Must Reasons be Either Theoretical or Practical? [1] *Aesthetic Criticism and Appreciative Reasons*

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ABSTRACT: A long debate in aesthetics concerns the reasoned nature of criticism. The main questions in the debate are whether criticism is based on (normative) reasons, whether critics communicate reasons for their audience's responses, and if so, how to understand these critical reasons. I argue that a great obstacle to making any progress in this debate is the deeply engrained assumption, shared by all sides of the debate, that reasons can only be *either* theoretical reasons (i.e., those that explain what to believe or what propositions are true) *or* practical reasons (i.e., those that explain what is to be done or what actions are good/required/called for/otherwise worthy of doing). My aims are (1) to put pressure on this assumption that, if there are critical reasons, they must be either theoretical or practical (the *EITHER/OR* assumption), and (2) to suggest that, if there are critical reasons, the most central among them are neither theoretical nor practical (*NEITHER/NOR*).

1. Introduction

[1] This question is inspired by Gilbert Ryle's question: why do we believe that acquiring taste and learning to exercise it must be a matter of *either* theoretical *or* practical learning? [Ryle 1958: 155].

While art criticism[2] has a long history, the advent of the Internet and the ubiquity of social media have undeniably 'transformed our thinking about reviewing and criticism' [Mendelsohn 2012]. Whether this is good or bad news for criticism is a topic of lively debates on the pages of newspapers, magazines, blogs and other publications today. For more than half a century, though, philosophers have concentrated on a different set of questions regarding criticism, questions that are germane however recent technologies affect criticism. The questions at the heart of this debate concern the reasoned nature of criticism: Are critical remarks based on (normative) reasons? And do critics communicate reasons for their audience to respond in certain ways? More generally, if criticism is reasoned in these ways, how should we understand the nature of critical reasons?

This paper pursues these questions by focusing on the strand in the debate, which was introduced by Frank Sibley, Arnold Isenberg and others, and was taken up more recently by Robert Hopkins, Anthony Cross and others. While these philosophers' contributions to the debate are important and instructive, they are also based on a shared mistaken premise. I argue that a great obstacle to making progress in this debate is the deeply engrained assumption, shared

[2] Even though, like the entire debate, I focus on art criticism (of a particular sort to be specified below), for the most part, I use the term 'aesthetic criticism' (rather than 'art criticism') to highlight the importance of a certain range of (dis)values for understanding art criticism: (dis)values that are *aesthetic* but *not* restricted to the sensory or the observable. When it comes to art, I use the term 'aesthetic' broadly to refer to the (dis)values of artworks *qua* artworks (rather than merely to their sensory or observable (dis)values). For a defence of this use, see Gorodeisky [2021].

by all sides of the debate, that reasons can only be *either* theoretical reasons (i.e., those that explain what to believe or what propositions are true) *or* practical reasons (i.e., those that explain what is to be done or what actions are good/required/called for/otherwise worthy of doing). My main aim is to put pressure on this assumption that, if there are critical reasons, they must be either theoretical or practical (henceforth, the *EITHER/OR* assumption). I argue that this assumption does not force itself on us, and suggest that, if there are critical reasons, the most central among them are plausibly neither theoretical nor practical (*NEITHER/NOR*).

Before starting, a note on the notion 'normative reason': normative reasons have been characterized, most notably, as considerations in favor (or against) having an attitude/state/experience/engagement/action/response [Response] (e.g., Scanlon [2006]; Millar [2004]), facts that render Responses as those to have or to refrain from having, or as appropriate or inappropriate (e.g., Raz [2011]; Skorupski [2011]), as premises in good reasoning (e.g., Way [2017]), as considerations that we bring to bear in answering a certain kind of questions (e.g., Hieronymi [2005]), or as considerations we bring to bear in answering certain questions by exercising a capacity for Reason (e.g., Marcus [2012]). These are all compatible with a core understanding of normative reasons as *those that explain in a distinctive manner what Responses to have*, *sustain,* or *cultivate (or withhold from having)*.[3] What is this distinctive manner of

[3] These need not be all-things-considered reasons. Consider, for example, the 11th century Japanese novel by Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*. The aesthetic reasons that a critic communicates for appreciating *The Tale of Genji* may well be trumped by pragmatic reasons not to invest the time and effort that are required in order to put yourself in a position to appreciate

explanation? Minimally, normative reasons explain by showing what justifies, makes appropriate or calls for a certain Response. They are cited in an answer to a 'why' question that does not require merely that one explain what causally or psychologically led one to have the relevant Response, but also, at the same time, that one show the Response to be a Response to have. This is how I'll use the term 'normative reasons' in this paper.

2. The Debate

Sibley presented the problem underlying the debate with great clarity. He argued that what the critic articulates in criticism, which he called 'aesthetic judgment', is an exercise of a 'kind of perception' [1965: 137], or, 'an exercise of aesthetic sensitivity or perceptiveness' [ibid.: 135]. The goal of the critic is to get others to make a similar judgment: to get others to *perceive* or to *be sensitive* to a work like the critic. On this basis, Sibley denied that criticism is a form of reasoning: 'An activity the successful outcome of which is seeing . . . cannot . . . be called reasoning' [ibid.: 144].

Unconvinced by Sibley, some aestheticians have recently given up on the perceptual character that he found in criticism, and explained its rational nature in terms of *action* [Cross 2017]. On this view, critics do communicate reasons, but for actions rather than for perceptions. Others, who are sympathetic to Sibley's understanding of the perceptual nature of criticism, but

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the novel (given its language, which was the language of the high courts in Japan's Heian period, given its context in the Heian courts, etc.). Other aesthetic reasons may be trumped by moral reasons, prudential reasons or others. In general, the reasons at stake are reasons to appreciate a work on account of its aesthetic excellence, and are not all-things-considered reasons.

seek to make room for critical reasons and reasoning, have offered a picture of perception and reasoning that allows the former to be the conclusion of the latter (see, Hopkins [2006]; Lord [2019]. I elaborate on both of these views below.

