or in a Dutch room' (p. 292).

More is required, however, to show that a large-scale, global feature of musical organization such as tonality has not met its moment of historical exhaustion, as its foes maintain. In the early development of his argument Scruton sets out no fewer than fourteen central features of traditional triadic tonality, including key, diatonicity, the circle of fifths, the diatonic scale, the major–minor relation, chord relations and cadences. These central features, moreover, are *bound to* and arise *from within* triadic tonality: that is, they are not features which the tradition of tonal music happens to manifest, but ones which atonal music *could not* manifest. Hence when we speak of tonality, Scruton argues, we are speaking not so much of 'a *style*, but an *order*, which we hear in music despite the greatest divergences of style' (p. 271). He gives a second, even more controversial, reason for thinking that tonality is not merely one musical alternative among others, namely, that the 'triad owes its authority to a system, the details of which were not so much made as discovered, through experiments in polyphony' (p. 247). In other words, the Western tonal tradition does not only have a history; it has a *natural* and progressive history in which we are not merely inventing new conventions, but discovering a structure which was always already there *in potentia*, waiting to be discerned by the (western European) ear. Moreover, these 'discoveries' only required polyphony as their catalyst, for their precursor, melodic tonality, was already ubiquitous: 'Folksong and liturgical chant, in all traditions, tend to focus on a particular tone, to which the melody constantly returns, and which it emphasises through rhythmic organization, repetition, and caesura' (p. 246). Tonality *simpliciter* is not, as Scruton understands it, merely a feature of the Western tradition, but of virtually all

⁴⁰ Ernst Krenek, *Music Here and Now*, trans. B. Fles, New York, 1939. Cited by Scruton (p. 291).

⁴¹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein trans. Leo Black, London, 1975, p. 279. Cited by Scruton (p. 286).

⁴² Arnold Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre*, 3rd edn, Vienna, 1922, p. 288.

recognizably musical traditions from the Greek modes to Indian ragas to medieval chant; and *triadic* tonality as we now know it is the natural progeny of polyphonic permutations of these original ancestors.

So goes the background narrative from which Scruton hopes to construct his defence of tonality as our only 'genuinely musical' alternative. The narrative itself has both the virtue and the defect of being very nearly unfalsifiable, rendering it at once plausible to its friends and vacuous to its enemies. (The latter will complain that Scruton's conception of 'original' tonality is so general and schematic that it can, with a properly prejudiced ear, be elicited from almost any musical tradition.) But the argument is vulnerable to at least one telling and obvious objection: if triadic tonality develops so organically and so inevitably out of polyphony, how have so many musical traditions which feature the latter failed to arrive at their 'natural' destination?

Let us suppose, however, that Scruton's narrative could be confirmed in some way. Would it then follow that no alternative forms of musical organization are possible? Of course not—as Scruton recognizes. So he produces a second argument, directed specifically against such alternatives as have been attempted. Serial music is his main target, and the argument is that the system by which serial music is constructed cannot be recuperated from the musical surface; such structure as can be discerned is often owed to the tonality 'latent' within it. In Berg's Violin Concerto, for instance,

The serial organization is subverted by the use of a tone-row . . . which divides into two distinct and clearly tonal regions: G minor, and B major/F sharp major . . . there is a melodic movement, beginning in the first motif on arpeggiated fifths, that sustains itself through repetition and parallelism, and causes us to hear tonal harmonies even in the most discordant of the orchestral chords. When the music comes home at last, to the lovely prayer . . . it comes home also to the second tonality of the tone-row, and uses all the devices of triadic tonality. (p. 298)

