TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS AND THE CALL OF METAPHYSICS

by

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(Under the Direction of O. Bradley Bassler)

ABSTRACT

Transcendental arguments have been a topic of considerable debate in philosophy during the last several decades. Most of the debate surrounding transcendental arguments has centered on their failure to accomplish what their advocates intend them to accomplish. They are typically called upon to settle decisively the philosophical difficulties they address by establishing necessary metaphysical claims through a consideration of the conditions of the possibility of epistemological premises. That is, transcendental arguments make a claim about reality, what is actually the case, based upon appearance, what is believed to be the case or how things seem. In Chapters One and Two, I will give an account of the chief characteristics and structure of transcendental arguments and provide several canonical exemplars, which will exhibit not only different manifestations that transcendental arguments can take but also the issues they have been used to address.

The most common criticism of transcendental arguments is that they are not able to span the justificatory gap between appearance and reality or to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of moving from mind to world. In Chapter Three, I will consider criticisms of transcendental arguments, focusing on the most common criticism given by Barry Stroud.

In light of Stroud's trenchant criticism, recent work reveals an optimistic undertone by some philosophers who would promote a more moderate use of transcendental arguments. Rather than establish necessary claims about reality, transcendental arguments reveal necessary epistemological connections. I will argue that although these moderate versions are indeed legitimate as transcendental arguments, there is no need to discard the more ambitious version. Through the work of John McDowell, I will show how Stroud's criticism can be overcome, thereby removing the incentive to endorse moderate versions as substitutes for ambitious versions and placing renewed confidence in transcendental argumentation. In Chapter Three, I will present and offer a critique of these moderate versions. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I will consider McDowell's work in my defense of transcendental arguments against the criticisms previously noted.

INDEX WORDS: Transcendental argument, John McDowell, Presupposition, Stroud, Genova, Verification principle, Metaphysics, Epistemology

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT ARE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS?

Introduction

Transcendental arguments have been a topic of considerable debate in philosophy during the last several decades. A more detailed account of the purposes to which transcendental arguments have been put will follow, but it suffices here to say that they are typically called upon to settle decisively the philosophical difficulties they address. Given the enormity of and (perhaps) a general antipathy toward undertaking such a task, it is easy to see why transcendental arguments would be met with considerable opposition and doubt. In Chapters One and Two, I will give an account of the chief characteristics and structure of transcendental arguments and provide several canonical exemplars, which will exhibit not only different manifestations that transcendental arguments can take but also the issues they have been used to address.

Most of the debate surrounding transcendental arguments has centered on a certain type of transcendental argument, "ambitious" transcendental arguments, and their failure to accomplish what their advocates intend them to accomplish. For detractors and defenders alike, transcendental arguments are supposed to establish metaphysical claims based upon epistemological premises. That is, they make a claim about reality, what is actually the case, based upon appearance, what is believed to be the case or how things seem. The detractors, most notably Barry Stroud, argue that on this conception of transcendental arguments, they are not able to span the justificatory gap between

appearance and reality or accomplish the task of moving from mind to world. In Chapter Three, I will consider common criticisms of transcendental arguments, focusing on the principal criticisms given by such early detractors as Stroud and Stephan Körner.[1]

As a response to the general long-standing skepticism toward transcendental arguments, recent work reveals an optimistic undertone by some philosophers who would promote a more moderate and cautious use of transcendental arguments. The result of this optimistic trend, however, is that transcendental arguments are no longer supposed to do what they previously had been called on to do, but there is still a niche carved out of the larger domain of philosophical argumentation that transcendental arguments fill. In light of this newly found hope for transcendental arguments, I will argue that although these moderate versions are indeed legitimate as transcendental arguments, there is no need to discard the more ambitious version. I propose to show, with John McDowell's help, that Stroud's criticism can be overcome, thereby removing the incentive to endorse moderate versions as substitutes for ambitious versions and placing renewed confidence in transcendental argumentation. In Chapter Three, I will consider these recent responses to the principal criticism of transcendental arguments and offer a critique of these responses. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I will consider McDowell's work in my defense of transcendental arguments against the criticisms previously noted.

1.1. *Features of Transcendental Arguments*

The source of the characteristics of and controversies surrounding transcendental arguments can certainly be traced back to Immanuel Kant, though this needs qualification. This does not mean that Kant was necessarily the first to employ the sort of

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[1] Stephan Körner, "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions," *The Monist* 51 (1967): 317-331; Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968): 241-256.

reasoning we have come to regard as transcendental. It is entirely possible, and in fact probable, that philosophers before Kant have employed transcendental arguments. It has been suggested, for example, that Aristotle gave a transcendental argument for the Principle of Non-Contradiction and that Descartes' *cogito* is a transcendental argument.[2] Thus, the thought continues, Kant should not be heralded as the premier transcendental arguer. But bringing up the use of transcendental arguments before Kant is just to say that a type of argument we are only now getting clear about had been used before we had gotten clear about it; certainly this is not peculiar. Furthermore, the claim that the origins of transcendental arguments are found in Kant is a claim about conceptual origin, not chronological origin. It has only been since the central use of transcendental argumentation in Kant, notably in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, that there has been something to get clear about, for there Kant laid out his transcendental project and the argumentative strategy by which it was to be accomplished. That argumentative strategy has since been termed 'transcendental', a term that has been applied to Kantian, neo-Kantian, and non-Kantian projects alike. Kant put a name to and made extensive use of a kind of argumentation that had not yet been brought into the philosophical limelight.

So, although Kant may not have been the first to use transcendental argumentation, he can certainly be considered its pioneer. For inasmuch as transcendental arguments are deemed transcendental, they share certain elements with Kant's own method of argumentation. Indeed, as Humphrey Palmer points out, when selecting a certain group of arguments referred to as transcendental "each scholar is of course

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[2] Aristotle's defense of the Principle of Non-Contradiction: Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 3; Anthony C. Genova, email correspondence, 18 October 2002; Descartes' *cogito*: Humphrey Palmer, *Presupposition and Transcendental Inference* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

theoretically free to select any group he likes, but in practice he will hold and help his readers only if his usage is more or less continuous with Kant's."[3] Since part of my task in the dissertation is to make clear a general account of transcendental arguments (what they are, what they do, how they do it, etc.), I wish to avoid conjuring the necessary elements of transcendental arguments by fiat. This would, in particular, be detrimental for a general study of transcendental arguments. In order to avoid such an unwelcome consequence, I will mention a few key things about what Kant himself had to say about transcendental arguments or proofs. But before moving on to Kant, I will first survey the contemporary philosophical scene in order to provide some key features of transcendental arguments and examples to illustrate them.

Since I am giving an account of transcendental arguments, I want to begin by mentioning a few things about the descriptive term 'transcendental' that is modifying this kind of proof. The term finds its origin in the transcendental idealism of Immanuel Kant; however, there are recent arguments that also go by the tag 'transcendental' but that either fail to endorse or explicitly reject Kant's transcendental idealism. If, then, the usage of 'transcendental' is not restricted to Kant, to what does it refer? A quotation from Patricia Kitcher is instructive here:

> The term "transcendental" has often been a source of confusion, because it includes three not obviously related ideas: (1) the idea that some conditions are necessary for knowledge and (2) the idea that some claims are *a priori*, in stating universal and necessary features of the world, and (3) the idea that some features of our knowledge are *a priori*, in the sense that they do not derive from sensory evidence, but from our minds' ways of dealing with sensory evidence. What is distinctive about Kant's philosophy is his belief that some of the necessary conditions for knowledge are also *a priori*, in all four senses of that term; they are universal, necessary, cannot be established by sensory experience, and reflect the

[3] Palmer, *Presupposition and Transcendental Inference*, 142.

> mind's ways of dealing with sensory experience; the term "transcendental" constantly draws attention to that complex doctrine.[4]

Here Kitcher gives a nice summary of what 'transcendental' means for Kant's project, hopefully paving the way for more clarity and less confusion. The first idea Kitcher mentions is simply that some conditions are necessary for knowledge, experience, or whatever aspect of experience is under investigation. The second idea is that some claims are not restricted to one's ideas or conceptual scheme but are a priori in that they state necessary, universal features *of the world*. The third idea is that some features of our knowledge or conceptual scheme are a priori in the sense that they are not derived from sensory evidence alone. It is these three elements outlined by Kitcher that, though originating in Kant's work, are not restricted to it and can reasonably be used also to describe non-Kantian transcendental arguments, to which I now turn.

There is no single standard account appealed to in the literature on transcendental arguments. Some characteristics of transcendental arguments are mentioned more than other characteristics. Some are discussed as essential features of transcendental arguments; some are mentioned as necessary and important consequences of the essentials. My choice of key characteristics is not purely "citational": I did not count those characteristics that were cited the most times in the literature, nor did I treat as unimportant those that were rarely discussed. I chose partly on the basis of relevant similarities with Kant, partly on the basis of what was going on in those arguments that have been cited as transcendental over the past few decades, and partly based on the prevalence and relevance of the characteristics in the literature. My hope is that I will

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[4] Patricia Kitcher, "Introduction," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), xxxi-xxxii.

help to solidify a unified account of transcendental arguments, rather than add one more individual account to the existing, scattered pile.

1.1.1. *Preconditions of Possibility*

At least one distinctive feature of transcendental arguments is common and central to all of them. It is principally in terms of this feature that transcendental arguments are termed transcendental. Most, if not all, of the characteristics that follow in my explication are strongly connected to it. This central characteristic involves a peculiar sort of question that transcendental arguments explicitly address and in terms of which one can easily, and without residue, reword them. The question is, What are the necessary preconditions that must be true in order for _____ to be possible or intelligible?[5] Depending on the purposes to which the argument is put, different items can be inserted into the blank. In fact, if Kant is a guide in principle, *any* fact of experience can be plugged in.

A relatively clear and much cited illustration of this first feature of transcendental arguments is found in Peter Strawson's *Individuals*.[6] In the third chapter, Strawson argues that in order for it to be possible to attribute mental state characteristics to ourselves, there must be persons of such a type that both mental and physical state predicates are ascribable to them. The former situation cannot even be *possible* unless the latter condition holds. So, if the former situation is *actually* the case, i.e., if we actually

[5] Both possibility and intelligibility have been used in the literature to describe the onus of the preconditions. However, differences in how these terms might be applied to transcendental arguments have not, as far as I am aware, been discussed in the literature. The difference between the two, as it relates to transcendental arguments, could be put as a difference between metaphysical and epistemological stances, respectively. Specifically, where transcendental arguments are concerned with preconditions of *possibility*, they are concerned with drawing metaphysically necessary conclusions; where they deal with preconditions of *intelligibility*, the arguments are drawing epistemologically necessary conclusions. Nevertheless, I will not utilize this distinction in the dissertation and will use the terms interchangeably throughout.

[6] Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959).

attribute mental state characteristics to ourselves, then the latter condition *must* hold as well, i.e., there are persons in the world.

Strawson is giving a transcendental argument for the necessity of a unique notion of *person*—something to which both mental and physical states are ascribable. The initial motivating question in Strawson's argument is, What are the necessary preconditions that must be true in order for the self-ascription of mental states to be possible? The short version of his argument is that in order to ascribe mental states to oneself, there must be persons (of the logical type noted above). I will now give a fuller version of Strawson's argument in order to show exactly how he proceeds.

> Let me rehearse briefly the stages of the argument. There would be no question of ascribing one's own states of consciousness, or experiences, to anything, unless one also ascribed, or were ready and able to ascribe, states of consciousness, or experiences, to other individual entities of the same logical type as that thing to which one ascribes one's own states of consciousness. The condition of reckoning oneself as a subject of such predicates is that one should also reckon others as subjects of such predicates. The condition, in turn, of this being possible, is that one should be able to distinguish from one another, to pick out, or identify, different subjects of such predicates, i.e., different individuals of the type concerned. The condition, in turn, of this being possible is that the individuals concerned, including oneself, should be of a certain unique type: of a type, namely, such that to each individual of that type there must be ascribed, or ascribable, *both* states of consciousness *and* corporeal characteristics.[7]

There are three steps Strawson takes to reach his conclusion. In the first step of the argument, he states: "The condition of reckoning oneself as a subject of [states of consciousness] predicates is that one should also reckon others as subjects of such predicates." Strawson is arguing here that in order for it to be possible to ascribe mental states to oneself, one must be able to ascribe them to others.

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[7] Ibid., 100.

In the second step, he continues: “The condition, in turn, of [the possibility of reckoning others as subjects of mental state predicates], is that one should be able to distinguish from one another, to pick out, or identify, different subjects of such predicates, i.e., different individuals of the type concerned.” This move simply turns upon the words used in the sentence. *Others* means more than one, or different. Others as *subjects* means they will be differentiated as particulars in some way. Others as subjects *of mental state predicates* means that such predicates will be ascribable to them. These subjects will be of a certain type.

The third step of the argument ends with the following: “The condition, in turn, of [the possibility of distinguishing different individuals of the type concerned] is that the individuals concerned, including oneself, should be of a certain unique type: of a type, namely, such that to each individual of that type there must be ascribed, or ascribable, *both* states of consciousness *and* corporeal characteristics.” One cannot ascribe *only* mental state predicates to others, because then one would not be able to ascribe them to *anything*. But, since we do in fact make mental state ascriptions to things, namely, to ourselves and others, it follows that we must be able to ascribe *both* physical state and mental state predicates to others in order to ascribe mental (or physical, for that matter) state predicates *at all*. In all three steps of his argument, Strawson argues transcendentally; that is, he argues on the basis of preconditions of possibility: first, on the basis of what makes self-ascriptions of mental states possible; second, on the basis of what makes “other-ascriptions” of mental states possible; and, third, on the basis of what makes distinguishing subjects of mental states possible.

With regard to this feature of transcendental arguments, namely, that they reveal the necessary preconditions of the possibility of whatever is under discussion, the question arises as to what sort of necessity is attached to the preconditions of possibility. Rüdiger Bubner suggests that the necessity of the precondition is not a physical or natural necessity:[8] the fact that attributing mental state characteristics to ourselves is not possible unless there are persons in the world does not result because some physical law prohibits it from otherwise obtaining in the actual world. For example, we might be concerned about what makes knowledge possible, but not everything that precedes or is a factor contributing to an act of knowing counts as necessary preconditions for its possibility. For instance, we should not count sufficient nourishment and a good library as *transcendental* preconditions, though they are preconditions of a sort. Transcendental necessity is of a different nature. It is more than a mere causal necessity—if certain necessary conditions of the effect did not obtain, then the effect would not happen. It is true that without sufficient nourishment, one would not engage in acts of knowing. But this causal necessity has more to do with one's particular, empirical relationship to knowledge than with the *possibility* of knowledge *per se*, and it is with possibility and intelligibility that transcendental arguments deal.