Though sharing the misguided EITHER/OR assumption that I will challenge below, the two sides of the debate nonetheless aim to preserve what I take to be two insights. Both sides agree, first, that even if critical discourse cannot be understood as inferential reasoning,[4] regarding it as a rational activity that communicates reasons for the audience's response is very 'appealing' (Hopkins [2006: 137]; cf., Cross [2017: 302]). Second, they share the conviction that critical reasons are not reasons for mere beliefs since 'the point of critical discussion is not the formation of belief' (Hopkins [2006: 137]; cf. Cross, e.g. [2017: 303]).[5] I take these commitments to express two insights: criticism is based on reasons and provides reasons for the audience's responses, but these are not reasons for mere beliefs. Instead of proposing full arguments for these two claims, I will motivate them by reflecting on the practice of criticism. I don't attempt to cover all forms of criticism, but concentrate instead on the genre of criticism that is at stake in the literature. Hopkins does not mention actual critics, but evokes the kind of critic who writes about the prissiness of the Botticelli. Cross does not stray far when he

[4] [Beardsley 1962 and Carroll 2008] do hold that criticism is inferential reasoning.

[5] In spite of this, Cross portrays Hopkins as holding critical reasons to be reasons for *belief* [Cross 2017: 303]. This is partly since Hopkins often obscures this commitment of his, an obscurity that is to his side's own detriment (insofar as it leads both to its rejection by Cross *and*, I will argue, to the EITHER/OR assumption).

discusses the works of Clement Greenberg and John Berger. I stick to the same tradition of criticism in this paper.

3. Criticism

A careful look at criticism supports the second insight: *mere* beliefs about the value of works don't aptly capture what the critic articulates in her practice, and the kind of response to criticism that counts as a successful achievement of the critic's aim. This reflection also suggests, I will argue, that critics standardly articulate their *appreciation* of the work, and guide their audience to *appreciate* the work similarly.

Consider Edward Snow's subtle treatment of Peter Bruegel's painting, *Children's Games* [1560][6]:

> . . . The blue coverings of *Children's Games* . . . are free to enter into a play of images that has more to do with our experience of being 'in' the human world . . . And the value of any single image is conveyed at the level of affective nuance. If one feels that the blue cloths . . . are 'positive', it is because one can empathize with the delight of the children under them—and even, perhaps sense the fondness with which Bruegel has rendered their experience.
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> The sensation of unmediated access to experience thus tends to involve access to its lived significance . . . in both respects *Children's Games* is a key work in his development. . . . [T]he figures of *Children's Games* are lived images. We experience them with an utter visceral particularity. . . .
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> This motor-visceral empathy with the human figure appears fully developed in Bruegel for the first time in *Children's Games*, and one tends to experience it as something intrinsically positive . . . It involves a *representational* faith in the goodness of the body, both as the basis of

[6] The painting is located in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

> experience and the vehicle for one's contact and identification with other selves. [Snow 1997: 69-70]

Snow centers the piece around the great aesthetic value and achievement that he takes the painting to manifest. He regards the painting (and guides his readers to regard it) as a novel and pivotal work in the development of Bruegel, as well as an extraordinary representational, perceptual and affective achievement. But he neither merely expresses the belief that the painting is of this value, nor merely tries to get his audience to believe so. What he expresses with nuance and beauty is a particular appreciative experience of the painting. Would Snow's aim be achieved if his readers merely believed that the painting is a key painting in Bruegel's development, but did not feel the value of each of the images on the affective level, if they did not empathize with the delight of the figures through a motor-visceral experience and so on and so forth? I doubt it.

Reading great many critics of the same genre of criticism suggests the same:[7] while the critical piece centers around the particular value that the critic appreciates, it can be reduced neither to the expression of the belief that the work has this value nor to the description of the features that determine whether it is of value. Nor does it aim at the formation of mere beliefs in the audience.[8] Rather, critic after critic (of this genre of criticism) articulates the kind of (cognitive-affective) experience of works that is often called appreciation. It is dubious that

[7] Cf. Fried [2002], Berger [1990], Hughes [1992].

[8] For additional support of these claims, see Gorodeisky [2019].

critics of this practice would take their aim to be fulfilled if their audiences did not embrace the kind of response that we call appreciation.[9]

If the critic (of this genre) does not express mere beliefs and her aim is not her audience's mere beliefs, then, no theoretical-doxastic account that presents criticism as based *merely* on reasons for beliefs, and as offering the audience *merely* reasons for beliefs, is adequate. And since the proposed reflection on the practice affirms this antecedent, it challenges the success of any theoretical-doxastic account of critical reasons as exhausted by reasons for beliefs.

Now you might say, correctly, that, even if apt, this is at best a partial characterization of criticism. Critics situate works historically, articulate their empathy with characters, bring out ambiguities and allusions, express feelings, interpret, explain, bring out the social impact and political depth of a work, etc. And they guide us to respond similarly. No?

My emphasis on the appreciative nature of criticism and its aim is not a denial of this variety of critical engagements as long as we remember (1) the centrality, and (2) the *primacy* of appreciation in this practice of criticism.

[9] I discuss below James Grant's view, on which appreciation is also the 'constitutive aim' of criticism [2013: 39]. Cf. Klevan [2018: 61].