Now at this point in Scruton's argument the attentive reader will feel very puzzled indeed. For has not the author earlier subjected us to a sustained and compelling argument to the effect that 'what we hear in music when we hear with understanding' has nothing to do with a recuperation of the strategy of composition—with the 'deep' structural principles by which it may have been generated? Has he not persuaded us that the 'grammar' of music, if there be one, is neither here nor there we it comes to our irreducibly metaphorical appreciation of musical gesture and movement? Did not Scruton himself insist that, even if a 'deep structure' of musical order *could* be identified, it would merely explain, and never describe, the intentional object of musical perception?⁴³ If all that was correct, then it is quite unclear what difference it should now make that the principles by which serial music has been constructed—its 'grammar'—are not recuperable from the musical surface. If Scruton's own earlier arguments are to be believed, then one must say: no difference at all. The fact that listeners whose ears have long been attuned by and to triadic tonality tend to search out a tonal order in their appreciation of constructivist compositions hardly establishes the natural 'unsuitability' or inaudibility of atonal structures. It may just as well be thought to bear witness to a natural tendency to seek out the familiar when confronted with the novel. Who is to say what the ears of future generations might find in the 'non-tonal tones' of Harry Partch, Robert Ashley and Pauline Oliveros? At their best, Scruton's arguments leave the jury out on the question of whether tonality in music arises from a *natural* capacity which our Western sensibilities will always strain to exercise. Meanwhile, one cannot but hear in them an echo of Wittgenstein's remark that 'The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do *not* repeat themselves'.⁴⁴

Scruton's defence of tonality is not motivated solely by his own aural preferences, although they clearly weigh in on its side. It is also inspired by the Platonic thought that aesthetic order in general is both a reflection of and influence on moral order—the order of the human soul. And the tonal tradition, he implies, fulfils that function in a way which best instantiates the moral order that we *ought* to pursue, a moral order which encourages people to 'move together'

⁴³ See especially Chapter 13, 'Analysis'.

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 56.

in concert, and so to live together in harmony. It is towards this last, grand thesis that his study has been directed from the outset, and with which it concludes.

WHY DOES MUSIC MATTER?

In the course of Immanuel Kant's sweeping exposition of 'judgements of taste', he argued that beauty is a symbol of morality: in beauty we find the sensible counterpart of harmoniously integrated parts, of a unified order in variety, which serves no end or purpose other than its own free form.⁴⁵ Like Kant, Scruton is concerned with judgements of taste, and with the relation of aesthetic and moral value, but he takes Kant's thought a step further: musical beauty, he argues, does not just mirror the morally well-ordered human soul, but can contribute to its cultivation—just as musical vulgarity can hurry its dissolution. This causal thesis is not unfamiliar in the history of aesthetics; indeed, it was first promoted two thousand years ago by that other famously conservative and censorious philosopher, the author of *The Republic*.

The foundations of Scruton's conception of musical value have already been laid in his account of musical understanding as a 'metaphorizing' of tones into movement and gesture, of musical expression in terms of *Einführung*, and of musical organization in terms of tonality. All point towards a characterization of music as a fundamentally social phenomenon. There are, strictly speaking, no solitary music lovers, for these features of musical understanding engage each of us with, respectively, the public language of spatial concepts, the interpersonal responses of sympathy, and a common aural and rational attunement to tonal order. It only remains to develop (what seem to Scruton to be) the natural consequences of that account for our communal, moral lives. Scruton's first move in that direction is to mark the union of the aesthetic and the moral with the notion of 'good taste'. Taste is not an 'arbitrary set of preferences' which might be invented anew from age to age and place to place; but like music itself, neither is it reducible to rules. It is a

complex exercise of sympathy, in which we respond to human life, enhanced and idealized in artistic form . . . we can define it . . . through a concept of virtue: it is the sum of those preferences that would emerge in a well-ordered soul, in which human passions are accorded their true significance, and sympathy is the act of a healthy conscience. (p. 378)

Our taste in music is, according to this view, inextricably bound up with our moral taste. If only we could be brought to appreciate their deep connection, a discerning musical sensibility 'would become as fully and immediately an expression of character as our taste in friends or jokes. The one with bad taste in music would be, to that extent, open to condemnation, just like the one who associates with low company or delights in coarse humour' (p. 386). Hence, if musical taste in a culture is in decline—as Scruton believes it to be in our culture—this is not merely a loss to the form and style of our lives but to their moral content. In fact it is, he claims, a moral catastrophe.