Interestingly, Stroud has more recently promoted a similar view of the necessity involved in transcendental argumentation, underscoring the a priori (rather than empirical) discovery of the conditions of possibility.[9] It is true, of course, that certain conditions must obtain in order for us to have experiences and gain knowledge in the

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[8] Rüdiger Bubner, "Kant, Transcendental Arguments and the Problem of Induction," *Review of Metaphysics* 28 (1975): 453-67.
[9] Barry Stroud, "Kantian Argument, Conceptual Capacities, and Invulnerability," *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

ways we do. Among such conditions, Stroud mentions the proper functioning of sense-organs and an environment that impacts us in the appropriate ways. He continues:

> But in those thoughts the 'must' is a causal 'must', and it is known to hold, if it does, by empirical investigation. What is striking about the Kantian enterprise is that discoveries of apparently non-psychological conditions of thought are to be made purely a priori, independently of experience. The necessity involved is not causal. That things are a certain way is said to be a necessary condition of our thinking and experiencing things as we do, in a stronger or different or at any rate non-causal sense of 'necessary.'[10]

The necessity involved in transcendental arguments, as Stroud echoes in this passage, is something stronger than and different from a merely causal sense of necessity. The necessary conditions are not grasped empirically, because the possibility of which they are conditions is not an empirical possibility.

There is an alternative, negative formulation of transcendental arguments involving possibility, called "impossibility of the contrary" arguments. The "impossibility" here has a dual reference: rather than asking about the necessary preconditions of possibility, the argument shows that alternative positions render impossible the thing under investigation, which thereby renders the positions themselves impossible as viable alternatives. Such "impossibility of the contrary" arguments often conform quite well to *reductio* formulations, for the "impossibility" is typically a contradiction or otherwise logically impossible state of affairs. Tyler Burge, for instance, argues through a series of impossibility of the contrary arguments that, as critical reasoners, we are both epistemically entitled to our judgments about and required to know our own thoughts, reasons, and reasoning.[11] At each stage he starts by supposing

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[10] Ibid., 156.
[11] Tyler Burge, "Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1996): 91-116.

the contrary of his position and then shows how that supposition leads to an impossibility, namely that we both do and do not engage in critical reasoning. His purpose is to show that positions contrary to his own cannot provide a basis for our being critical reasoners; that is, he shows that alternative positions render impossible the fact that we are critical thinkers and are themselves thereby to be discarded as viable possibilities. As is the case in Burge's argument, impossibility of the contrary formulations are supposed to have the power to settle decisively philosophical difficulties in one sweep, for they can eliminate alternatives without having to make separate arguments against each one.[12]

In order to see how Burge's argument reflects the impossibility of the contrary formulation of transcendental arguments, we must look more closely at how it proceeds. The argument occurs within the broader context of critical reasoning, a context that informs the "specialness" of the self-knowledge for which he argues. Since critical reasoning is central to Burge's argument, an extended quotation on the subject from Burge is appropriate:

> Critical reasoning is reasoning that involves an ability to recognize and effectively employ reasonable criticism or support for reasons and reasoning. It is reasoning guided by an appreciation, use, and assessment of reasons and reasoning as such. As a critical reasoner, one not only reasons. One recognizes reasons as reasons. One evaluates, checks, weighs, criticizes, supplements one's reasons and reasoning. . . . It also involves an ability to assess the truth and reasonability of reasoning—hence *attitudes*. . . . To be a critical reasoner, one must also be able to, and sometimes actually, use one's knowledge of reasons to make, criticize, change, confirm *commitments* regarding propositions—to engage explicitly in reason-induced changes of mind. (pp. 98-100)

[12] For instance, an impossibility of the contrary refutation of materialist metaphysics would not have to refute every particular position that relied on a materialist metaphysics; these positions are like branches that would fall once their trunk was cut down. Thus, bringing materialist metaphysics into disrepute would ipso facto bring them into disrepute without having to consider each of their peculiarities and differences.

His argument for why we must be knowledgeable about our thoughts when we reflect upon them (as critical reasoners) occurs in three stages. First, Burge argues that "to evaluate reasons critically, one must have an *epistemic entitlement* to one's judgments about one's thoughts, reasons, and reasoning" (p. 101). What does he mean by "entitlement" or, as he also puts it, "epistemic warrant"? He means more than the ordinary notion of justification—an articulation of the evidence or justification an individual has for a belief or other epistemic state or act. His notion of entitlement "consists in a status of operating in an appropriate way in accord with norms of reason, even when these norms cannot be articulated by the individual who has that status" (p. 93), though in principle it is likely that such an entitlement could be articulated by someone.

In the first stage of his argument, Burge gives something like a *reductio* proof. He begins by assuming a skeptical claim about one's knowledge of one's own attitudes, namely, that one's judgments about them are not reasonable. This being the case, he continues, "one's reflection on one's attitudes and their interrelations could add no rational element to the reasonability of the whole process [of reasoning]" (p. 101). But, Burge urges, reflection does add such a rational element. Since it cannot be the case that reflection both could and could not add a rational element to the reasonability of the reasoning process, the skeptical assumption must be wrong. Burge puts the point more fully:

> If reflection provided no reason-endorsed judgments about the attitudes, the rational connection between the attitudes reflected upon and the reflection would be broken. So reasons could not apply to how the attitudes should be changed, suspended, or confirmed *on the basis of* reasoning depending on such reflection. But critical reasoning just is reasoning in which norms of reason apply to how attitudes should be affected partly on the basis of reasoning that derives from

> judgments about one's attitudes. So one must have an epistemic entitlement to one's judgments about one's attitudes. (pp. 101-102)

Here Burge does not argue in the strictly *reductio* manner I suggested above; neither does he speak of the beginning assumption as a "skeptical" claim. However, his argument broadly conforms to this pattern of reasoning. Although at the opening of his essay, Burge says that he will not be discussing skepticism, he is nevertheless quick to point out the relevance of his discussion for anti-skeptical arguments. I take the claim that reflection does not provide reason-endorsed judgments about one's attitudes as a skeptical claim. My reformulation thus focuses Burge's attempt to turn this skeptical claim back upon itself, to reveal its "absurdity." He is intent on showing that an assumption that is contrary to his conclusion leads to a state of affairs that does not obtain, i.e., that the contrary of what he wants to conclude is in this sense impossible.

Burge begins the second stage of his argument by asking whether one can have epistemic entitlement and yet be "systematically mistaken" or lacking in knowledge.[13] Burge claims that "if we failed normally to know our thoughts and attitudes, in ordinary reasoning about reasons, either through systematic falsity of our judgments or through systematic mismatch between our entitlement and truth, critical reasoning would not occur among us." The reason for this impossibility hinges on what critical reasoning is: critical reason requires a rational coherence between the level of "higher-order evaluations" of our thoughts and attitudes and the level of "first-order, object-oriented reasoning." If these levels were disconnected, or accidentally connected, critical reasoning would not occur, for the evaluations would not be reason-guided or reason-

[13] It is important to note here that he does not deny the possibility of lacking knowledge in individual cases. He denies, rather, that such epistemological failure can be the normal state of affairs.

guiding. But, Burge insists, "critical reasoning does occur among us. So, as critical reasoners we must know our thoughts and attitudes" (p. 103).

In the third and final stage of his argument, Burge attacks what he calls the simple observational model. Burge likens this model to the view that "beliefs about others' attitudes must be based on inferences from or criteria for observation. On the [simple observational] model at issue, beliefs about one's own attitudes differ only in that one need not always infer those beliefs, because one is the closest witness" (pp. 104-105). According to the simple observational model, self-knowledge rests partly on one's "inner observation" of one's thoughts and attitudes, an observation that, for Burge, involves "a pattern of veridical, but brute, contingent, non-rational relations—which are plausibly always causal relations—between the subject matter (the attitudes under review) and the judgments about the attitudes" (p. 105). Given what Burge has said already in the first two stages of his argument about the importance of non-contingent and rational relations between attitudes and judgments of those attitudes in critical reasoning, it is not difficult to see why Burge thinks this model fails.

But the failure of the simple observational model does not result simply because the relations between the judgments and attitudes are brute, contingent and non-rational. Burge's problem with the model is that it urges a dissociation between the point of view of the judgments and that of the attitudes. This notion of point of view or perspective is central in Burge's argument against the simple observational model. Burge likens the model's view of the judgment-perspective and attitude-perspective *within* a person to the same relationship *between* persons: "Different people have different points of view. My judgment that your beliefs are irrational may be reasonable from my point of view. But it

does not follow that there is reason from your perspective to change your beliefs" (p. 108). There is a normative dissociation between one person's judgment-perspective and another's attitude-perspective. The former's reasons for why the latter should change his attitudes do not possess the normative force to lead the latter to immediately change them. Reasons do not automatically or immediately transfer across the two points of view.

Burge argues that according to the simple observational model, this same normative dissociation occurs *within* the person. Judgments that one's thoughts and attitudes are found wanting would not immediately transfer into reasons for changing those thoughts and attitudes. But "it is constitutive of critical reasoning that if the reasons or assumptions being reviewed are justifiably found wanting by the reviewer, it *rationally follows immediately* that there is prima facie reason for changing or supplementing them, where this reason applies within the point of view of the reviewed material (not just within the reviewing perspective" (p. 109). Critical reasoning for Burge demands that "the reviewing of reasons that is integral to critical reasoning includes the review and the reviewed attitudes in a single point of view" (p. 110). In critical reasoning, the point of view of evaluations made necessarily transfer to the point of view of the attitudes being evaluated. Burge concludes that the simple observational model cannot account for the self-knowledge we have as critical reasoners. Such knowledge, therefore, "must take a distinctive, non-observational form" (p. 101).

Burge offers a transcendental argument in defense of our being critical thinkers against skeptical claims to the contrary. He does so on the basis of the conditions necessary for critical thinking to be possible. Following his definition of critical thinking,

Burge argues that alternative positions to his own either end in impossibilities and contradictions, as in the first two stages of his argument, or they end up rendering critical thinking itself impossible, as in the final stage of his argument. Taken as a whole, he argues that in order for our notion of critical reasoning to be what it is, it must be the case that we are epistemically entitled to our own judgments and the reasons and reasoning behind them.

1.1.2. *Against Skepticism*

A further distinctive feature of transcendental arguments concerns the sort of problems they typically address. Ever since Kant's use of transcendental argumentation, transcendental arguments have been primarily concerned with epistemological issues; in particular, they are usually exploited to combat various forms of skepticism. Donald Davidson, for example, argues against the skeptic who maintains that someone can be mostly wrong in his beliefs.[14] Ultimately, he argues that meaningful communication presupposes that one's beliefs are mostly true, that the very possibility of meaningful communication demands that one's beliefs, in the main, are true. If the fact that one's beliefs are mostly true is a necessary condition for the possibility of meaningful communication, then the skeptic is wrong to think that one's beliefs can be mostly false.

Davidson argues against both non-coherence theories of truth and knowledge and the skeptic who claims that our senses might be systematically deceiving us that there is good reason for supposing that most of our beliefs are true. He prepares for his argument by considering the way in which non-coherence theories seek to establish justification for (the truth of) our beliefs. These theories, claims Davidson, ultimately make appeals to

[14] Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest LePore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

experience as an adequate justification or source of evidence for our beliefs. The most common tack taken by non-coherence theorists is to have sensation be the ground for our beliefs. So, in one case, as Davidson notes in Hume's, beliefs are identified with sensation as having the same epistemic content. Of this simple identity theory, Davidson makes short work: "There are two difficulties with such a view: first, if the basic beliefs do not exceed in content the corresponding sensation they cannot support any inference to an objective world; and second, there are no such beliefs" (p. 310). In another case, rather than asserting an identity between sensation and beliefs about the external world, sensations may simply justify our beliefs about things that go beyond what is given in sensation. But, replies Davidson, the relation between sensation and belief here is not a logical one, that is, it is not one of justification or evidence. The relation is instead a *causal* one, in which case a sensation will cause (and not provide evidence for) a certain belief. Sensations only deliver information, and we cannot get outside of our skins in order to make sure the information is correct; this, of course, is not much of an answer against the skeptic. These, and other similar, considerations lead Davidson to "give up the idea that meaning or knowledge is grounded on something that counts as an ultimate source of evidence" (p. 313). So, Davidson lays out the goal of his argument:

> What is needed to answer the skeptic is to show that someone with a (more or less) coherent set of beliefs has a reason to suppose his beliefs are not mistaken in the main. What we have shown is that it is absurd to look for a justifying ground for the totality of beliefs, something outside this totality which we can use to test or compare with our beliefs. The answer to our problem must then be to find a *reason* for supposing most of our beliefs are true that is not a form of *evidence*. (p. 314)

Davidson proceeds with his argument within the context of meaningful communication, considering first the standpoint of the speaker. As a speaker, he begins,

if you want your communications to be understood by would-be interpreters, you must not systematically deceive them about when you hold as true the things you say. It would not do to have your would-be interpreters think you assent to sentences when you in fact do *not* assent to them. The best way to encourage understanding in this case, then, is to assent to those statements that reflect what you take to be true beliefs. This amounts to having your would-be interpreter think that you hold true those propositions that you actually hold true.

In the world of communication, we are all speakers and interpreters. I have spoken of the speaker-perspective; it turns out, for Davidson, that this perspective informs the interpreter-perspective as well. As an interpreter, we apply the principle of charity, which

> directs the interpreter to translate or interpret so as to read some of his own standards of truth into the pattern of sentences held true by the speaker. The point of the principle is to make the speaker intelligible, since too great deviations from consistency and correctness leave no common ground on which to judge either conformity or difference. (p. 316)

So, we take what we have learned from the speaker-perspective and apply it to the interpreter-perspective: as an interpreter, we "interpret what the speaker accepts as true when we can." What follows, claims Davidson, is that from the interpreter-perspective, most of the sentences a speaker holds to be true just *are* true.

But how does this follow? How does Davidson make the logical jump from beliefs that a speaker *holds to be* true to those beliefs *actually being* true? The answers to these questions reveal the transcendental nature of Davidson's argumentation, for, he says, "once we agree to the general method of interpretation [i.e., the principle of charity]

I have sketched, it becomes impossible correctly to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are" (p. 317).

The only method open to the interpreter is the principle of charity—to interpret the speaker's beliefs in terms of the interpreter's own speaker-perspective, i.e., to credit the speaker with having generally true beliefs. This is the only method available since it is the only one that makes communication possible, for otherwise there would be "no common ground on which to judge either conformity or difference." We have no other choice of method if we want to engage in meaningful communication.

Furthermore, even if we concede that the interpreter and speaker are both fallible, i.e., can be wrong about some things, Davidson argues that they cannot be wrong about *most* things. To argue this, Davidson has us imagine an omniscient interpreter who is "omniscient about the world, and about what does and would cause a speaker to assent to any sentence in his (potentially unlimited) repertoire" (*ibid*.). Using the principle of charity, just like the fallible interpreter, the omniscient interpreter finds the fallible speaker's beliefs about the world to be largely true. If the omniscient interpreter turns his attention to the fallible interpreter of the fallible speaker, he will find the same result—most of the fallible interpreter's beliefs are true, including his beliefs about the fallible speaker. So, it turns out that once the principle of charity, as a general method of interpretation, is put into play, it is not possible that the fallible interpreter share universal error with the fallible speaker he is interpreting.

We have, then, (at least) two transcendental arguments at work in Davidson. The main transcendental argument seeks to establish the anti-skeptical claim that it is impossible that anyone could be mostly wrong in his beliefs, provided one takes the

principle of charity to be the general method of interpretation. This is how Davidson seeks to establish his overall claim that beliefs about how things are must be mostly true. His other transcendental argument is set within this larger one; it shows why the principle of charity is the only viable method of interpretation available: the principle is the necessary condition for the very possibility of communication, which is the backdrop for Davidson's arguments and which we take to be a fact about the world. Since there is meaningful communication, the principle of charity must be the only viable method of interpretation

To summarize, each of the arguments presented illustrate a feature of transcendental arguments: that they are typically enlisted against skeptical positions. Strawson's argument is taken to be directed at the skeptic who doubts that there are persons in the world; Burge's argument, against the skeptic who doubts that we have direct, rational access to our own thoughts and judgments; Davidson's argument, against the skeptic who doubts that there need be a connection between language and reality.