First, it is hard to find critical pieces that consist *just* in expressing and recommending these varied responses *independently* of expressing and recommending *(dis)appreciation*.[10] Critics standardly recommend that we grasp this ambiguity here, understand the allusion, experience the work in light of its historical background etc. as *these are part and parcel of (dis)appreciating* the work at stake. A comparison will serve to clarify this point.

While historians may situate a work historically for the sake of enhancing their audience's historical understanding, and while prosody teachers may compare poems and introduce sounds in order to get their students to hear and understand certain rhythms and alliterations, when critics of the relevant genre recommend similar engagements, these are most often made for the sake of (dis)appreciation. Not only is appreciation centrally expressed and recommended by this sort of critics, it most often *explains* why seemingly non-appreciative responses are expressed and recommended: rather than non-appreciative responses (such as the historian's way of situating the work etc.), the responses that the critic articulates and recommends are most often part and parcel of appreciating the relevant works. They are appreciative responses.

Perhaps this is explained by the primacy of appreciation over beliefs and actions in this realm. Typically, a critic of the relevant genre aims to get her audience to believe that the relevant work is of value and to take some courses of action concerning this value *only if* and *because* she also aims to get her audience to appreciate the same work. Beliefs in the value of

[10] I focus on the positive case for reasons of space, but hold that negative criticism aims at disappreciation, which is also in the appreciative domain, exercising an appreciative capacity (rather than a theoretical or practical capacity).

the work and actions in its promotion are justified *only if* and *because* appreciation of this value is justified. This (explanatory) primacy is captured by the oddity of statements such as: 'There are reasons to believe that W is of aesthetic value but there are no reasons to aesthetically appreciate it.' Statements such as 'There are aesthetic reasons to watch W/exhibit W etc. (*on account of* its *aesthetic* value),[11] but there are no reasons to aesthetically appreciate W' are similarly odd. This oddity is explained, I argue, by the primacy of appreciation in this realm: merely believing that W is of aesthetic value or acting on its behalf without appreciating it falls short of hitting the mark of success of aesthetic recommendations and criticism. It is a reason for disappointment. But appreciating W (where this involves consciousness of it as valuable and thus meriting appreciation) with no *separate* belief in its value and without any *separate* action on its behalf is sufficient for the relevant kind of success. It is no reason for disappointment. And so, just as there are reasons to believe that W is of aesthetic value and to act in promotion of this value only if and because there are reasons to appreciate W, critics aim at their audience's beliefs that W is of aesthetic value and at their audience's actions on account of this value *only if* and *because* they also aim at their audience's appreciation of W: these beliefs and actions about the relevant work are appropriate and called for *because* appreciation is appropriate and called for.[12]

[11] Reasons for actions that are *not* grounded in a work's aesthetic value need not depend on appreciation.

[12] Though aesthetic reasons for appreciation are central and primary in this practice of criticism, they are *not* exclusive. Critics may offer reasons to believe that works are of aesthetic value and reasons to act on behalf of their aesthetic value. In this genre of criticism, though, these reasons obtain only if reasons for appreciation obtain and because the latter obtain. Moreover, such

Even if appreciation is not the *sole* aim and recommended response of criticism, it is both the *central* and the *primary* aim and object of critical recommendations.

4. Reasons-Responsiveness

Not only do Cross and Hopkins both deny that criticism aims at mere beliefs, but they also share the conviction that criticism is in the space of reasons.[13] Critics seem to voice their response to the work in a way that both brings out the nature and value of the work and explains *why this response is to be had*—by both critic and audience. Critics communicate considerations that don't explain only what led them to respond in a certain way, but also what in this work merits such a response. Such considerations are potential answers to the 'why' question that requires an explanation of why a response is to be had. Given the minimal core understanding of normative reasons introduced above, on the face of it, critics seem to articulate and communicate reasons.

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reasons for beliefs and actions are typically meant to support theoretical and practical responses that are *part* of properly appreciating the work; I show in section 7 that this typically renders them *appreciative* reasons. Still, this doesn't undermine the fact that believing correctly that a work, say, is elegant is better than falsely believing that it isn't; I don't deny that such correct beliefs meet *theoretical* standard of correctness. Rather, I argue (in section 8) that, in this realm, theoretical standards of correctness are insufficient: here success requires not only accuracy, but also *responsiveness* to aesthetic value, which *merits* a non-merely theoretical response, namely, *appreciation*.

[13] They both also acknowledge the importance of appreciation in criticism. See section 6, and 'In the aesthetic case, the . . . goal is presumably appreciating the object' [Hopkins 2006: 145].

But one may still worry that appreciation is not in the space of reasons. On this objection, since we rarely regard the person who fails to appreciate that which merits appreciation as 'irrational,' appreciation is not responsive to reasons.[14]

This might suggest that, even if my argument below goes through, appreciation might be responsive to neither theoretical nor practical reasons because it cannot be responsive to reasons at all.

But this is false. Appreciation is capable of reasons-responsiveness insofar as it is (a) assessable as either supported or unsupported by good reasons, (b) subject to an explanatory/normative 'why' question in a way that sensations are not but beliefs and actions are and (c) criticizeable for being irresponsive to reasons.

Aesthetic appreciation is standardly assessed as either supported or unsupported by reasons. We often criticize ourselves and others for not having good reasons to appreciate what we do. Should I enjoy the HBO TV show *Big Little Lies*—does it merit appreciative aesthetic enjoyment? Doesn't Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra merit appreciation no matter how painful I find listening to it?