Scruton's thesis is eloquently set out, and movingly reinforced by references not only to music but also to political history, literature and philosophy. Nonetheless, its substance will strike many as little short of preposterous. Particularly questionable is its suggestion that the aesthetically sophisticated person—whose soul is ordered by the traditions of high culture which Scruton endorses—is also more likely to be a *good* person. It would be difficult enough to establish that sensitivity to musical value is a necessary condition of moral excellence, and Scruton sometimes speaks as if it were almost a sufficient one. Even more serious doubts will be provoked by Scruton's specific prescriptions for remedying the 'moral catastrophe' courted by contemporary musical culture. It is true, no doubt, that *form and content in a human life, as in music, are to a point inseparable*. It is also probably true, to a point, that 'music is a character-forming force, and that 'through melody, harmony, and rhythm, we enter a world where others exist besides the self, a world that is full of feeling but also ordered, disciplined but free' (p. 502). But there is no easy move from these observations to Scruton's condemnations of popular music (a manifestation of the 'anomie of its listeners') and the avant-garde (a 'state-funded priesthood, ministering to a dying congregation') (pp. 502 and 506).

So how does Scruton move to such parochial and prejudicial conclusions from theoretical

⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, 1987, §59.

premisses which are, in themselves, both persuasive and appealing? It seems that two commitments serve as his bridge. The first is his attachment to the bourgeois European tradition and its communally sanctioned forms, only through which (he claims) can individual talent flourish. The 'rebellious' composer's urge to innovate, to experiment, to break free of predecessors is fundamentally misguided; if the bourgeois ear is to be 'again opened to music', it must be through an extension of a tradition already in hand. Hence 'the great task which lies before the art of sound' is the 'task of recovering tonality, as the imagined space of music, and of restoring the spiritual community with which that space was filled' (p. 507). The second commitment guiding Scruton's judgements of musical value is to a narrow conception of the *kind* of human 'life and movement' which music can properly embody and promote. He refuses to consider the possibility that music which serves to express sentiments and attitudes of which he disapproves (i.e., which do not contribute to the bourgeois moral ideal) could be 'good' music, even when it wonderfully fulfils the function for which it is intended. For if the function is condemnable, so must be its vehicle. Scruton identifies the 'new forms of dancing' as a paradigm of wrong function—forms which require 'neither knowledge nor self-control, for these would impede the democratic right of everyone to enter the fray' (p. 499). Listen to a gavotte from the late Renaissance, Scruton advises, and you will find it natural to imagine certain mores endorsed by those who danced to it. 'Then listen to a track by Nirvana, and imagine the mores of the people who can dance to *that*' (p. 391). As these remarks suggest, Scruton's answer to the question 'Why does music matter?' is quickly integrated with the question 'Which music matters?'. Too quickly, I would say, for a plausible and intuitively attractive answer to the former is on offer in these pages, and it stands to be overwhelmed by his facile and parochial handling of the latter. The reader should look carefully, therefore, for what can sensibly be taken away from Scruton's two chapters on 'Value' and 'Culture', and regard the rest with the scepticism it deserves. There is still much that merits attention, including a splendid account of sentimentality and kitsch, a lively defence of the role of reason in aesthetic evaluation, and an admirably concise survey of key points in the 'language of criticism'—all of which are largely uncontaminated by the prejudicial commitments noted above, and deserve to become standard fare for all students of aesthetics.

Despite its questionable developments, Scruton's critique of contemporary culture and its musical forms is, on the whole, insightful, inspired and compelling. No Spenglerian gloom follows on his protests; they are protests with a positive aim in view, motivated by an optimistic belief in the possibility of progress towards an ideal, rather than a resigned surrender to relativistic arbitrariness. We will not all share Scruton's particular, deeply traditional, ideal, but we should agree with him that music gives voice to depths of human character which might otherwise languish in silence. And if that is true, then it is worth reflecting thoughtfully and deeply on what we wish our music to say, and how it can best say it.