1.1.3. *Self-Reference*

Another distinctive feature of transcendental arguments is their self-referential character. Bubner makes this the key characteristic of transcendental arguments. In speaking of transcendental knowledge, neither the existence of "unspecified precondition[s] for knowledge" nor a priori knowledge alone point to transcendentality, though, as I noted in the first section, these are characteristics of transcendentality for Kant. In the first case, concerning unspecified preconditions for knowledge, there could be many such preconditions—physical, cultural, historical, sufficient nourishment, well-stacked library—without which knowledge would not be possible. Yet, they are not

transcendental preconditions simply because they precede or may be preconditions for knowledge. Rather, "only such knowledge is transcendental . . . in which the relationship between the conditions for the possibilities of cognition on the one hand, and empirical knowledge on the other, is itself the object of knowledge." Preconditions of a thing's own possibility constitute transcendental preconditions.[15]

In the second case, all transcendental knowledge is a priori, but not all knowledge of an a priori nature counts as transcendental. In Kant's words,

> we must not call just any a priori cognition transcendental, but must call transcendental (i.e., concerning the a priori possibility or the a priori use of cognition) only that a priori cognition whereby we cognize that—and how—certain presentations (intuitions or concepts) are applied, or are possible, simply a priori. . . . [W]e may call transcendental only the cognition that these presentations are not at all of empirical origin, and the possibility whereby they can nonetheless refer a priori to objects of experience.[16]

Another way of putting this second point is that all knowledge that is not of empirical origin is a priori, but not all knowledge of an a priori type considers the preconditions of its own possibility. Transcendental knowledge is a priori, but not *only* a priori.

In both of these cases—that of transcendentality being a priori and of its involving necessary preconditions—self-referentiality is what gives transcendentality its meaning. It was not simply the presence of necessary preconditions of transcendental knowledge that pointed to its transcendentality, but rather that the preconditions referred to the very possibility of the knowledge itself. The preconditions of knowledge, then, referred back to the knowledge itself in terms of its possibility. Likewise, it was not simply the a priori nature of transcendental knowledge that pointed to its transcendentality, but rather that a

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[15] Bubner, "Problem of Induction," 461.
[16] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), A56. Unless otherwise stated, all references to *Critique of Pure Reason* will be to this translation.

priori knowledge that notes its own possibility. This reference back to its own possibility is what Bubner means by self-referentiality.

Self-referentiality has been charged against transcendental arguments as a kind of dangerous, and ultimately self-defeating, circularity. Bubner himself seems to recognize the problem self-referentiality poses when he asks, "Does such a demand [that "any conceivable legitimation [of empirical knowledge] must therefore make use of the form of knowledge for which legitimation is demanded"] make any sense at all then? Can knowledge still be legitimated under these circumstances?"[17] Those who charge transcendental arguments with circularity *qua* transcendental arguments answer that knowledge cannot be legitimated under such circumstances because they involve an illegitimate circularity: in order for the knowledge to be legitimated by these arguments, it is used as part of the legitimation. But in order to escape the charge of circularity, no access is granted to the knowledge until after its justification. Therefore, such knowledge cannot be made use of as part of its own justification.

Palmer suggests that all transcendental arguments are guilty of "presumptive circularity" or "p-circularity."[18] Essentially, an argument is p-circular where the premises are not available—cannot be *known* to be true—independently of the conclusion. "The challenge is 'epistemic' in character. It concerns the order in which we get to know the premise in question . . . and the conclusion."[19] If the premise cannot be known to be true independently of the conclusion, then it cannot serve as part of the guarantee of the conclusion without circularity. Furthermore, any argument that seeks to establish a

[17] Bubner, "Problem of Induction," 463.
[18] I say "suggests" because Palmer himself is not certain of whether *all* transcendental arguments suffer from circularity. All the ones he mentions he treats as circular. It seems that he thinks they are bound to be circular enough to issue a challenge for someone to offer a non-circular transcendental argument.
[19] Palmer, *Presupposition and Transcendental Inference*, 30.

presupposition is p-circular, "since that presupposition would itself need to be verified, in arriving at the premises."[20] This affects transcendental arguments insofar as they seek to establish presuppositions of the subject matter in the premise set.

Moltke Gram also connects the objection of circularity to the activity of presupposition in transcendental arguments: they are "peculiar in virtue of [their] circularity" since "the conclusion of a transcendental argument is presupposed . . . by the premises of the argument."[21] The charge here is that the conclusion is already present in the premises, in the sense that, as he later says, "the conclusion . . . figures as one of its premises."[22] The question here is how "the conclusion is presupposed by the premises" morphs into "the conclusion figures as one of its premises." The answer, at least in Gram's case, lies in how presupposition works and precisely what is being presupposed in a transcendental argument.

The issue of presupposition in transcendental arguments, and how it culminates in the devastating criticism of circularity, also appears in an essay by Martin Kalin.[23] In that essay he attempts two kinds of analysis of transcendental arguments—a "formal analysis" and a "structural analysis"—in an effort to answer the question posed as the essay's title, What makes an argument transcendental? The answer to this question, Kalin argues, is not to be found in a formal analysis alone—which finds transcendental arguments to be

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[20] Ibid., 155.
[21] Moltke S. Gram, "Must Transcendental Arguments Be Spurious?" *Kant-studien* 65 (1974): 304.
[22] Ibid. In his essay, Gram begins the objection with "Suppose . . . that the conclusion of a transcendental argument is presupposed. . . ." This may only indicate, in all fairness to Gram, a merely hypothetical objection. However, two things can be said in this regard: (1) at least two others have taken this to be an objection actually raised by Gram (see Stephen W. Arndt, "Transcendental Method and Transcendental Arguments," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 [1987]: 43-58 and Oliver Leaman, "Transcendental Arguments: Gram's Objections," *Kant-studien* 68 [1987]: 468-477), and (2) even if merely hypothetical, it is a serious charge advanced by philosophers against transcendental arguments and, as such, must be dealt with in any serious account of transcendental arguments, which I am attempting in this chapter.
[23] Martin G. Kalin, "What Makes an Argument Transcendental?" *Idealistic Studies* 7 (1977): 172-181.

hopelessly circular, anyway—but in his notion of "anticipation," which depends upon several structural features of transcendental arguments. Leaving aside for now his claim that the uniqueness of transcendental arguments lies in this idea of anticipation, the charge of circularity appears in his formal analysis, an analysis which, according to Kalin, studies the relationship between the premise set and the conclusion of an argument. Kalin puts the relationship in terms of presupposition: "An argument is transcendental if it demonstrates a presupposition, or a statement whose truth is necessary for the sense of the premises—including even its own negation—from which it [i.e., the presupposition] follows."[24] But, he continues, if the truth of the conclusion, which is being demonstrated, is necessary for the premises to make sense, then there must be "a version of the presupposition [i.e., the conclusion] among its premises. Such an argument buys success at the cost of circularity."[25]

In the case of Palmer, Gram, and Kalin, circularity is a feature of transcendental arguments due to the fact that the conclusion somehow makes its way into the premise set. The "somehow" by which this logical blunder is accomplished is presupposition: since the conclusion is presupposed by the premises, the conclusion must already be true prior to the end of the argument in order for the premises to make sense. The truth of the conclusion is already present in the premises. The way out of this predicament, if there is one, lies in getting straight about the concept of circularity, the notion of presupposition, and the kind of statements that end up as premises and conclusion in transcendental arguments. I will postpone a discussion of the latter two elements until Chapter Two; I

[24] Ibid., 174.
[25] Ibid., 175.

hope one result of that chapter will be to vindicate transcendental arguments from the charge of circularity.

As for getting straight about the concept of circularity, I will follow Stephen W. Arndt's characterizations of a vicious circle (*circulus vitiosus*) and begging the question (*petitio principii*).

> In a *circulus vitiosus* one attempts to prove each of two propositions to be proved from the other, as if, for example, one were to argue that the human soul is spiritual and not material because it is properly intellectual and not merely sensitive, but then to argue that the human soul is intellectual precisely because it is spiritual,

whereas

> in a *petitio principii*, one assumes the conclusion to be proved in the MaP [i.e., the major premise], as when Aristotle argues from the general MaP that heavy things gravitate towards the center of the universe, through the empirical MiP [i.e., minor premise] that we observe heavy things gravitating towards the center of the earth, to the conclusion that the center of the earth is the center of the universe.[26]

Arndt argues that neither vicious circularity nor begging the question occurs in transcendental arguments; his argument leans heavily upon his formal account of transcendental arguments, a fuller discussion of which, as I indicated above, will be postponed until the next chapter. Nevertheless, a few words about Arndt's argument and its relationship to self-referentiality are in order.

Arndt treats transcendental arguments as syllogisms, with a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion.[27] The major premise he speaks of is a "phenomenological description of an intentional operation"; this corresponds to my rougher claim, made in the opening section of this chapter, that a transcendental

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[26] Arndt, "Transcendental Method," 57.
[27] More accurately, Arndt takes his formal account of transcendental arguments directly from Roderick Chisolm ("What is a Transcendental Argument?" *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 14 [1978]: 19-22). But since Arndt endorses and explicates Chisolm's formulation, I will continue referring to it as Arndt's formulation.

argument will proceed from epistemological premises or from some aspect of experience. The minor premise of a transcendental argument, according to Arndt, lays out the necessary preconditions of the possibility of performing the intentional operation; this corresponds to my insistence that transcendental arguments address questions of the preconditions of the possibility of the epistemological or experiential dimension of the premise set. The conclusion of a transcendental argument shows the framework within which the intentional operation makes sense or is intelligible; this corresponds roughly to self-referentiality: the intentional operation, once its conditions of possibility have been explicated, refers back to itself in the conclusion by revealing what must be the case for the operation to be possible or intelligible in the first place.

Transcendental arguments are not guilty of a vicious circle because, in Arndt's formulation, there is "no attempt to prove the MaP by the conclusion: it [the MaP] is simply a phenomenological description of an intentional operation."[28] In other words, there is no attempt, in the transcendental argument, as in a vicious circle, to prove one proposition (the major premise) by another proposition (the conclusion); rather than *proving* the major premise, the conclusion simply shows the context within which it can be meaningful or possible. Neither are transcendental arguments guilty of begging the question, "for the MaP is again only a phenomenological description of an intentional operation, and, as such a description, it does not presuppose the horizon of the operation which comes to light in the conclusion after having explicitated the C'sP [i.e., conditions of possibility] of the operation in the MiP."[29] In other words, there is no assumption of the framework in the description of the intentional operation, although the intentional

[28] Arndt, "Transcendental Method," 57.
[29] Ibid., 58.

operation presupposes that framework. That the explicit intentional operation, in its performance, presupposes an implicit framework of meaning is not the same as the former's assuming that the framework has been proved already, as in begging the question; although the framework is necessary for the intentional operation to make sense, this is not shown until the argument is done.

1.1.4. *Dialectical Tensions*

A final distinctive feature of transcendental arguments has a more dialectical character. Transcendental arguments are usually offered in contexts of debate and discussion surrounding a particular issue. Often the dialogue is hypothetical or fictitious, with one side anticipating counterarguments or criticisms that may or may not be actually held by anyone. In such dialectical contexts, the transcendental argument shows that the opponent, by his own claims, cannot help himself to his starting assumptions and highlights the internal inconsistency in and incoherence of his position. The argument exposes the fatal tensions in the opponent's position and uncovers its complete lack of philosophical foundation.

This feature of transcendental arguments has a certain affinity with the *reductio* formulation of the impossibility of the contrary mode articulated above. Here, as in the *reductio*, the opponent's position is shown to lead to an absurdity: in the *reductio* case, the absurdity is a contradiction or otherwise impossible state of affairs; in the present case, the absurdity is the position's implication of its own falsity. The opponent's position is typically put in the mouth of the skeptic who denies that the position held by the transcendental arguer can be rationally justified. Rather than lead straightaway to a contradiction as in most versions of the *reductio* argument, the skeptical position ends up

presupposing a state of affairs that undermines that position by presupposing the very state of affairs that it denies. This is precisely what both Kant attempts in the "Refutation of Idealism," where "the game that idealism played is being turned around and against it" (B276), and how Hilary Putnam's argument against the possibility of our being brains in vats proceeds.[30]

Taking each of these arguments in turn, Kant's "Refutation of Idealism" will be a better example of his transcendental argumentation for the purposes of illustration than the grand project behind the Transcendental Deduction.[31] In the previous section, I noted that transcendental arguments are typically put forward against skeptical positions, and in the Refutation Kant specifically counters Cartesian idealism and its skeptical implications. There he disarms the Cartesian skeptic who accepts inner experience as indubitable and "alleges that we are unable to prove by direct experience an existence apart from our own" (B275). Thus according to the Cartesian skeptic the existence of objects outside us is mediate—mediated by the knowledge of self-existence. Objects outside of us are inferred from self-existence (and a few other things), but are not (proven) beyond doubt. The existence of objects in space outside of us for the Cartesian idealist, claims Kant, is "doubtful and *unprovable*" (B274).

> The proof it demands must, therefore, establish that regarding external things we have not merely *imagination* but also *experience*. And establishing this surely cannot be done unless one can prove that even our *inner* experience, indubitable for Descartes, is possible only on the presupposition of *outer* experience. (B275)

[30] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[31] Graham Bird, "Kant's Transcendental Arguments," in *Reading Kant*, ed. Eva Schaper and Wilhelm Vossenkuhl (New York: Blackwell, 1989), 23.

Thus Kant's proof will show that the dependence or grounding relation does not go from inner to outer but the other way around, though the proof begins with consciousness of inner experience.

We are conscious of our existence as determined in time. Yet time determinations require the existence of permanent objects outside of us. This is evident from two considerations. The first is that by the First Analogy, "all time determinations presuppose something *permanent* in perception" (*ibid.*). The second is that this something cannot come from in us, because all that is "in us" is a succession of ideas in time, which, according to the First Analogy, requires something else. The "else," then, is not something in us but is something outside of us. Furthermore, this permanent something is a *perception*. So, "determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things that I perceive outside me. . . . [Thus] the consciousness of my own existence is simultaneously a direct consciousness of the existence of other things outside me" (B276).

The main point of the Refutation is to show that inner experience presupposes outer experience. The commitment of the Cartesian idealist to the indubitability of inner experience is also a tacit commitment to the existence of other things outside of the self. Thus, as soon as the Cartesian idealist enters the dialogue by regarding inner experience as indubitable and outer experience as dubitable, he is being contradictory; accepting the indubitability of the one means accepting the indubitability of the other.