Arguably, we criticize our acts of aesthetic appreciation for lacking reasons as often as we criticize ourselves and others for not having good reasons for certain beliefs and actions. Relatedly, the 'why' question that asks for an explanation not only of what led one to appreciate a certain work, but also of what renders this appreciation appropriate, and asks for these answers

[14] Recall that these are not all-things-considered reasons. This might *partly* explain the refrainment from the label 'irrational'.

in a single explanation, is one of the commonest responses to aesthetic appreciation. Hearing that our friend dislikes the new Tarantino, that our partner marvels at Karl Ove Knausgaard's series of novels, *My Struggle*, we standardly ask for their reasons.

This marks a contrast between acts of appreciation and bodily sensations. When hearing the expression of appreciation, we standardly ask the same 'why' question that we ask in response to an avowal of a belief or an intention to act, but not in response to an avowal of sensation; we ask about the normative *grounds* of appreciation. This is never true of sensations, which are opaque rather than transparent to whether the world is such as to give reasons for certain responses. It makes no sense to ask a person why she feels a headache, where this question concerns the sensation's *normative* grounds. Even though (just like beliefs) they are neither producible at will nor under voluntary control, acts of appreciation are nonetheless reasons-responsive: like actions and beliefs that are beholden to considerations about what to do and what to believe, acts appreciation are beholden to considerations about whether and what to appreciate. They are not just episodes we undergo, but expressions of our reasons-responsive agency, broadly construed.

And so, even if we don't call the person who fails to appreciate the work that merits appreciation 'irrational,'[15] acts of appreciation are *required* to be well-supported by reasons. Insofar as they are required, they are capable of reasons-responsiveness—should implies can. When they are not, we often criticize the subject, expect her to acknowledge the reasons against her appreciation and to reconsider *what to appreciate*, just as we expect the believer to assess

[15] We also rarely call the person who doesn't do what she has reasons to do 'irrational'. These similarities between the two practices are worth noting even if they have different explanations.

whether evidentiary reasons support her belief and the actor to assess whether practical reasons support her action. The view that appreciation is responsive to reasons is well-supported.

And recall that critics at least seem to articulate and communicate reasons. Both Cross and Hopkins think that they do, and attempt to explain the nature of these reasons. Do they enhance our understanding of the reasoned nature of criticism? Time to review their views.

5. Hopkins's Perceptual-Theoretical Account

In his fine essay, 'Critical Reasoning and Critical Perception,' Robert Hopkins both endorses Sibley's view of the critic as making a perceptual kind of judgment and as guiding the audience to make a similar judgment, and attempts (*pace* Sibley) to explain and defend the possibility of critical reasoning. He argues that criticism may be a mode of reasoning that terminates in the audience's perception of the work by proposing a form of reasoning that can support perception. Briefly, the idea is that perception may incorporate an argument. Perception can include a transition between rationally connected acts of perception, some of which are the premises, and one of which—the complex one that includes the others—is the conclusion. For example, perceiving the Botticelli as prissy requires that one perceive it as dainty, and perceive its prissiness as a consequence of perceiving it as dainty, such that if one perceived the figures as robust and healthy rather than dainty, one might have not perceived it as prissy. This shows that the relation between its daintiness and its prissiness is rational.[16]

Hopkins's suggestion is attractive for a number of reasons.

[16] For related arguments, see [Lord 2019].

First, it is faithful to the Sibleyan notion of aesthetic/critical judgment as experiential.[17]

Hopkins also highlights the openness to the world that is characteristic of both ordinary perception and the critic's appreciation. He rightly draws attention to the seeming clash between this openness and the idea that perception may be responsive to reasons. The clash results from the fact that perception is standardly taken to provide justification for beliefs and judgments, but not to require its own justification. As such, perception doesn't seem to be capable of being based on reasons.

Third, Hopkins rightly observes that a practical account of critical reasoning is ill-suited to capture the answerability to the world that critical reasoning must manifest.

Finally, Hopkins's proposal for how to think of a form of reasoning, the conclusion of which is an experience is attractive: it is plausible that the kind of appreciative engagements that critics articulate and guide consist of complex, nested, often parts-whole related experiences, which are structurally akin to structure of perceptual reasoning that Hopkins describes.

Yet, for all its worth, Hopkins's proposal is limited.

First, it overlooks relevant disanalogies between sensory perception and critical appreciation: (a) while the former is self-sufficient, the latter is not, (b) while the former is in the service of forming beliefs, the latter standardly doesn't, but aims only at itself. To paraphrase Sibley, the point is to see, hear or feel appreciatively, not to believe that what one sees, hears or feels is true.

These differences bear on the possibility and nature of critical reasons. Consider self-sufficiency. Hopkins rightly observes that defending the possibility of reasons for perceptions

[17] For a defense see Gorodeisky [2021].

requires that one overcome the (at least seeming) conflict between the self-sufficiency of perception and the idea that it is based on reasons. But while sensory perceptions are self-sufficient in requiring no supporting reasons, aesthetic/critical judgments pervasively require rational support. In response to aesthetic judgments, we ordinarily ask: 'Why do you appreciate it?' 'Why do you like it?' Arguably, criticism is the expert response to such a 'why' question. In response to a report of a sensory perception, in contrast, the why question does not arise. We typically ask a different kind of question, a "how" or a "what" question. To use an auditory example, when the electrician hears that some particular part of the HVAC system is misfiring, one might ask "How do you know?" or "What do you hear which indicates that that is the problem?" One wouldn't ask "*Why* do you hear it that way?" a question that asks for the normative rather than merely causal grounds of the perception. But this is precisely the question one would ask a critic who expresses her appreciation of, say, Fiona Apple's 2020 album, *Fetch the Bolt Cutters*, as "a perfect album," when one does not (yet) hear the album as perfect.[18] Since appreciation is always legitimately subject to such a why question, it is not self-sufficient in the way that perception is.