In his argument against our being brains in vats, Putnam shows that the skeptic's position, that we are brains in vats, ends up implying its own falsity—ends up turning

upon itself and disappearing in a puff of logical smoke. The argument is set forth in summary form as follows:

> It follows [from the fact that terms in vat-English refer to things in the vat-world, things 'in the image', and not to things in the real world] that if their 'possible world' is really the actual one, and we are really the brains in a vat, then what we now mean by 'we are brains in a vat' is that *we are brains in a vat in the image* or something of that kind (if we mean anything at all). But part of the hypothesis that we are brains in a vat is that we aren't brains in a vat in the image (i.e. what we are 'hallucinating' isn't that we are brains in a vat). So, if we are brains in a vat, then the sentence 'We are brains in a vat' says something false (if it says anything). In short, if we are brains in a vat, then 'We are brains in a vat' is false. So it is (necessarily) false.[32]

The brain-in-a-vat (BIV) thought experiment is a contemporary counterpart to Descartes' evil genius hypothesis intended to bring home the problem of skepticism: Can we know that we aren't just brains in vats being deceived by a mad scientist who is programming our experiences through his supercomputer? Putnam asks us to imagine a slightly different scenario. Suppose all human beings are brains in a vat tended by automatic machinery that is programmed to give *all* the brains a *collective* hallucination (rather than separate hallucinations to each brain).

Putnam intends to show that the supposition that we are brains in a vat is self-refuting and, consequently, false.

> A 'self-refuting supposition' is one whose truth implies its own falsity. . . . Sometimes a thesis is called 'self-refuting' if it is *the supposition that the thesis is entertained or enunciated* that implies its falsity. For example, 'I do not exist' is self-refuting if thought by *me* (for any '*me*'). So one can be certain that one oneself exists, if one thinks about it (as Descartes argued). What I shall show is that the supposition that we are brains in a vat has just this property. If we can consider whether it is true or false, then it is not true (I shall show). Hence it is not true.[33]

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[32] Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 15.
[33] Ibid.

How is the thesis that we are brains in a vat self-refuting? Putnam opens the discussion with a theory of reference. Without getting into the details of that theory, he concludes from it that terms in vat-English (i.e., English terms used by the brains in the vat) do not refer to things in the actual world, like our English terms do. Rather, vat-English terms refer to the images in the vat-world presented by the automatic machinery; that is, they refer to hallucinations and not to real things. 'There is a tree in front of me' in vat-English refers to the tree *in the image*, whereas that same phrase in English refers to an actual tree.

This being the case, let us then suppose that it is *we* who are the BIVs, that this world we have been imagining applies to *us* and not just to those BIVs in the thought experiment. That is, let us suppose that the phrase "We are BIVs" is true. It follows from Putnam's theory of reference (propounded at the outset of his discussion) that what we mean by "We are BIVs" is that we are BIVs *in the image*. However, part of the supposition that we are BIVs is that we are *really* BIVs and not just BIVs in the image. Since this is what the supposition entails but *not* what the phrase when uttered by us entails, the phrase "We are BIVs" is false whenever we suppose that we are BIVs. Thus, concludes Putnam, it is (necessarily) false that we are BIVs. The thesis that we are BIVs is self-refuting insofar as entertaining it as a possibility implies its falsity. That is, if we are BIVs, then we are not BIVs.

Putnam's argument proceeds by considering the conditions for the possibility of such-and-such being the case, though this feature is not so easy to locate. He does not explicitly give his argument anything like the form "*X* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *Y*", such that *Y* cannot obtain without *X*'s being the case. Nevertheless, I

think we can pick out an implicit "condition for the possibility of" structure. It goes something like the following. That the phrase "We are BIVs" must refer to the actual state of affairs of our being BIVs *is a necessary condition for the possibility of* our being BIVs. But since the condition cannot hold, i.e., since "We are BIVs" cannot refer to the actual state of affairs of our being BIVs, neither can it be the case that we are BIVs. The other principal feature of Putnam's transcendental argument is its aim in turning the skeptical position back upon itself and implying its own falsity. This is, roughly, what Putnam means by "self-refuting."

1.2. *Kant's Thoughts on Transcendental Proofs*

I said above that insofar as transcendental arguments are deemed transcendental, they would share some elements with Kant's own arguments. Having discussed several features of transcendental arguments that have made their way through recent literature, it remains to consider some of Kant's thoughts on transcendental arguments.

Anthony C. Genova cites several elements of transcendental arguments found in Kant's writing.[34] First, they always involve the establishment of the legitimacy of a claim or concept. The establishment of legitimacy here is a justification of right or warrant (*quid juris*) with respect to a claim or a concept, not a search into its origins or acquisition, which concerns questions of fact (*quid facti*). A question of fact corresponds to what Kant calls an "empirical deduction," a look into how a concept is acquired through experience and, therefore, the fact of how it came to be possessed. Kant contrasts such contingent empirical deductions with the a priori necessity of transcendental

[34] Anthony C. Genova, "Transcendental Form," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 11 (1980): 25-34.

deductions, which correspond to questions of right and show how concepts can refer to objects a priori and, consequently, independently of experience. (A85/B117)

Second, in a transcendental proof the legitimacy of a transcendental principle is established "not at all directly from concepts [of understanding], but always only indirectly by referring these concepts [of understanding] to something entirely contingent, viz., to *possible experience*." There are two main elements of this second remark of Kant's that I'd like to focus on. The first concerns the "directness" of the establishment of the transcendental principle; the second, the proof's relationship to possible experience. The above quote states that the a priori necessity of transcendental principles is derived not directly from the concepts of understanding but indirectly through the concepts' application to contingent possible experience. The direct-ness in view here runs along the lines of conceptual analysis: a transcendental principle is not established simply and straightforwardly through an analysis of the concepts of understanding.

Kant indicates why this is so in the first *Critique* at the beginning of Chapter I, Section IV of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method. In that section, entitled "The Discipline of Pure Reason in Regard to its Proofs," he states that "proofs of transcendental synthetic propositions" establish "a priori the objective validity of their concepts and the possibility of these concepts' synthesis" (A782/B810). Insofar as the objective validity of the concepts and the possibility of their synthesis is under consideration in a transcendental proof, the conclusion cannot be reached solely by an analysis of the concepts. Transcendental proofs go beyond the concepts in order to say something about their application; hence, the proofs need a sort of guide that itself is

located beyond or outside of the concepts. This guide is possible experience. The guide will be neither pure intuition (as in mathematics) nor any particular experience or set of experiences, since it is the possibility of the application or synthesis of the concepts of understanding and not this or that application that is being dealt with in transcendental cognition (A783/B811). It is not this or that experience with which we are concerned in regard to the concepts of understanding, but with possible experience, experience in general. So, for any transcendental proof, which has to do with establishing the objective validity of and the possibility of the synthesis of concepts, only possible experience can and must be the guide. It is only with respect to possible experience that the principles being established can be assured of being necessary, universal, and objectively valid.

Not only is a transcendental principle derived from possible experience, it also "has the special property of itself first making possible its own basis of proof, viz., experience, and of always having to be presupposed in experience" (A737/B765). This is the second main element of Kant's second remark on transcendental proof and is in keeping with the idea of self-referentiality discussed earlier. Not only does the proof move from experience to the transcendental principle, but there is also reference by the principle to experience, in terms of making possible the experience. Trudy Govier gives a similar account of transcendental arguments when she notes that

> in a transcendental argument, we try to justify a principle by showing that because its truth is a necessary condition of knowledge that we have, it is true. . . . But the principle that is justified as a necessary condition . . . helps make that knowledge possible and is thus a part of the explanation as to how we got that knowledge—knowledge which is assumed both in the justification of the principle and in the accompanying explanation.[35]

[35] Trudy Govier, "Reasons Why Arguments and Explanations are Different," in *Problems in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (Providence, R.I.: Foris Publications, 1989), 169. This account is part of her larger point that both argument and explanation are at work in transcendental arguments. I will come back to this at the end of Chapter Six.

This is why Kant says that the transcendental principle being established is called a "principle" (*Grundsatz*) rather than a "theorem" (*Lehrsatz*): the principle does not simply follow from the premises, as does a theorem; it is also part of the explanation for their possibility. The transcendental principle established in a transcendental proof makes experience possible; yet, it is from considerations of possible experience that the principle itself is derived.

A third element of transcendental proofs found in Kant concerns his distinction between ostensive and apagogic proofs. Ostensive proofs are direct, in the sense that they deal directly with the experience or cognition argued about, whereas apagogic proofs are indirect, *reductio*-type proofs, for in apagogic proofs "we need only look at the consequences issuing from the cognition's opposite and find a single one of them to be false, for then this opposite is also false, and hence the cognition that we had to prove is true" (A791/B819).[36] Ostensive proofs provide "insight into the sources of [the] truth [of the conclusion]" or, in other words, insight into the bases of its possibility, whereas apagogic proofs, while capable of producing certainty, cannot gain insight into the bases of its possibility.[37] Applying this distinction to transcendental proof, Kant states that proofs of transcendental synthetic propositions "must never be *apagogic* but always *ostensive*" (A789/B817). The reason for this has to do with the judicial metaphor Kant employs for transcendental proofs, that they are principally concerned with questions of

[36] Though Kant says here that ostensive proofs, as transcendental proofs, are direct in this sense, they are *not* direct in the sense that they proceed on the basis of conceptual analysis mentioned earlier.
[37] The term "sources" here should not be taken in the sense of a metaphysical deduction, where insight is gained into the actual acquisition or possession of a concept. For, in contrasting ostensive with apagogic proofs, Kant draws a semantic parallel between the phrases "insight into the sources of its truth" and "comprehensibility of the truth as regards its connection with the bases of its possibility." See A789-790/B817-818.

right, which in the context of ostensive proofs involves providing insight into the bases of possibility.

In his discussion of the ostensive-apagogic distinction, Kant is specifically concerned with proofs of transcendental synthetic propositions, the ultimate justification of which will come from an ostensive proof. Kant claims that apagogic proofs can only be useful "when there is no possibility of [erroneously] *substituting* the subjective [element] of our presentation for the objective, viz., for the cognition of what is in the object" (A791/B819). And yet "each and every transcendental attempt of pure reason is carried out within the medium proper of dialectical illusion, i.e., the subjective [element] that in reason's premises offers itself to reason—or even thrusts itself upon reason—as objective. Thus here, as far as synthetic propositions are concerned, one cannot be permitted at all to justify one's assertions by refuting their opposite" (A792/B820).

Apagogic proofs, then, are not transcendental deductions. The reason is twofold. Either the refutation is not an actual refutation but merely the *presentation* of a conflict between the opposing view with the subjective conditions of our own view; or neither one's own assertions nor the opposite's are based on assertions about the object under consideration but are rather based merely on appearances. In the former case, there is no *actual* refutation, and so the proof does not go through. In the latter case, anything that is "proved" will not have been proven objectively, i.e., in regard to an object, which is what transcendental proofs are supposed to do. But this does not render apagogic proofs useless for other purposes as well. They can, Kant claims, produce certainty (A789/B817) and uncover the truth of the claim being proved (A791/B819); it's just that they fall short of uncovering the *ground* of its truth (A790/B818), since they do not "go through the

entire series of bases that can lead us to the truth of a proposition by means of complete insight into this truth's possibility," as in ostensive proofs. (A791/B819). In this way apagogic proofs are easier to provide.

Kant alludes also to the dialectical uses to which apagogic proofs are put. He says about apagogic proofs that though they are easier and more expedient than ostensive proofs, which must pass through a complex series of connections, apagogic proofs "are superior to direct [i.e., ostensive] proofs in regard to evidence, inasmuch as contradiction always carries with it more clarity in the presentation than does the best connection, and thus comes closer to the intuitive character of a demonstration" (A790/B818). Kant has made clear that ostensive, direct proofs are superior to apagogic, indirect ones (with regard to the establishment of transcendental principles) insofar as the former show *both* the truth of the synthetic proposition being established *and* the grounds or bases for that truth. But in the quote at hand, Kant indicates that although apagogic proofs are inferior to ostensive ones in one respect, in respect to evidence and clarity of presentation they are superior.

Thus at the end of Chapter One of the Transcendental Doctrine of Method, Kant likens apagogic proofs to a "champion who wants to prove the honor and the indisputable right of his adopted party by promising to scuffle with anyone who might doubt these [i.e., honor and right]" (A793/B821). This, however, Kant says, is a deception; such a showing by the champion only pits the honor and indisputable right of his party against that of the adversaries and fails to show the grounds, as it were, of that honor and right. All that such a display shows is the relative strength of the combatants and not the universal necessity of any of them. Apagogic proofs, then, may make a good showing

and convince the spectators on some surface level, but more must be done (by ostensive proofs) in order to adequately establish what is sought in the proofs.

Kant's thoughts on the ostensive-apagogic distinction have potentially problematic implications for my account of transcendental arguments. It is clear from Kant's account of apagogic proofs that they closely resemble *reductio* proofs. I said before that one formulation of transcendental arguments noted in the literature often involves a *reductio* form of argument in which the opposite of the claim being proved is shown to produce a logical contradiction. Acknowledging that this is a possible formulation of a transcendental argument seems contrary to what I have just been saying with regard to Kant's ostensive-apagogic distinction. If, as is clear in Kant, the apagogic tag cannot be legitimately applied to transcendental arguments insofar as transcendental arguments uncover not only the truth of the claim being argued for but also the *source* of its truth; and if, as is also clear in Kant, apagogic proofs are *reductio* in form, then a legitimate transcendental argument cannot be *reductio* in form. It follows from this that the *reductio* formulation of transcendental arguments really isn't a formulation after all, at least for Kant.

But we need not take Kant's remarks this far. Genova, for example, takes the legitimate use of apagogic proofs to be dependent upon a primary, "original" ostensive transcendental argument that legitimates, by uncovering the ground of its truth, the transcendental principle in question: "Behind every transcendental indirect proof (and these can be constructed in various ways) there stands a primary ostensive proof."[38] If the principle does, in fact, supply the necessary precondition for the conceptual scheme by

[38] Genova, "Transcendental Form," 32.

which the epistemic claim(s) in the premise set are possible, then, Genova claims, of course any candidate for the principle's opposite will lead to logical trouble. But one cannot be certain of the *quid juris* of the principle based on an apagogic proof alone. The apagogic proof does not establish or justify; rather, it points to a logically prior establishment or justification, which is accomplished by an ostensive transcendental proof. In a later article, Genova even marks apagogic, *reductio*-type proofs as a kind of transcendental argument—a transcendental refutation. Thus, there is some reason to regard apagogic, *reductio* proofs as a type of transcendental argument, though one that does not occupy as central a place as Kant's transcendental deduction.

Kant, like Genova, sees apagogic proofs as occupying a legitimate, even if secondary, place in argumentation. These proofs point out the inability of competing alternative frameworks to provide necessary preconditions of possibility. Insofar as such arguments involve conditions of possibility, even if the involvement touches only on the impossibility of alternatives' meeting those conditions, and insofar as they are dialectically efficacious, I think they can be termed transcendental in the spirit of Kant. Furthermore, the secondary role need not necessarily be one of dependence on a prior transcendental argument, as Genova urges. Given what Kant says about their dialectical superiority, these apagogic proofs could act as aides to "primary" transcendental arguments by giving credibility to a conceptual framework prior to its being established by the transcendental argument. In showing the superiority of one framework over contrary alternatives, impossibility of the contrary arguments give credence to the framework and a reason to consider its justification by way of a primary transcendental argument.

1.3. *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have attempted to present a characterization of transcendental arguments. To this end, I brought in from the literature on the subject several key features of transcendental arguments and have provided often cited (but rarely explained) examples of transcendental arguments. I also gave some indication of what Kant thought about transcendental proof in general and how this might relate to the literature.