And so explaining the possibility of critical reasons does not require that one overcome the problem of self-sufficiency because, in contrast to sensory perceptions, aesthetic/critical judgments are not self-sufficient.

Moreover, sensory perceptions make beliefs available; they just are (*prima facia*) justifications of beliefs. But the reflection on criticism above suggested that critics aim to facilitate appreciation, not belief.[19] This must matter for an account of critical reasons.

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[18] [Harding and Sloan 2020].
[19] And recall Hopkins's denial that critics aim at mere beliefs (section 2).

Second, Hopkins's categorization of critical reasons as 'theoretical' [2006: 146] is unfortunate. Not only does this characterization fail to adequately capture the character of the critic's judgment, aim and reasons, but it also plays to the hands of Hopkins's opponent, Cross, who correctly rejects the theoretical model of reasons as inadequate. To be fair, Hopkins recognizes that the label 'theoretical' is 'tendentious' [ibid.]. Nonetheless, he concludes that critical reasons/reasoning 'must be theoretical in form' [ibid.]. Why does Hopkins choose this label even though it's 'tendentious'?

One plausible answer is the one just discussed: his assimilation of the critic's aesthetic judgments to ordinary perceptual judgments. As his example of seeing a deer in the undergrowth [ibid.: 149] indicates, Hopkins's model for critical reasoning is the model of sensory perception. When the practice of criticism is assimilated to this model, one is naturally led to think that the rationality of the former is as theoretical as that of the latter.[20]

While this explanation likely played a role in Hopkins's conclusion, I suspect that he chooses the theoretical model primarily because he believes (correctly) that critical reasons must, like theoretical reasons and unlike practical reasons, reveal the nature of the work and support responses that reflect how things *already are independently of these responses*.

But these premises (i.e., that theoretical and critical reasons must manifest awareness of how the world is independently of the responses to these reasons, but practical reasons need not)

[20] Another possible answer is that Hopkins takes critical perception to *essentially serve* the theoretical goal of forming beliefs (though via perception). This is how Cross reads him [2017: 303]. But given that Hopkins denies that critics aim at mere beliefs (section 2), this is not the most convincing explanation of his conclusion.

support Hopkins's conclusion that critical reasons are theoretical only if reasons must be either theoretical or practical. Is this implicit premise forced on us? My argument is that even though Hopkins is right that critical reasons cannot be practical because the two kinds of reasons are answerable to the world in different ways, we are not forced to conclude that critical reasons are theoretical. Reflecting how the world is independently of the responses to the relevant reasons is a necessary but *not* a sufficient mark of theoretical rationality.

Section 8 proposes a closer inspection of the practice of criticism (and the emotions) that demonstrates this insufficiency, and shows also that, if aesthetic appreciation is supported by reasons, those reasons cannot be practical. But in the next section, I first review the suggestion that critical reasons are practical.

6. Cross's Practical Account

Anthony Cross recently defended a sophisticated practical account of critical reasons:

> According to the practical model of criticism, in characterizing works of art critics provide us with reasons *for action*: in particular, pointing out these features serves as a way of providing considerations which count in favour of particular acts of looking, contemplating, listening, reflecting, or otherwise engaging with the artwork. [2017: 304]

Cross insightfully rejects the theoretical account, according to which critics express beliefs and aim to rationally support merely the audience's beliefs about the works. The practical account is thus well-motivated by the rejection of the doxastic model of criticism as involving merely reasons for beliefs. But it is also marred by (1) implicitly presupposing that the critics' practical reasons are grounded in appreciation without following through on this insight, and by

(2) the assumption that we are forced to choose between a theoretical and a practical account of critical reasons. I explain these in the rest of the section.

Hopkins raises an important challenge against any practical model of critical reasons. The thought is this: critical reasons must be grounded in how the work (and thus the world) already is independently of the worth of the responses that they support, and the relevant reasoning must manifest receptive consciousness of this actuality. But, according to Hopkins, practical reasons are not bound by this constraint: 'I can have good pragmatic reasons for imagining something . . . for all that such states do not lay claim to revealing how the world is' [2006: 145]. Unfortunately, even though he directs this criticism towards "practical reasoning" [ibid.] in general, Hopkins's terms might suggest that the challenge is restricted to *pragmatic* reasons. You might think that other practical reasons (most notably, moral reasons) are different; they do not concern merely 'how to maximize my positive states' [ibid.] regardless of how the world is like. But the gist of Hopkins's challenge *is* applicable to *all* practical reasons. As I explain in section 8, *all* practical reasons are grounded in the worth or point of the responses to them: they justify the response as a means to other actions, virtuous, pleasant, morally right or good in another respect. But critical reasons are different: they are grounded in how the work is independently of the point or worth of the response they justify. Moreover, practical reasoning reflects how the world would be when the action is brought about, i.e., it reflects *the world as to be actualized*, while critical reasoning reflects how the world already is, i.e., *the world as actual*. For these reasons, I agree with the upshot of Hopkins's criticism: practical reasoning is ill-fitted as a model for critical reasoning. Does Cross's practical account successfully deal with Hopkins's challenge?

Cross agrees that critical reasons must be grounded in how the work already is independently of the worth of the response to it, and amends the account so as to restrict the critic's practical reasons to those 'that are themselves centrally connected to the activity of *appreciating* the work' [2017: 312]. This indeed meets Hopkins's challenge since reasons for appreciation are grounded in how the work is independently of the responses to them.

However, Cross's amendment undermines his main thesis that critics communicate reasons for *actions full stop*, as his explanation of the unity of the account does: Cross explains that what unifies the varied responses that critics rationally support (e.g., looking at works, contemplating them, immersing oneself in them) is that 'engaging in all these activities seems central to a proper *appreciatio*n of' [2017: 306; my italics] these works. It is the *appreciation* of works that unifies the otherwise disparate responses that critics, according to Cross, give us reasons for, and it is *appreciation* that allows Cross to meet Hopkins's challenge.

But this key role that appreciation plays in Cross's amended account undermines its *practical* nature. For after the amendment and the explanation of the unity, Cross's account presupposes that critics rationally support *not* actions full stop (as he claims), but certain modes of engagement (that he calls 'actions') *insofar as* they are part of *appreciating* the work. This is *not* a picture of criticism as the source of practical reasons for actions *per se*. At best, it is a *partially* practical account of critical reasons since it's committed to the view that critics give reasons for action *only if* and *because* they also give reasons for appreciation. Unwittingly, on Cross's account, critics aim to get their readers to *appreciate* the work in a certain way. Why, then, speak of action if the aim is appreciation, as the reflection on criticism above also suggested?

I believe that the answer relies largely on the assumption that there could be reasons only for either actions (and related practical stances) or beliefs (and related theoretical stances).[21] Cross implicitly presupposes the primacy of appreciation that I argued for above, but doesn't follow through on this insight by describing the critic's primary reasons as reasons for *appreciation* because of the EITHER/OR assumption. As the title of one of his sections suggests, he believes that his main task is to choose between two options: 'Critical Reasoning: Theoretical or Practical?' Cross opts for the latter because he argues that there are 'three reasons for preferring the practical model to the theoretical model' [2017: 311]. Appreciation, as a third option, is not seriously considered because of the EITHER/OR assumption. But if there are no independent grounds for adopting the practical model, its success depends on the premise that reasons must be either theoretical or practical, the assumption I challenge in section 8. First, though, in the next section, I address the worry that reasons in criticism are *conjunctively* theoretical *and* practical.

7. Appreciation: the Unitary Account

[21] I suspect that Cross misses the crucial role of appreciation in accounts of critical reasons also because of his misunderstanding of 'appreciation' as (1) a *conjunction* of beliefs, activities and affective/conative attitudes and (2) the source of the work's value. But (1) I reject the conjunctive model of appreciation below, and (2) argue that 'appreciation' need not be understood as the source of the work's value. Appreciation may be the proper response to a work's value, without being what makes it of value. See Gorodeisky [2019].

You might worry that neither Cross nor Hopkins presupposes a confused assumption, but are *both* right. Can't appreciation be a *conjunction* of theoretical and practical attitudes, and so, supported by *both* theoretical *and* practical reasons?

I argue (in extreme brevity) that appreciation is best understood as unitary, rather than conjunctive. Appreciation is not divided into a set of practical and theoretical responses, but is a unitary experience that explains why the responses to a work that are parts of appreciation are *appreciative* responses. To explain this proposal and its virtues, I compare it with James Grant's conjunctive model of appreciation.

According to Grant,

> One appreciates a work by responding appropriately to it. . . For various parts of a work, features of a work, represented persons, items, and events, there are various responses to them that appreciation can involve. You appreciate the work in virtue of responding in some of these ways to these parts, features, and represented elements. So, for example, pitying Oedipus is plausibly a response that appreciation of *Oedipus Rex* can involve. Being amused at his fate is almost certainly not. [2013: 30]

Undoubtedly true. But without an explanation of the unity of appreciation, it is not clear why and when any of the responses that Grant regards as (potential) parts of appreciation are such parts, rather than stand-alone responses that do not amount to appreciation. Is just pitying Oedipus appreciating the play? If not, are pitying and grasping the ironic hints scattered throughout the play enough? Or perhaps pitying, grasping the ironic hints and empathizing with Jocasta? And so on and so forth. Unless we grasp that which renders all the responses that are parts of appreciation *appreciative* responses, we have not understood what appreciation is and what, in Grant's words, it could include.

Any conjunctive account of appreciation faces this problem. Instead of such account, I argue that appreciation is a unitary experience that *modifies* (rather than divides into) perceptual, cognitive, practical, emotional or other responses, in the same way that emotions and other affects modify the responses that they accompany (e.g., in the same way that fear modifies the perception of the snake one fears and pleasure modifies the conversation one enjoys).

Consider pleasure as an example. When I enjoy a glass of 2009 Meslerie Vouvray, my pleasure is not a conjunction of sipping the cold drink, smelling its rose and quince notes, tasting its apricot aromas and sensing its tenderness. Rather, my pleasure is a unitary experience of the wine that shapes and modifies these activities and experiences which it accompanies. The modification is roughly so: if the wine did not delight me, my sipping of the cold drink, tasting the aromas, etc. would be different—they wouldn't be pleasurable, appreciative responses that endorse those qualities as ones to be valued.

Analogously, aesthetic appreciation is not a conjunction, but an approving apprehension of value that could be had only as a modification of other responses and experiences, such as seeing the curved lines, understanding the allusions, feeling dizzy by the camera movements, etc. When modified by appreciation, the dizziness that one senses is not just, well, dizziness, but an apprehension and endorsement of the specific camera movement as a value-making property of this movie. Similarly, when so modified, pitying the character is not just an emotional response but an endorsement of the character construction as a value-making property of the play, and so on for other responses that critics recommend. As we saw above, typically, when critics give us reasons to do/feel/engage in certain ways, etc. they give these *insofar as they are part of appreciating the work*. This means that critics don't communicate *separate* reasons for seeing the curved lines or enjoying the vivid colors—separate theoretical, practical, emotional etc.

reasons—but rather reasons *for appreciating* the work *in certain ways*, *by,* say, seeing the lines as curved, enjoying the vivid colors or other theoretical, practical, emotional or conative responses.