Transcendental arguments proceed by way of a consideration of preconditions of possibility: these arguments attempt to answer the question, What are the necessary preconditions that must be true in order for _____ to be possible or intelligible? Kant's philosophy of transcendental idealism was his answer to just this question, where, as is evident in the first *Critique*, "experience" is inserted in the blank. Although few (at least in the twentieth-century analytic tradition) have followed him in his transcendental idealism, many have followed him in other ways. What gets put in the blank is tied typically to experience, in one way or another. However, though there is certainly this epistemological element involved in the concerns of transcendental argumentation, the proof itself is not a posteriori but a priori; though experience is an element, the proof is not *based on* experience but instead on the preconditions of its possibility. Furthermore, this a priori character of transcendental arguments goes hand in hand with a certain necessity of their conclusions, which I termed transcendental necessity in opposition to a physical, natural, or causal necessity.

There are also *reductio*-type formulations that arise in the literature; these formulations closely resemble Kant's apagogic proofs. Such proofs, according to Kant, remain inadequate for transcendental proof—for establishing the grounds and source of

truth of transcendental synthetic propositions. Apagogic proofs, and by comparison *reductio* formulations of transcendental arguments, are rather secondary to ostensive or "standard" transcendental proofs. This secondary role could be one of dependence on primary transcendental arguments for their legitimacy, as Genova claims. Or, they could act as aides to transcendental arguments in providing a reason why one conceptual framework rather another is being argued for by the transcendental argument. For, as I indicated above, Kant noted that apagogic proofs seem admirably suited for uncovering dialectical tensions in an opponent's position, a feature that accompanies transcendental arguments. This gives a certain credibility to the position being argued for in the transcendental argument.

Transcendental arguments are set up against skeptical positions, showing the latter's inconsistency and/or incoherence. Similarly, Kant, in the first *Critique*, embarked on his project in order to blaze a trail for a "secure path for science" (Bxv), metaphysics, and the natural sciences amid the contradictions that afflict them and that are likely to lead one to resignation and skepticism. Among the things that Kant hoped to "cut off, at the very root" was skepticism (Bxxxiv). Transcendental arguments also involve some measure of self-reference, along the lines of Kant's insistence that an ostensive proof makes possible the grounds of its own proof or justification. This self-referentiality resembles vicious circularity, and transcendental arguments have, in fact, been charged with circularity. I hope to have offered some reasons, even if only provisional at this point, not to saddle transcendental arguments with circularity of such an illegitimate sort. In the next chapter, I will consider some formal accounts of transcendental arguments and present a discussion of presupposition in transcendental arguments in the hope (1) of

gaining clarity about the nature of transcendental arguments beyond the general features I have outlined here and (2) of dispelling the charge of objectionable circularity directed at transcendental arguments.

CHAPTER 2

A FORMAL ACCOUNT OF TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS

Introduction

As stated previously, there has been considerable debate and discussion for the past three or four decades regarding the success of transcendental arguments. Most of the discussion has focused on either general features (as I have in the previous chapter) or criticisms (as I will in the next chapter) of transcendental arguments. The bulk of the critical debate centers around Stroud's criticism that transcendental arguments require a verification principle in order to draw a valid inference. This criticism is essentially a criticism of the form of transcendental arguments. Without a verification principle acting as a premise, transcendental arguments are formally invalid; with a verification principle as a premise, they are useless. More will be said in the next chapter about this criticism. But in order to understand the full import of Stroud's criticism, more must be said in this chapter about the form that these arguments take.

In the previous chapter, I presented several general features of transcendental arguments from the literature and have given canonical examples of transcendental arguments that illustrate these features. In the present chapter, I will move from a more general discussion of transcendental arguments to a more specific one—from the forest of features to the trees of premises and conclusions. I will be giving an account of transcendental arguments in terms of their form.[39] First, I will discuss the form of the

[39] This form is not necessarily or absolutely divorced from content, but is abstracted from the specific subject matter transcendental arguments can be about. When judging the merits of arguments by analogy,

statements that make up these arguments—the kind or type of statements one would find in a transcendental argument. This will involve looking separately into the premises and conclusions of transcendental arguments. Second, I will discuss the form of the argument as it relates to the relationship between the premises and conclusion of a transcendental argument. This will involve looking at the type and mode of inference at work in a transcendental argument. Finally, I will discuss the notion of presupposition with regard to transcendental arguments in some detail. Presupposition has been touted as an important aspect of transcendental arguments, and I believe it holds a key to understanding them.

2.1. *Statement Form: Premises and Conclusions in Transcendental Arguments*

Defenders and detractors alike agree that at least one premise of transcendental arguments must be epistemic and describe some domain of experience. After all, the purpose of transcendental arguments, for Kant as well as those who have followed him, is to draw conclusions based upon experience. As was alluded to earlier in the chapter (and will be shown in more detail in the next chapter), a major sticking point for detractors is that transcendental arguments begin with an aspect or domain of subjective experience but, *contra* most defenders, cannot break out of the subjectivity. Such a criticism assumes that at least one premise of the argument be about experience.

Here I am concerned with the content of the statements of transcendental arguments, but only insofar as they display a *type* or *kind* of statement. This is related to

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for instance, what is central is that they all make argumentative use of analogies. This means, of course, that content, i.e., the similarities drawn between the subject and the analogue, is important. But not all arguments by analogy use the same analogies. That is, their specific subject matter differs, while their use of analogies is shared and is thus part of their structure or form. Likewise, though the specific subject matter of transcendental arguments differs (the principle of non-contradiction, possible experience, language), they all can be said to follow a certain formula.

the usual notion of statement form in that the truth or *specific* content of the statement is bracketed. By the terms "epistemic," "experiential," and "intentional," I mean to describe a *type* of statement with a *type* of content. Because content, in the sense just noted, is important for evaluating transcendental arguments, their "validity" cannot be evaluated on formal grounds alone. The content of the statements plays a central role in any evaluation of transcendental arguments.

The epistemic character of the premise may be put in different ways. For Anthony C. Genova, it simply means referring to some domain of possible experience, whatever that domain may be.[40] A transcendental argument is not merely concerned with specific experiential content, a particular action, or even a particular type of experience. Rather, transcendental arguments concern a *kind* of experience or experiential content. For Stephen W. Arndt, the epistemic premise is "a phenomenological description of an intentional operation."[41] Although this is a very different way of putting it than Genova's, it involves essentially the same thing as a reference to possible experience. The "phenomenological description" refers to unspecific experiential content, in this case the content regarding the performance of an intentional operation. The "intentional operation" is left purposefully vague in order to accommodate any such operation, not only epistemological operations of knowing or perceiving.[42]

The premise set of a transcendental argument, then, includes at least one epistemic proposition. Along with this epistemic premise is a proposition or set of propositions that spell out the necessary preconditions for the possibility of the action or

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[40] Anthony C. Genova, "Good Transcendental Arguments," *Kant-studien* 75 (1984): 478.
[41] Stephen W. Arndt, "Transcendental Method and Transcendental Arguments," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1987): 48.
[42] Ibid., 49.

content of the epistemic premise. Arndt is perhaps the most specific in terms of the type and number of premises that compose a transcendental argument. Following Roderick Chisolm's analysis of the formal structure of transcendental arguments, Arndt presents them as syllogisms in which the major premise is the epistemic proposition or phenomenological description of an intentional operation and the minor premise is "a transcendental principle stating the C'sP [conditions of possibility] of performing the intentional operation."[43] The additional premise, then, is neither another epistemic premise, nor an analytic proposition, nor an uncontested generalization. In Chisolm's words, it is the apprehension of "certain necessary principles about the conditions under which it is possible for the initial subject matter [i.e., the content of the epistemic premise] to exist" or "for the pre-analytic data [again, the content of the epistemic premise] to be true."[44] Through reflection upon the epistemic premise, the minor premise gives the preconditions of the possibility of the performance of the operation mentioned in the epistemic premise. Genova, on the other hand, is not quite as particular about the premise set. The additional premises may be "propositions already proved, certain analytic propositions, and (in a certain sense to be explained later) certain uncontested empirical generalizations."[45]

For Humphrey Palmer, as for Arndt, transcendental arguments begin from some knowledge claim or experience, which the skeptic will not accept,[46] and then proceed to the conclusion on the basis of the necessary preconditions for the claim or experience. In

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[43] Ibid., 48.
[44] Roderick Chisolm, "What is a Transcendental Argument?" *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 14 (1978): 20-21.
[45] Genova, "Good Transcendental Arguments," 478.
[46] Palmer is alluding to the dialectical character of transcendental arguments: "Perhaps the real force of transcendental persuasion lies not in conjuring unwelcome conclusions out of harmless-looking premises, but in getting would-be skeptics to see that *they* are in no position to deny those premises" (Humphrey Palmer, *Presupposition and Transcendental Inference* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985], 143).

transcendental arguments "some knowledge or experience is taken as given first, other items required as preconditions for such experience or knowledge are then explored; these items are then alleged to be available, for behold, those things were *given*, to which these items are prerequisite."[47]

In the previous chapter I mentioned Descartes' *cogito* argument as an example of a pre-Kantian transcendental argument. As typically formulated, the *cogito* has only one premise and one conclusion: "I think, therefore I exist." However, my account of transcendental arguments requires *at least* two premises. How, then, can the *cogito* be a transcendental argument? A principle is needed to connect actions, "I *think*," with agents, "*I* exist": "actions presuppose agents," or "[the existence of] an agent is a necessary precondition of the possibility of performing an action." This principle serves as an implicit premise that spells out the necessary precondition(s) of the possibility of the action. The *cogito* can then be re-formulated in such a way that it illustrates what I have said with regard to the premises of transcendental arguments: I think; the activity of thinking in an agent presupposes the existence of the agent doing the thinking; therefore, I exist.

Not as much is said in the literature about the conclusions of transcendental arguments as about their premises. Both Genova and Arndt provide similar analyses of the conclusions of transcendental arguments. For Genova, the conclusion shows that "certain propositions express the fundamental necessary conditions (or presuppositions, if you will) for a conceptual scheme which is itself a precondition for the possibility of" what is going on in the epistemic premise, i.e., of experience.[48] Likewise for Arndt, who

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[47] Palmer, *Presupposition and Transcendental Inference*, 145.
[48] Anthony C. Genova, "Transcendental Form," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 11 (1980): 29.

claims that "the conclusion shows the horizon of my operation or the framework within which my operation can be meaningful."[49] In both cases, the conclusion of a transcendental argument is neither the conceptual framework itself that is being justified and that undergirds the epistemic premise, nor is it a transcendental principle. Rather, the conclusion *points* to a conceptual framework as the necessary precondition and states that certain *other* propositions are transcendental principles.

Among the similarities between Genova's and Arndt's accounts, at least one difference emerges concerning the placement of the transcendental principles in a transcendental argument. Genova and Arndt seem to agree that a transcendental principle has to do with the preconditions of the possibility of the content of the epistemic premise and is to be justified indirectly. The difference between the accounts seems to be one concerning how the principle figures in the transcendental argument. Genova, as has been shown above, does not place the principle anywhere within the argument; it figures neither as part of the premise set nor in the conclusion. Rather, the argument points to it as the objectively valid core proposition of a conceptual scheme that serves as a necessary precondition for experience.

Arndt, on the other hand, puts the transcendental principle in the minor premise, which gives the conditions of the possibility of performing the intentional operation in the major premise. It, too, is justified indirectly, but by a method that he calls *retorsion*.[50] This method exactly parallels the dialectical tensions that transcendental arguments are said to uncover. The skeptic denies a certain state of affairs; but in the very act of

[49] Arndt, "Transcendental Method," 48.
[50] In a footnote Arndt says this about retorsion: "Retorsion is a technique which demonstrates that the attempt to deny something involves the critic in an internal inconsistency between what is denied *in actu signato* and what is affirmed *in actu exercito*" (Ibid., 47).

denying, he also posits, as a condition of the possibility of the denying, the very state of affairs being denied. A contradiction and incoherence in the skeptic's position is the result. The incoherence, however, is not simply a logical incompatibility between the skeptic's position and the position he denies; neither is it a contradiction between the skeptic's philosophical claim and assumptions about either the limits of human experience or human abilities to which we cannot conceive alternatives.[51] Rather, the incoherence is inescapably internal to the skeptical position itself and "involves a contradiction between the content denied and the act of the denial."[52]

From the above survey of work by Palmer, Genova, and Arndt, an account of the premises and conclusions of transcendental arguments emerges. All three of these philosophers show at least the following about the statements of transcendental arguments. First, transcendental arguments require at least one "epistemic" premise. This premise will typically be some belief or piece of knowledge; it may, more broadly speaking, involve some sort of experiential content or, as Arndt puts it, a phenomenological description of an intentional operation. Second, transcendental arguments require at least one other premise, which shows the necessary preconditions for the possibility of either the action performed in or the content of the epistemic premise. The showing of these preconditions is typically couched in terms of presupposition. Third, the conclusion of a transcendental argument expresses the presupposition of its own grounds of proof by giving the necessary preconditions for the

[51] On this point, see T. E. Wilkerson, "Transcendental Arguments Revisited," *Kant-Studien* 66 (1975): 112-113.

[52] Arndt, "Transcendental Method," 47. Arndt quotes Eva Schaper in support: "A uniqueness claim *is* justified: when it can be shown that candidates for the title of competitors to the scheme in question must, if they are to be genuine alternatives, include or imply features inconsistent with other specific features of the scheme. To argue this way is to show up such 'alternatives' as internally incoherent, not just logically incompatible with the scheme for which uniqueness is claimed" (Eva Schaper, "Arguing Transcendentally," *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972): 111).

conceptual scheme within which the content or action in the epistemic premise is possible or intelligible.

In order to illustrate these features of transcendental arguments, recall several of the examples given in the previous chapter. Strawson argues that in order to ascribe mental states to oneself, there must be persons to whom both mental and physical states are ascribable. The epistemic premise is the one giving the intentional operation under consideration—in this case, the ascription of mental states to oneself. Strawson then runs through a series of conditions of possibility, the final condition of possibility being that there are persons to whom both mental and physical characteristics are ascribable. This series of conditions of possibility is the second type of premise at work in transcendental arguments; in Strawson's case, multiple premises are involved. That there are persons to whom both types of characteristic are ascribable points to a conceptual scheme in which this is the case and which provides the ultimate grounding for being able to ascribe mental states to oneself. "The point is not that we must accept this conclusion in order to avoid scepticism, but that we must accept it in order to explain the existence of the conceptual scheme in terms of which the sceptical problem is stated. . . . So with many sceptical problems: their statement involves the pretended acceptance of a conceptual scheme and at the same time the silent repudiation of one of the conditions of its existence."[53]

Burge's argument, although presented in a more *reductio* manner than Strawson's, also illustrates the above features of transcendent arguments. He begins with the skeptical claim that the epistemic action of reflecting upon one's attitudes does not

[53] Peter Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), 103.

provide reason-endorsed judgments about them; this is the epistemic premise. Thus, such reflection could not provide reasons for changing the attitudes. But, Burge claims, critical reasoning presupposes that judgments made about one's attitudes involve the application of norms of reason; this is the premise that presents the conditions of possibility. Since his definition of epistemic entitlement includes the application of norms of reason, he concludes that insofar as one is a critical reasoner, one must have an epistemic entitlement to one's judgments about one's attitudes. This conclusion points to a position in which there is a rational connection between epistemic attitudes and judgments about them.

As the final illustration, consider Putnam's argument against the claim that we are brains in vats (BIVs). Our being BIVs presupposes that the phrase "We are BIVs" must refer to the actual state of affairs of our being BIVs. But according to Putnam's theory of reference, "We are BIVs" cannot refer to our actual state of being BIVs but rather refers to being BIVs "in the image." The epistemic content in the premise set is the belief or utterance that we are BIVs. The conclusion is the self-refutation of the skeptic, i.e., the very utterance or belief that we are BIVs implies that we are not BIVs. This conclusion points to a position of which the fact that we are not BIVs is an integral part.

I have presented transcendental arguments as having at least two premises, one of which is epistemic in nature and the other of which shows the presupposition of what is going on in the epistemic premise. Transcendental arguments also have a conclusion that states the preconditions of a conceptual scheme that must be true if the action or content of the epistemic premise is to be possible or intelligible. Arndt, following Chisolm, presents transcendental arguments as syllogisms, but I do not believe this should be

required. As long as the transcendental argument has the *elements* I mentioned in this section, it can have as many premises as one wishes. It is likely that an analysis of a transcendental argument would present it as a syllogism, since three statements would give the minimum number of statements required of a transcendental argument and thus be the simplest expression of a transcendental argument. A transcendental argument is a transcendental argument in virtue not only of exhibiting the general features of the previous chapter but also in terms of the types of statements it contains and the presuppositional relationship among them. It is to this relationship that I now turn.

2.2. *Argument Form: "Transcendental Inference"?*

Having considered the kinds of propositions that comprise a transcendental argument, in this section I will consider whether there is a unique kind of inference at work in transcendental arguments. Palmer seems to claim a unique kind of inference for transcendental arguments—"transcendental inference" or "transcendental reasoning"—that is based on presupposition. Palmer's analysis of presupposition reveals a unique relationship between propositions that is different from deduction or entailment. Genova, on the other hand, claims that deduction is the type of inference at work in transcendental arguments, primarily because there is no account of presupposition adequate to be the basis for a unique kind of inference. In addition to deduction, abduction also seems a potential candidate, since it resembles in some regards the inferential movement in transcendental arguments.

Following a few introductory remarks on classifying inferences, I will first present the position that there is a unique mode of inference or reasoning in transcendental arguments that is not captured by existing, well-known types of inference.

This will involve a somewhat detailed exposition of the notion of presupposition, as presupposition is the hallmark of this unique mode of inference. I will then consider whether the inference in transcendental arguments would be better classified as a type of abductive or deductive inference rather than as a unique type. In the end, I will argue that abduction fails to capture adequately the inference in transcendental arguments. I then go on to argue that it is not necessary to propose a unique inference for transcendental arguments, although I will argue that Palmer is correct to make presupposition central to transcendental arguments as arguments. Thus, I will claim with Genova that deduction is the inference form at work in transcendental arguments and that there is no need to suppose a unique form of inference.

An analysis of any argument demands investigation into the relationship between its premise(s) and conclusion. Typically, arguments are divided into two major groups: deductive and inductive. Authors of introductory logic texts describe the fundamental difference between deductive and inductive arguments in different ways, but I think these all come down to one principal distinction. Some authors base the distinction upon the degree to which the conclusion follows from the premises. For deductive arguments, the conclusion follows with absolute necessity (alternatively put: if the premises are true, the conclusion *must* be true, or it cannot be the case that the premises are true and the conclusion false). For inductive arguments, the conclusion follows only with some degree of probability (short of absolute necessity).[54] Others cite the *intended* strength of the argument. If the author of the arguments intends the conclusion to follow with absolute

[54] Merrie Bergmann, James Moor, and Jack Nelson, *The Logic Book*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1990), 10-11; Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*, 10th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), 28.

logical necessity, it should be evaluated by deductive argument standards; if the authorial intention is a degree of probability short of absolute necessity, it should be evaluated by inductive argument standards.[55]

While the strength of the inference is a useful way to distinguish deductive from inductive arguments, the strength itself is a consequence of a yet more fundamental difference that highlights the relationship between the premises and conclusion. Because the conclusion of a (valid) deductive argument is implicit in the premises, the truth of the conclusion follows necessarily from the truth of the premises. In deductive arguments, the conclusion is "contained within" the premises; the argument makes this implicit containment explicit. The conclusions of inductive arguments go beyond what is presented in the premises, and so some degree of doubt must remain as to whether the truth of the conclusion follows from the truth of the premises.[56]

This broad classification of inductive and deductive arguments can be further divided into various types, depending on the types of premises involved, relationships among the premises, and/or relationships between premises and conclusion. For instance, the syllogism is a type of deductive argument that can be further divided into categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive: categorical, because all of the statements are categorical; hypothetical, because at least one premise is a conditional or hypothetical; and disjunctive, because one premise is a disjunction. Furthermore, for each of these types,

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[55] Arthur K. Bierman and Robin N. Assali, *The Critical Thinking Handbook* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 39-40; Virginia Klenk, *Understanding Symbolic Logic*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 5-6.

[56] Vincent E. Barry and Joel Rudinow, *Invitation to Critical Thinking*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1990), 188; David Kelley, *The Art of Reasoning*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 191-192.

formal relationships between the premises serve to distinguish their valid from their invalid forms. The same can be done with induction.

2.2.1. *Presupposition*

For Palmer, neither induction nor deduction capture the unique relationship between premises and conclusion that he finds in transcendental arguments. Instead he places the notion of presupposition at the core of what he calls *transcendental inference* or *transcendental reasoning*. In his account of presupposition, Palmer lists six logical properties that, he notes, may not suffice to define the presupposition relation completely, but that go a long way toward distinguishing it from other similar inferential relations that might be confused with presupposition, e.g., deductive entailment.

The first property of presupposition is that it is *transitive*. Where *S* presupposes *P*, and *P* presupposes *Q*, then it follows that *S* presupposes *Q*. Strawson's transcendental argument, presented in the previous chapter, is an illustration: Ascribing mental state predicates to oneself presupposes that one must be able to ascribe mental state predicates to others. Ascribing mental state predicates to others presupposes that there are persons to whom both mental and physical state predicates are ascribable. Therefore, ascribing mental state predicates to oneself presupposes that there are persons to whom both mental and physical state predicates are ascribable.

The second property is that presupposition is *ganderous*. Where *S* presupposes *P*, not-*S* also presupposes *P*. Genova says the same thing in an example taken from John Austin:

> If "John's children are bald" presupposes "John has children," then unlike entailment, it is the case that "John's children are bald" and that "John's children

> are not bald" alike presuppose "John has children," and it is not the case that the negation of "John has children" presupposes "John's children are not bald."[57]

In his analysis of presupposition, Genova considers Strawson's theory of presupposition, where "*P* presupposes *Q*" is translated as "*Q* is the necessary condition of the truth or falsity of *P*." Genova here follows Gram's objection to Strawsonian presupposition theory by noting that the implication relation in "(*P* or not-*P*) implies *Q*" can be neither material implication nor strict implication.[58] Following Henry Ruf, Genova claims that the implication cannot be material: since the tautology "*P* or not-*P*" is true no matter what, it does not make sense to say that it has necessary conditions.[59] Neither can the implication be strict or logical, for what is implied must be analytic (since only analytic propositions are entailed by tautologies) and *Q* will not be analytic in every case.

Arndt criticizes Gram's construal of Strawsonian presupposition, "(*P* or not-*P*) implies *Q*," on the basis of the disjunctive form that Gram gives it. A better reflection of what Strawson was proposing, continues Arndt, is "(*P* implies *Q*) and (not-*P* implies *Q*)." This seems more congenial to Austin's example above. We do not wish to say that *either* "John's children are bald" *or* "John's children are not bald" imply "John has children." Rather, Austin urges that it is the case that *both* "John's children are bald" logically implies "John has children" *and* that "John's children are not bald" logically implies "John has children." Adding to Arndt's account, I think an even better reflection of Strawsonian presupposition would be "(*P* is true implies *Q*) and (*P* is false implies *Q*),"

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[57] Genova, "Transcendental Form," 28.
[58] Moltke S. Gram, "Must We Revisit Transcendental Arguments?" *Philosophical Studies* 31 (1977): 235-248.
[59] Henry Ruf, "Transcendental Logic: An Essay on Critical Metaphysics," *Man and World* 2 (1969): 38-64.

since this formulation makes explicit Strawson's original insistence on putting presupposition in terms of the truth and falsity of statements.

The third property Palmer addresses is that presupposition *involves three truth values*. Here Palmer attacks *bivalence*, the notion that truth and falsity exhaust the presuppositional possibilities. There must be something that a statement is about, some reference for the statement, in order for it to be true or false. Where, "John's children are bald" presupposes "John has children," that John has children fixes the reference of "John's children are bald." However, if it were not the case that John has any children, then "John's children are bald" does not refer to anything and thus, says Palmer, is neither true nor false. We have, then, the three possible values for presupposition: true, false, and neither-true-nor-false.

The fourth property is that presupposition is *irreflexive*. This is simply to say that a statement cannot presuppose itself. Palmer's example statement "No carnivores are vegetarians" does not presuppose that no carnivores are vegetarians, but only presupposes "carnivores," "vegetarians," and the like. The statement does not presuppose itself, but rather presupposes its constituents or necessary prior conditions.

The fifth property is that presupposition is *non-symmetrical*. "John's children are bald" presupposes "John has children," and consequently it is not the case that "John has children" presupposes "John's children are bald." Non-symmetry holds, for example, for the predicate "father of" but not "sister of." Where Bill is the father of Emily, Emily cannot be the father of Bill. However, if Sue is the sister of Pat, Pat may also be the sister of Sue.

The sixth and final property is that presupposition is *directional*. The logical movement of presupposition is from the thing that is presupposed to the thing that presupposes it; this is similar to the movement in an argument from the premises to the conclusion. So, where "John's children are bald" presupposes "John has children," the presuppositional directionality is from the latter to the former and "John has children" must be logically prior to "John's children are bald" (hence the "pre-" in "presupposition"). This logical priority must be contrasted with temporal priority. There may be a priority of discovery or presentation, where one first learns or discovers that John's children are bald; but coming first logically is a different matter entirely. That John has children need not be known before learning that his children are bald in order for "John's children are bald" to presuppose "John has children." The "pre-" in "presupposition" refers to the logical preeminence that the thing presupposed enjoys.

I mentioned earlier that these properties go a long way in distinguishing presupposition from other similar relations that might be confused with presupposition, such as deductive entailment. The only two properties presupposition and entailment have in common, says Palmer, are being transitive and non-symmetrical. Deductive entailment, unlike presupposition, is non-ganderous, bivalent, reflexive, and non-directional. So, armed with Palmer's exposition of presupposition, it might be argued that presuppositional inference is a unique type among inferential relations.

However, what Palmer has offered in this exposition of presupposition is not an inferential relation, that is, a relationship between premises and conclusion, but rather a relationship among propositions. Presupposition assuredly plays a central role in Palmer's account of transcendental arguments. The premise laying out the conditions of

the possibility of what is going on in the epistemic premise essentially lays out what the epistemic premise presupposes. The conclusion shows that what was presupposed is the case. As an illustration, recall my formulation of Descartes' *cogito*: I think; the activity of thinking in an agent presupposes the existence of the agent doing the thinking; therefore, I exist. The conclusion, I exist, is presupposed by and provides the conditions for the possibility of the epistemic premise "I think." This justification of presuppositions and conditions of possibility is both central and unique to transcendental arguments.

Nevertheless, this justification falls short of establishing a unique inference from premises to conclusion at work in transcendental arguments. The inferential relationship between premises and conclusions is more than simply a relationship between propositions, as in Palmer's account of presupposition. Palmer does not give sufficient indication in his study on presupposition that he means to extend the notion of presupposition any farther than to a relationship among propositions. His use of the phrases 'transcendental inference' and 'transcendental reasoning' seem to indicate the key role presuppositions play in transcendental arguments rather than a unique kind of inference that such arguments display.

If there is no new, unique inference that transcendental arguments display, what existing type of inference might fit the bill? I will next consider two types of inference, abduction and deduction, as potentially successful candidates. [60]

[60] We can safely, and without much argument, exclude induction as the inference at work in a transcendental argument. Insofar as transcendental argument are intended to settle decisively the issues they address, their conclusions can hardly be merely probable. Furthermore, transcendental arguments do not provide new information in their conclusions in the way that inductive arguments do.

2.2.2. *Abduction*

Abduction, though not as well-defined and formalized an inference form as deduction or induction, is closer in some regards to what happens in a transcendental argument than is either deduction or induction. For Charles Peirce, there are two kinds of inference: explicative and ampliative. An explicative inference is one in which the conclusion explicitly indicates (i.e., explicates) what was already implicit in the premises; deduction is a type of explicative inference. An ampliative inference is one in which the conclusion gives new information not contained in the premises; there is a sort of transcending of the information in the premises so that by the time we reach the conclusion, we have more information than we did before the conclusion. Induction and abduction are ampliative inferences.

According to Peirce's formulation, abduction "supposes something of a different kind from what we have directly observed, and frequently something which it would be impossible for us to observe directly."[61] This describes the transcending, or "going beyond," the premises during the abductive process. An abductive argument can be summarized by the following:

> The surprising fact *C* is observed.
> But if *A* were true, *C* would be a matter of course.
> Hence, there is reason to suspect that *A* is true.

In abduction, we pass from the observation of certain facts to the supposition of a general principle to account for or explain the facts.[62] Abduction has been tied to a variety of descriptive phrases: *modus ponens* turned backward, explanatory inference, inferring the cause of something, explanation-based evidence evaluation, and inference to the best

[61] K. T. Fann, *Peirce's Theory of Abduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 9.
[62] Ibid., 10.

explanation.[63] I will take the latter formulation to be the most adequate, since it encompasses the key notions of inference, explanation, and evaluation that correspond to a full treatment of abduction, which includes not merely a process of hypothesis generation but "the whole process of generation, criticism, and possible acceptance of explanatory hypotheses."[64]

Abduction is the specific process of both hypothesis generation and hypothesis evaluation, which involves the choosing of the "best" explanatory hypothesis among competing explanatory hypotheses. However, the above formulation of an abductive argument does not adequately characterize this evaluative feature; the only constraint on the conclusion, that hypothesis *A* must be true, is that the fact *C* follows "as a matter of course." But many other hypotheses might just as well make fact *C* follow "as a matter of course." In light of this, Josephson's formulation of an abductive argument is better:

> *D* is a collection of data. ("The surprising fact *C* is observed.")
> *H* explains *D*. ("But if *A* were true, *C* would be a matter of course.")
> No other hypothesis can explain *D* as well as *H* does.
> Therefore, *H* is probably true. ("Hence, there is reason to suspect that *A* is true.")

In this formulation, it is made explicit that only the best explanatory hypothesis will do, the hypothesis than which no other hypothesis can explain as well.

There are both important similarities and key differences between transcendental and abductive arguments. One similarity is that both employ some form of "backward" reasoning. In the case of transcendental arguments, we move backward from a given knowledge claim to a presupposition, a supposition that is logically prior to, *logically* before, the knowledge claim. Likewise, with abductive inference we move backward

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[63] John R. Josephson and Susan G. Josephson, *Abductive Inference, Computation, Philosophy, Technology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5.
[64] Ibid., 9.

from some given fact or observation to a hypothesis that best explains that fact; given that such a hypothesis explains the fact, it must be prior to it in some sense—if not logically, then possibly temporally, as in causal explanations. What these types of inference move back to differs, of course, but the movement itself is quite similar.