Unity here is not a philosophical fetish, but a virtue of any account of criticism given the following desiderata. If appreciation is not unified as an experience that modifies different responses to works, but *divided* into responses that vary in light of each particular work, then, it is not clear when a response is just a response and when it is an *appreciative* response to a work. Moreover, if appreciation were built out of disparate parts, there would not be even the thinnest commonality among what different aesthetically valuable works merit *qua* aesthetically valuable, and among different acts of appreciation. Each work would call for a totally different set of responses, and each act of appreciation would be wholly different. Correspondingly, there would be no commonality, however minimal, between the responses that critics articulate and aim at. We can, of course, give up on any such (thin) commonality and punt the question of what makes aesthetic criticism, well, aesthetic, and what is common to all exercises of appreciation. But an account of criticism and appreciation that (1) explains what makes any of the responses that critics articulate and aim at an appreciative one, (2) provides a minimal but still sufficiently general characterization of the critic's aim and of appreciation and (3) explains what makes criticism aesthetic has significant advantages over a conjunctive picture of appreciation.

And if appreciation is unitary, reasons for it are also best understood as unitary rather than conjunctive. Reasons for appreciation are not conjunctively theoretical *and* practical, but unitary appreciative reasons. And as I turn to show now, the unitary structure of these reasons is neither theoretical nor practical.

8. Neither/Nor

Even though the successful response to the critic must reflect the work, the success of this response is *not* exhausted by a correct reflection of the work's character, that is, by the standard of truth. A true belief about the value of the work is *not* a fully successful response to the critic even though it is true (and even justified). Obviously, a correct belief that *Children's Games* is a great painterly achievement is more successful than the incorrect belief that it is a failure, but it nonetheless falls short of the mark of the relevant success in this domain. Such a belief is not *responsive* to the critic's reasons, and to the value of the relevant work. Recall the reflection on criticism above. It suggested that believing that *Children's Games* is novel and a pivotal work in Bruegel's development without feeling the value of each of the blue images, without empathizing with the figures etc. falls short of being a 'successful' response to Snow's criticism. The success conditions of the response to the critic are different from the success conditions of a response to theoretical reasons. While theoretical reasons are just those that mark accurate reflection of how things are, or, alternatively, provide evidence for the truth of a proposition, if there are critical reasons, they don't fit this characterization. The appropriateness *to* the world of the attitudes that are supported by these reasons is not just a matter of tracking the world. Critical reasons are different from theoretical reasons.

While this might initially seem peculiar, this kind of success conditions is not distinctive to aesthetics, but prevalent in our affective lives. Consider my true belief that Oedipus is pitiful. Though correctly reflecting Oedipus, this belief falls short of being correct *to* Oedipus and his pitifulness, of being *responsive* to his plight. Here too the belief that Oedipus is pitiful is better than the belief that he is comical and better than being amused at his plight, but even the correct

belief falls short of the relevant mark of success since it fails to be *responsive* to what his plight merits. To be true *to* Oedipus's undeserved wretchedness is to pity him. Feeling pity is both answerable to the fact that he is pitiful, in *presenting* him as such, and—in a single unified experience—*responsive to* his pitifulness. No belief is needed given that affects can themselves be ways of presenting the world, while also being kinds of responsiveness to what it deserves. Though emotional 'appropriateness' requires that emotions present the world correctly, it is different from truth and thus from theoretical standards correctness since it also requires responsiveness.[22]

I argue that just as a mere true belief that, say, a person deserves forgiveness or calls for empathy, without feeling these emotions, falls short of the mark of succusses in the affective domain, so a mere true belief about a work's value falls short of being responsive both to this value and to most critics' recommendations. Though appreciation must reflect the work, appreciative and critical 'appropriateness,' like emotional 'appropriateness,' differs from theoretical correctness. It is irreducible to accurate representation.

My emphasis on the responsiveness to what is merited by a work brings out an affinity between the practical and the critical (as well as the emotional) cases. On the view I am proposing, all these three concern what is called for or merited. So are critical reasons not just

[22] Here I disagree with [Raz 2011], who argues that reasons for emotions are an instance of the class 'adaptive reasons,' to which epistemic reasons for beliefs also belong. My argument shows that reasons for emotions don't belong to the same category as epistemic reasons for beliefs.

practical? I believe not. Here I will discuss only two important differences between these two sets of reasons.[23]

First, notice the **formally different structures of rational explanation**. Say you shared a room with a friend at a recent APA meeting. She agreed to pay the entire lodging bill up front while having you pay her back half the bill later. To explain your giving back the money you owe your friend by saying 'because it is honest' is to point to the goodness of retuning the money: it is the honest thing to do. To explain my decorating a Gila monster cake by saying 'I am throwing a birthday party for my son Kaito in 30 minutes' is to explain the point of my current action by appeal to my larger action. A practical rational explanation appeals to the action's worth or point (as good, virtuous, morally right, honest, grateful, means to another end, part of a larger action etc.).