Another similarity is that both types of inference are showing that something is possible, that it follows from some principle or hypothesis. But they show this in different ways. In transcendental arguments, *B* makes *A* possible because *A* presupposes *B*, where presupposition denotes a peculiar logical relationship. In abductive arguments, *B* makes *A* possible because *B* is the hypothesis that best explains *A*; here 'best explains' is the operative phrase, and it operates differently than 'presupposes'. Explanation, for instance, shares only the logical properties of transitivity, irreflexivity, and non-symmetricality with presupposition. A further difference is that the conclusions of abductive arguments do not follow from their premises with the kind of necessity with which the conclusions of transcendental arguments follow from their premises. This difference between abductive and transcendental arguments marks a primary similarity between deductive and transcendental arguments. These differences are enough to reject abduction as a viable candidate for the inference at work in transcendental arguments.

2.2.3. *Deduction*

Genova defends the deductive character of transcendental arguments outright against the claim that transcendental arguments cannot be deductive.[65] The gist of the claim runs as follows. Kant required of transcendental proofs that they justify principles, not theorems. The distinction Kant makes here between principles and theorems is

[65] Genova, "Transcendental Form," 26-30.

important. As with deductive proofs in general, a theorem is logically necessary for the truth of its premises. That is, if the theorem does not hold, then at least one of the premises must be false. Principles as conclusion of proofs, on the other hand, are not only logically necessary for the truth of the premises but also make possible what is involved in the premises. Principles, then, are presuppositions of their own basis of proof. Theorems, however, are not presuppositions of their own ground of proof but are instead derived deductively from axiomatic propositions in the premise set. So, given that principles are presuppositions of propositions in the premise set, and given that transcendental arguments justify principles rather than theorems, it follows that the relation between the premises and conclusion in a transcendental argument must be presuppositional, not deductive.

Genova has two responses. First, there is no satisfactory account of presupposition as a relation between premises and conclusion that could serve as the basis for a unique inferential relation and, consequently, a unique form of argument. Yet while this is true, the reason that presupposition cannot serve as the basis for a unique inferential relation is not, as Genova suggests, that existing accounts of presupposition are faulty or unsatisfactory in some way and that a better account of presupposition is needed. Rather, the reason is simply that presupposition does not mark a relationship between premises and conclusion but marks a relationship among propositions. What makes presupposition special is the unique way in which propositions and their presuppositions are logically related to each other. Presupposition nevertheless continues to be the foundation of the transcendental argument qua unique form of argument. What

makes transcendental arguments special is the way in which presuppositions and conditions of possibility work in the argument.

Genova's second response is that it is true that principles are presupposed by propositions stating epistemic facts. Furthermore, presupposition and entailment/implication, as logical relationships, are not equivalent. What blocks the inference that presupposition is the key relation between premises and conclusion in a transcendental argument is that the conclusion of a transcendental argument is not a principle. The conclusion of the transcendental argument, according to Genova, is established directly by deduction through an analysis of the conditions of the possibility of the epistemic concepts in the premise set. The conclusion states that certain *other* propositions are principles. Furthermore, the principle is justified in that it is a necessary constituent of a conceptual scheme that itself is the necessary presupposition for the epistemic concepts in the premise set. Thus the principle is justified indirectly through presupposition, not deduction, while the conclusion of a transcendental argument is established directly through deduction.

Moreover, Genova continues, a transcendental argument justifies the objective validity of the principles, but does not establish them in the same way that a "normal" deductive argument establishes its conclusion. This highlights Kant's notion of *quid juris* justification, establishing the legitimacy, right, or warrant of a concept, which is distinct from deductive inference. Thus, if the principle being justified is not the same as the conclusion being established, then there is room for the conclusion to be established deductively and the principle to be justified presuppositionally. In this account of

transcendental arguments, Genova holds together both Kant's insistence that transcendental principles are justified indirectly and the "directness" of deduction.

2.3. *Conclusion*

Transcendental arguments have at least two premises: One premise is epistemic in character. The other premise marks out the presuppositional relation; in particular, it sets out the necessary preconditions for the possibility of the experiential content or intentional action in the epistemic premise. The conclusion of transcendental arguments justifies a conceptual scheme, without which the goings-on in the epistemic premise would be unintelligible or impossible, by establishing the necessary preconditions of the epistemic premise.

I have argued that the notion of presupposition is central to transcendental arguments. Nevertheless, even a satisfactory account of presupposition would not yield a unique inferential relation in transcendental arguments. My explication of presupposition gives reason to think that it is not a relation at the level of the *argument* but, instead, at the level of the *proposition*. That is, the account of presupposition I have offered marks it as a unique relation (distinct from entailment) among propositions but not between the premises and conclusions in arguments.

I agree with Genova that deduction is the inference at work in moving from premise set to conclusion in transcendental arguments. As in all instances of deduction, where the premises of transcendental arguments are true, the conclusion cannot fail to be true, i.e., the truth of the conclusion is guaranteed by the truth of the premises. Though I am in agreement with Genova on this point, I disagree with him on at least two other related points. Because Genova denies the availability of a satisfactory account of

presupposition and believes that only such an account would allow presupposition to serve as the key relationship in transcendental arguments, presupposition cannot be the key relationship at work in these arguments. This is why presupposition is at work only after the conclusion has been established in his account of transcendental arguments. I have given reason to think that there is a satisfactory account of presupposition available—satisfactory enough to play a central role not only after the conclusion has been established but also among the premises of transcendental arguments. Presupposition, couched in terms of conditions of possibility, is at work in the argument itself and not simply as an afterthought to transcendental arguments as in Genova's account.

Furthermore, that deduction is the inference at work in transcendental arguments does not entail that transcendental arguments are thereby indistinguishable from any other deductive argument, as detractors such as Moltke Gram claim. Gram says,

> Suppose . . . that the conclusion of [a transcendental] argument does make possible the experience which is said to be the ground of proof. This is indistinguishable from the way in which the conclusion of any valid deductive argument makes possible the grounds of its proof. For the conclusion of any valid deductive argument is a necessary condition of whatever premises that generate it.[66]

There is, of course, a way in which transcendental arguments can be characterized that makes them indistinguishable from other deductive arguments insofar as transcendental arguments are a type of deductive argument. This shared characteristic might be put in terms of necessary conditions and would fall along the lines of Gram's last statement in the above quotation. Where Gram makes his mistake, and where transcendental arguments distinguish themselves from other deductive ones, is that the conclusion of a

[66] Gram, "Must Transcendental Arguments Be Spurious?" 304.

transcendental argument is not *only* a necessary condition of the premises that generate it. Rather, it is primarily a necessary condition of *the possibility of* the premises that generate it. That is, there is a sense in which the premises *presuppose* the conclusion of a transcendental argument. And, as I hope I have already shown, this presupposition relation is different from that of ordinary deductive entailment.

In this chapter, I have offered an account of transcendental arguments in terms of the types of propositions they involve and the kind of inference at work in them. As I noted in the Introduction, there is an influential criticism of transcendental arguments directed against their validity. The criticism states that transcendental arguments are unable to draw factual conclusions from premises with merely epistemic content. There is a premise, typically covert, that guarantees the validity of these arguments and without which the arguments would not work. This covert premise provides the necessary connection between belief and fact, between mind and world. The criticism, put forth by Stroud, has had a significant impact on discussions of the status of transcendental arguments. Other key criticisms, notably by Stephen Körner and Moltke Gram, have likewise been repeatedly discussed in the literature. In the next chapter, I will consider the strength of these criticisms, spending most of my efforts on the influential criticism put forth by Stroud.

CHAPTER 3

OBJECTIONS TO TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce key objections to transcendental arguments and, following the demarcation by Charles Crittenden, will discuss them under three headings: transcendental arguments have been objected to in terms of their uniqueness, in terms of the ontological character of their conclusions, and in terms of their reliance on a verification principle.[67]

There are at least two ways in which to characterize the first of these headings, the uniqueness of transcendental arguments. The first way concerns the "formal" uniqueness of transcendental arguments. Are they different from other types of argument (e.g., inductive, deductive, abductive, and subclasses of these)? If so, why? If not, why not? What logical niche is carved out by them? I have addressed this aspect of transcendental arguments in the previous chapter.

In the present chapter I will discuss only briefly the second way in which to characterize the uniqueness of transcendental arguments. This characterization concerns the ability of a transcendental argument to provide a "uniqueness-proof" to the effect that the conceptual scheme being argued for is unique and without viable alternatives. As mentioned in Chapter One, transcendental arguments are intended as arguments unique in their ability to settle decisively the philosophical issues they address. They are meant to

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[67] Charles Crittenden, "Transcendental Arguments Revived," *Philosophical Investigations* 8 (1985): 229-51.

be among the strongest of arguments, showing the necessity of a conceptual scheme or worldview—how we think about, or view, the world—for experience and the internal incoherence of workable competitors to that scheme. Yet, the objection goes, even if a transcendental argument rules out one or more possible competitors, it simply cannot rule out *all* possible competitors. Thus, a transcendental argument cannot establish that the scheme in question is the only legitimate ground for experience, knowledge, or whatever happens to be addressed by the transcendental argument. In other words, a transcendental argument cannot establish the scheme's uniqueness. Below I will consider this objection more specifically through the work of Stephan Körner and A. Phillips Griffiths.[68]

The second heading I will cover has to do with the status of a transcendental argument's conclusion. The following quote from Richard Rorty expresses the objection nicely: "The most that this sort of argument can show is that it must seem as if there are x's—not that there actually exist x's."[69] Whatever a transcendental argument is about, the "x" in the quotation, its conclusion is supposed to establish that such a thing is actually the case, is really a feature of the world independently of our arguments for or thinking about it, or is ontologically real. However, the objection goes, transcendental arguments cannot accomplish this bold task. The most we can expect transcendental arguments to show is that it must *seem* or *appear* to be the case that x's exist. One might be inclined to think that this ontologically more modest account, since it has a "must" attached, is still a pretty good deal for transcendental arguments. After all, a transcendental argument

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[68] Stephan Körner, "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions," *The Monist* 51 (1967): 317-331; A. Phillips Griffiths, "Transcendental Arguments," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* suppl. 43 (1969): 165-180. See also Stephan Körner, *Categorical Frameworks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970) and Richard Rorty, "Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference, and Pragmatism," in *Transcendental Arguments and Science*, ed. P. Bieri, R. P. Horstmann and L. Krüger (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979).

[69] Quoted in Crittendon, "Transcendental Arguments Revived," 245.

indicates what one must assume if there is to be experience, meaning, etc. at all. We will see that many philosophers have argued just this point. But it nevertheless remains that the *apparent* existence of x's is perfectly compatible with their not existing at all. And if the conclusion is compatible with x's not existing, it cannot be said that the conclusion establishes the existence of x's. So, if this objection holds, one must concede a more modest ontological status for a transcendental argument's conclusion and that a more modest task for transcendental arguments is all that can be gained from them.

The third heading I will cover stems from a criticism of transcendental arguments by Barry Stroud. This criticism, which I have already introduced in the dissertation, claims that transcendental arguments, in order to accomplish what they set out to do, must rely on some version of a verification principle and cannot establish their conclusion on their own. The upshot of this criticism is that "there is nothing particularly special or unique about such arguments; they do not bring us much further than the positivism of the 1930's."[70]

I will spend more time on the second and third headings, since they are more central to my examination and defense of transcendental arguments. I will also consider them together in one section rather than divide them. I do this principally because in the criticisms of Stroud, with whom I am especially dealing, the two objections are very closely linked. But apart from this reason, the more philosophically interesting reason is that I take the motivation for these latter two headings to be the presence of an appearance-reality gap, which, ultimately, is the focus of the latter part of this dissertation. It will thus be simpler and less confusing to treat them together.

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[70] Ibid., 246.

3.1. *Transcendental Arguments as Uniqueness-Proofs*

After the publication of Strawson's *Individuals*, Stephan Körner was perhaps the first to issue the objection that transcendental arguments fail to provide a uniqueness-proof, and others have followed suit.[71] The idea behind the objection is that a transcendental argument will show that one conceptual scheme, and no other, is necessary for experience or is unique. Körner lists three *prima facie* ways in which he thinks uniqueness can be demonstrated, two of which are germane to the objection under consideration. One of these ways is to show a scheme's uniqueness by comparing it with its competitors, actual or potential, real or possible; a second way is to show uniqueness internally, from within the scheme itself.

The first way, the objection goes, remains unattainable. In order to compare the scheme to competing alternatives, the alternatives must be exhibited or be capable of explication. But not only is it most likely impossible to lay out and compare all actual alternatives, it would likewise be nigh impossible to anticipate potential future, never before considered competitors. The second way is equally unattainable. In that case, since the justification does not reach outside the said scheme, there can be no demonstration of its uniqueness. At best, says Körner, "this could only show how the schema functions in the differentiation of a region of experience, not that it is the only possible schema to which every differentiation of the region must belong."[72]

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[71] Although this is likely the first published modern criticism of transcendental arguments, according to Stroud's recollection, it was not the first use of the term "transcendental argument" to denote that type of argument (Barry Stroud, "The Goal of Transcendental Arguments," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Robert Stern [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999], 155-172). Stroud cites J. L. Austin in a 1939 symposium for the earliest use of the term (John L. Austin, "Are There *A Priori* Concepts?" *Philosophical Papers* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], 1-22).

[72] Körner, "Transcendental Deductions," 321.

A. Phillips Griffiths levies a similar objection against transcendental arguments when he lays out two things that any non-trivial transcendental argument will show. The first is that some principle must hold for the conditions of experience; the second is that the said principle must hold for every condition of experience. But, says Griffiths, to show the latter "would involve an examination of all possible conditions. . . . Further, this means an examination of all possible conditions in detail: a humanly impossible task. Hence we can never show that a principle is a necessary condition of the possibility of" experience.[73]

There are two responses that render this objection harmless. The first response casts suspicion on whether the alternative to the scheme under consideration need be *available* for the transcendental argument to stand. Both Körner and Griffiths hold as a condition for ruling out competing alternatives the availability of every one that would be ruled out. They are correct to think that this is an impossible task. But they are wrong to think that this renders transcendental arguments incapable of anticipating alternatives. If, for instance, I show that a key in my possession is the only one configured in such a way as to unlock my door, it would not make sense to insist further that I try every key with an alternative configuration before I can *really* show that my key is the only one that can unlock the door. It would make even less sense to insist that I try every key *not yet in existence* before my point is conceded. So long as a key—past, present, or future—does not have the configuration of the only one capable of unlocking the door, it will fail to unlock the door. The situation with transcendental arguments is analogous. They show that a conceptual scheme is unique in that it possesses the conditions necessary for the possibility of experience, language, communication, knowledge, etc. In showing this, it

[73] Griffiths, "Transcendental Arguments," 171.

follows that any alternative to that scheme, any one that does not possess the necessary conditions of possibility—past, present, or future, will be ruled out of court.