Rational explanations of belief and appreciation should not appeal to the worth or point of the response but rather to its appropriateness *to* the world or the work [Hopkins 2006; Raz 2011]. When I ask you why you believe that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris you don't answer me properly if you explain why the belief is good or what its point is (say, that it promises you a doxastic bonanza or a French frame of mind). Rather, you properly answer my question when

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[23] An additional difference concerns the *receptive consciousness* involved in theoretical and critical reasoning and the *productive consciousness* involved in practical reasoning (*consciousness of what is actual vs. what is to be actualized*). In the literature, this difference is often discussed in terms of different directions of fit (world-to mind vs. mind-to-world).

you explain what in the world makes this belief true. Sure, truth is the goodness of beliefs. But this variety of goodness is wholly explained by the belief's correct representation of the world as it is independently of the belief. That the action is honest—the goodness of this action—or that it is part of what is required for a larger action is not a matter of its correctly representing the world as it is independently of this action.

Likewise, when I ask a critic 'why are Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels* good?' she's unlikely to answer the question by explaining the goodness, worth or point of appreciating them (e.g., it will make you a connoisseur of Italian literature). Critics standardly explain *what in the relevant work makes appreciation appropriate* (and how to appreciate it). Of course, part of the greatness of the *Neapolitan Novels* (if, for example, the critic Molly Fischer [2014] is right), lies in the kind of passionate, loving engagement that they deserve. But this does not mean that the critic properly answers the relevant 'why' question when she says 'because it is pleasant to read them' *independently* of an explanation of what it is about the novels that is *worthy* of pleasure, passion and love. The critic is asked to explain why the novels merit such responses. While actions are standardly explained by appeal to their own goodness—the goodness of what the reasons are reasons for—the critic does not standardly explain the appreciation she recommends in terms of the goodness of this appreciation—the goodness of what her reasons are reasons for. And she shouldn't. A work does not merit appreciation on account of the goodness of this act of appreciation. Relying *merely* on the goodness of the act of appreciating a work, *regardless of how the work is independently of appreciating it* is, at best, limited, requiring a further explanation. The structure of the rational explanation of action differs from the structures of the rational explanation of belief and of appreciation in this respect.

Second, responding to practical reasons and responding to critical reasons are **exercises of different capacities.** Even if both practical reasons and critical reasons are grounded in what is called for or merited by some aspect of the world, they are crucially different: when the called for response is an *action*, properly responding to the relevant reason must be an exercise of the *will*; it is a matter of bringing about an action through the will. But if what is merited is appreciation, no exercise of the will is required; indeed, no exercise of the will could (partially) constitute appreciation. One cannot appreciate 'at will' more than one could believe 'at will.' Properly responding to the relevant kind of merit is an exercise of a different, arguably rational but at least partly receptive capacity for aesthetic appreciation. Practical reasons and critical reasons are different if the proper responses to them require exercises of different capacities.

And so reasons for appreciation—in criticism and otherwise—are neither theoretical nor practical.

9. Clarification: *Communicating* Reasons?

Recall that the debate concerns not only the possibility and nature of the critic's reasons, but also their communication. I suggested that critics plausibly communicate reasons for their audience's appreciation. But this does *not* entail that the audience's appreciation is to be had *only* on basis of reading criticism, independently of experiencing these reasons for oneself. In this sense too, critical reasons differ from theoretical reasons. One can form the belief that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris merely on the basis of a trustworthy testimony without seeing that it is there (or reading the city map on one's own etc.). One can also form the *belief* that the work that the critic recommends merits appreciation without experiencing the reasons in support of this belief for oneself. But such a belief, we saw, is different from appreciation, and would not fulfill the aim of

criticism. And one cannot *appreciate* a work on the basis of either testimony or criticism alone independently of mirroring the critic's own appreciative experience of the work.[24] One appreciates a work when one experiences for oneself the reasons that the critic communicates as reasons for the appreciative worth of the work.[25] There is a difference between experiencing and appreciating reasons, on the one hand, and merely considering them and concluding (believing) on this basis alone that the work is of value, on the other hand. This is the grain of truth in the Sibleyan thought that critics *guide* their audience's response: they guide but do not ground the audience's responses *independently of the audience's own appreciation of the relevant reasons* as reasons for appreciating the work.[26] Critics neither rationally support the audience's appreciation of the relevant work *independently of the audience's own appreciation of these reasons*, nor communicate premises on the basis of which the audience is to infer a conclusion.

[24] On this mirroring, see [Gorodeisky and Marcus ms.].

[25] The experience of these reasons need not be 'in the flesh' but may take the form of *visually and audibly imagining* the relevant work and the features that make it great (if one has the relevant imaginative skills).

[26] I agree with Lord that the rational support that critics offer to audiences is asymmetrical to the rational support of their own responses [2019: 20]. Our views differ significantly, though, insofar as, on his view, critics offer reasons for perceptually based *beliefs*. This is unfaithful to the practice of criticism as shown in section 3, and also strains to explain the relevant asymmetry (given that *beliefs* can be legitimately based on testimony). For more on the limitation of Lord's view, see [Gorodeisky and Marcus ms.].

Instead, by articulating their own rationally supported appreciative experiences of works, critics offer themselves as our appreciative mirrors.

10. Conclusion

I've argued that if criticism involves reasons, the most central and primary among them (reasons for appreciation) exhibit a neither theoretical nor practical structure of rationality. While such reasons exhibit aspects that are akin to aspects of both theoretical and practical rationality, they do not fall squarely under either one of these forms of rationality. Trying to fit them under either one of these models, as the whole philosophical debate about criticism has, is misguided. Critical reasons are not EITHER/OR, but most plausibly NEITHER/NOR.

This goes way beyond aesthetics. If reasons for appreciation are most plausibly neither theoretical nor practical, and especially if appreciation and emotions exhibit the similarities I pointed to above, then philosophers across the normative literature should not assume what virtually everyone assumes, namely, that reasons are either theoretical or practical. There may well be reasons that are neither theoretical nor practical.[27]

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