The second response to the objection of uniqueness concerns modes of justification. One way uniqueness is shown is internally, from within the conceptual scheme itself. The problem Körner seems to have with this is that justification of the scheme never reaches outside of the scheme. This is only a problem, however, if one takes legitimate justification to be some sort of external justification. But the insistence on an honorific title given to external justification seems to be precisely what the transcendental argument calls into question. To demand an external justification is simply to restate what, among other things, the transcendental argument addresses. It is to ignore the alternative mode of justification presented by the argument.

3.2. *The Verification Principle*

As mentioned already in previous chapters, Barry Stroud has introduced a long-standing and influential criticism of transcendental arguments. The efficacy of transcendental arguments, he notes, is tied to the challenge of the "epistemological skeptic" who claims that "any justification for our belief [that there is a public objective world of material objects in space and time] will have to come from within experience, and so no adequate justification can ever be given."[74] As long as there is such an objective world, questions concerning our beliefs about that world can, presumably, eventually be settled. The belief that there is such a world is what the skeptic questions. In this context, transcendental arguments are supposed to justify the belief in a public objective world of material objects in space and time. This can be done, the

[74] Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," 242.

transcendental arguer may contend, even when that justification comes from within experience, i.e., proceeds from epistemic premises, *contra* the contention of the epistemological skeptic.

Here we see, in Stroud's characterization, one of the characteristics I outlined in the opening chapter: transcendental arguments are typically meant to be arguments against skepticism, and specifically in Stroud's case, against the epistemological skeptic. Transcendental arguments, according to Stroud, "are supposed to demonstrate the impossibility or illegitimacy of this skeptical challenge by proving that certain concepts are necessary for thought or experience" (*ibid.*). For instance, if the skeptic denies our justification in believing that there is an objective world of material objects and challenges us to provide our warrant for holding that belief, a transcendental argument will answer the skeptic by proving that the concept of an objective world of material objects is necessary for the belief's making sense in the first place. So, if the skeptic hopes to make sense of his challenge, he must accept the existence of an objective world of material objects, which is exactly what he initially brought into question. Rather than refuting the skeptic directly, Stroud suggests that such arguments take an indirect approach to refutation.

Stroud's contention is that transcendental arguments cannot accomplish this task—the justification of a publicly objective world—without resorting to what he calls a *verification principle*, according to which "the skeptic will have been directly and conclusively refuted" (p. 255). It is a lose-lose situation for transcendental arguments: without the verification principle the transcendental argument has no force against the skeptic's challenge; with this principle there is no need to proceed *indirectly* by

transcendental argumentation, since the principle itself provides a *direct* answer to the skeptic. Stroud gives various formulations of the verification principle in his essay; I will postpone the discussion of the principle itself until after having looked at the critical elements in Stroud's essay.

Stroud devotes most of his critical analysis to an argument of Strawson's that occurs in the first chapter of *Individuals*. Briefly, Stroud's reconstruction of the argument has as its premises

(1) We think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system.

(2) If we think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system, then we are able to identify and reidentify particulars.

(3) If we can reidentify particulars, then we have satisfiable criteria on the basis of which we can make reidentifications.

and concludes with

(6) Objects continue to exist unperceived. (pp. 245-246)[75]

But Stroud contends that (1)-(3) are not enough to infer (6) legitimately, for it is still possible for one's reidentifications to be false even if based on the best criteria available. In order to rule out such a possibility, Stroud claims that the following premise is required for a successful anti-skeptical argument:

(4) If we know that the best criteria we have for the reidentification of particulars have been satisfied, then we know that objects continue to exist unperceived.

The verification principle that Stroud sees as necessary to make Strawson's transcendental argument valid "is the conclusion of the argument from (1) to (4)": "We could not make sense of the notion of unperceived continued existence without having

[75] The statement numbering is Stroud's.

criteria of reidentification, and if we have such criteria then we can sometimes know whether objects continue to exist unperceived" (pp. 246-247). And to finish the argument, Stroud adds to the verification principle the factual premise that

(5) We sometimes know that the best criteria we have for the reidentification of particulars have been satisfied,

without which (6) would not follow.

Stroud gives a similar reading to another of Strawson's arguments in the third chapter of *Individuals*, one that I discussed in Chapter One. The skeptic denies that one can know that there are any states of consciousness other than one's own. Disarming the skeptic in this case follows from the following verification principle: "my possession of 'logically adequate criteria' for the other-ascription of a particular psychological state implies that it is possible for me to know certain conditions to be fulfilled, the fulfillment of which logically implies either that some particular person other than myself is in that state or that he is not" (p. 248). So, if the skeptic's denial makes sense, the denial must be false, for the same reason as above.

Stroud does not give a uniform formulation of the verification principle, but one can be gleaned from his various formulations. Along with the passage quoted above, Stroud also formulates the verification principle in this way: "the verification principle that [Strawson's] argument rests on is: if the notion of objective particulars makes sense to us, then we can sometimes know certain conditions to be fulfilled, the fulfillment of which logically implies either that objects continue to exist unperceived or that they do not" (p. 247). From these passages, I think that a general formulation of the principle can be made along these lines:

> *for* X *to make sense or be intelligible, it can sometimes be known that certain conditions or criteria are fulfilled, the fulfillment of which implies that either* X *is true (or obtains) or it is not true (or does not obtain)*

It is clear from Stroud's characterization of the first of Strawson's arguments that he sees it as a strictly deductive argument composed of a series of hypothetical syllogisms. It should also be clear from the previous chapter that I find this characterization off the mark, at least with regard to Stroud's hypothetical syllogistic rendering. Curiously, however, Stroud claims that "[t]he fact that (5) is needed shows that it was wrong to interpret Strawson as making a purely deductive step from how we think, or what makes sense to us, to the way things are. (6) is not a consequence of (1) alone, but only of the conjunction of (1) and (5), and so there is an additional factual premise which enables Strawson to make the otherwise questionable transition" (p. 247). This statement of Stroud's appears to be evidence against my claim that he presents Strawson's argument as essentially deductive, but I think such evidence is illusory. What Stroud means is that since Strawson's actual argument stops at (3), and since, according to Stroud, more premises are needed in order to complete the argument, Strawson's argument fails to be deductively *valid*. It is not that Strawson's argument, once elucidated, is really non-deductive; Stroud's point is that, as stated, Strawson's argument from (1)-(3) to (6) fails to be *adequately* deductive. In fact, it seems that Stroud's point is not that the conclusion of the argument is not part of a deductive argument, but rather his point is that the conclusion doesn't follow deductively from purely "epistemic" premises. The conclusion follows deductively from epistemic plus factual premises. This is why he adds the "factual" premise (5) in order to "complete" the argument. But, setting any

further discussion of this aside, I want to pursue the central role Stroud gives to the verification principle.

According to Stroud, the verification principle alone refutes the skeptic. The skeptic, says Stroud, holds that our belief in (6) can never be justified, that it can never be known to be true or false. In order to make sense out of the skeptic's claim, the notion of objective particulars—which is the subject matter of (6)—must also be intelligible. However, the verification principle states that for a thing to be intelligible, it can sometimes be known that the thing is true. For the notion of objective particular to be intelligible, then, it can sometimes be known that (6) is true, which contradicts the skeptic's claim. Consequently, for the skeptic's claim—that (6) can never be known to be true or false—to be intelligible, the claim must be false. The skeptic, in making the claim, is thereby refuted.

So, for Stroud the refutation of the skeptic "follows from the truth of the verification principle. Without this principle Strawson's argument would have no force; but with this principle the skeptic is directly and conclusively refuted, and there is no further need to go through an indirect or transcendental argument to expose his mistakes" (p. 247). There is no need for a transcendental argument if the verification principle alone can do the job of refuting the skeptic. In separating the refutory work of the transcendental argument and the verification principle, Stroud divorces their justificatory roles. The verification principle alone has adequate refutory force; a transcendental argument alone, i.e., one that does not include a verification principle as a component, does not.

But if it is the verification principle alone that refutes the skeptic, how, Stroud continues, can we know the verification principle to be true? What right does one have to use it, to bring it to bear against the skeptic? How can the verification principle be justified? Both Genova and Stine argue that a transcendental argument is precisely the sort of thing that could provide justification for a verification principle.[76] I will lay out their arguments at the end of the next section as part of a brief response to the defenses of modest transcendental arguments that have resulted from Stroud's criticism.

3.3. *Objectively or Subjectively Necessary Conclusions?: Recent Responses to Stroud's Criticism*

Even if a transcendental argument adequately argues for some set of necessary conditions, Stroud urges, the skeptic can always reply per a distinction "between the conditions necessary for a paradigmatic or warranted (and therefore meaningful) use of an expression or statement and the conditions under which it is true."[77] That is, the skeptic can always reply that it is enough for one to *believe* that the necessary conditions established by the transcendental argument are true without their actually being true. It is enough for the conditions to *appear* to be true even where we lack justification for *knowing* them to be true. There is a gap between what appears to be true and what really is true or what one can know to be true.

Stroud contends that any bridging of this gap (and, consequently, any answer to the skeptic) would have to rely on a verification principle. "The conditions for anything's making sense would have to be strong enough to include not only our beliefs about what is the case, but also the possibility of our knowing whether those beliefs are true. . . . But

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[76] Anthony C. Genova, "Good Transcendental Arguments," *Kant-studien* 75 (1984): 469-495; William Stine, "Transcendental Arguments," *Metaphilosophy* 3 (1972): 43-52.
[77] Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," 255.

to prove this would be to prove some version of the verification principle, and then the skeptic will have been directly and conclusively refuted" (*ibid*.). So, if a transcendental argument is going to be able to refute the skeptic, whether the refutation be concerned with an argument limited in scope like Strawson's or an argument as wide in scope as Kant's, it will have to be able to bridge the gap. In order to accomplish this, the argument must rely on a verification principle, in which case the transcendental argument is unnecessary since the verification principle itself, apart from the transcendental argument, will have refuted the skeptic. So, whether or not the verification principle is integral to transcendental arguments, it will have to be employed at some point for them to work.

Stroud's criticism attempts to show that transcendental arguments cannot span the appearance-reality gap—they cannot make the inference from how one thinks or believes the world to be to how the world factually is. Stroud's criticism has had the effect of showing this ambitious type of transcendental argument untenable. If some version of verificationism is necessary, as Stroud argues it is, then there is no need for the transcendental argument—the verification principle spans the gap on its own. So, if we are going to span the gap in response to the skeptic, transcendental arguments are unfit for the job.

This criticism, however, even if valid does not render transcendental arguments *completely* void of philosophical usefulness; it simply disables them from achieving a certain end, namely, establishing that we can know through transcendental argumentation what the world must be like. Some philosophers, Stroud included, have argued that although transcendental arguments cannot establish such *objectively* necessary

conclusions, they can reveal the *subjectively* necessary conditions for our thinking about the external world in the ways we do. In other words, transcendental arguments can reveal necessary conditions and connections among one's thoughts and beliefs. In this respect, Stroud acknowledges a "certain transcendental invulnerability" for such subjectively necessary beliefs. He elaborates:

> If we find that our belief that there are enduring particular objects in space and time is one of those beliefs, for example, then we might say 'There *must* be such objects.' But the most we will have discovered is that we cannot hold that we have the beliefs and experiences we have without also holding that there are enduring objects in space and time. We will have found that the world cannot *be thought* to be one way without its also *being thought* to be another: it cannot *be thought* to contain beliefs about an independent world of enduring objects without also *being thought* to contain enduring objects.[78]

On this view of the efficacy of transcendental arguments, they draw necessary conclusions, but these conclusions reach no further than one's beliefs.

Recall that transcendental arguments are supposed to combat various forays of the skeptic. If Stroud's criticism and elaboration stand, transcendental arguments can show only that certain beliefs are necessary in order, for example, to think of the world as being a certain way, to have experience, or to make assertions. Transcendental arguments, then, can indicate what the skeptic must believe or think in order for him to have any experience, make any assertion, etc. But since this situation is compatible with its being false that the world is actually the way we think it is, they are unable to relieve the skeptic's doubts as to knowledge of the external world.

In spite of the seemingly damaging effects this position has for the ability of transcendental arguments to combat skepticism, some recent defenders have argued along

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[78] Barry Stroud, "Kantian Argument, Conceptual Capacities, and Invulnerability," in *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 173-174, emphasis added.

with Stroud that although it is correct that transcendental arguments can only prove subjectively necessary conditions, this is enough for the arguments to have anti-skeptical force. The genius of the recent defenses of transcendental arguments is to show that modest versions can do anti-skeptical work even though they prove nothing conclusively about how the world actually is.

Robert Stern defends a form of transcendental argument that is "*belief-directed* (as opposed to truth-directed), where a belief-directed transcendental argument is one which claims that for experience, language, or some other belief(s) to be possible, the belief that *p* is required."[79] A truth-directed transcendental argument would conclude that *p* is actually the case. Stern, therefore, is clearly following Stroud in advocating a more modest version of transcendental argument. What anti-skeptical value does such a transcendental argument have? It refutes the *justificatory* skeptic, who doubts whether our belief in *p* is or can be justified or made reasonable in accordance with our own doxastic norms, as opposed to the "epistemic skeptic, who demands that we prove that causal determination holds in the world before we are entitled to claim to have refuted his doubts in this respect."[80] A transcendental argument in this case shows that we are entitled to the belief in question given the norms that underpin our belief practices. Here the refutory force of the transcendental argument is dependent, at least in part, on the type of skeptic being refuted. Since the skeptic only denies that our belief in *p* can be justified, rather than that *p* is actually the case, the transcendental argument, by establishing the necessity of a belief in *p*, effectively counters the skeptic's claim.

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[79] Robert Stern, "On Kant's Response to Hume: The Second Analogy as Transcendental Argument," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects* ed. Robert Stern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 51.
[80] Ibid., 52.

Ralph Walker also proposes a more modest version of transcendental argument as an effective refutation of skeptical claims. He draws a distinction between two ways in which transcendental arguments can be taken. "Whether they are effective may depend on which way they are taken. In this case the argument fails when it is taken in one of the ways, but succeeds when taken in the other." The way in which it fails is what Walker calls a "third-personal" way. According to this way, transcendental arguments "take it for granted that there is experience, or knowledge, and they present some condition as holding in consequence of that, on the grounds that unless it did hold, experience, or knowledge, would not be possible." These are stand-alone arguments, neither directed toward anyone in particular nor integrally part of some broader dialectical context. [81]

The way in which transcendental arguments succeed he calls a "second-personal" way. This way places the argument in the context of trying to convince someone of something. This way of taking transcendental arguments resembles the third-personal way insofar as the argument still starts with experience or knowledge. The difference is that the second-personal way does not allow the skeptic, against whom the transcendental argument is directed, to deny the starting point of the argument (experience or knowledge). Once the transcendental argument is placed within a dialectical context, the skeptic is unable to take himself out of the debate; the skeptic cannot now put himself out of the reach of argumentation. The second-personal transcendental argument reveals a (hidden) commitment of the skeptic and shows him that he has no alternative but to accept the conclusion of the transcendental argument.

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[81] Ralph Walker, "Induction and Transcendental Argument," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Robert Stern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 20.

This is a more modest proposal than the ambitious version in that nothing is said about how the world really is or that the conclusion of the transcendental argument really is the case. "[T]here is a sense in which the argument does establish its conclusion—it puts it beyond doubt. There is also a sense in which it does not. . . . [T]here remains a sense in which the skeptical possibility remains. Nobody can really believe [the skeptical possibility], but that does not show that it cannot be true: the world might be like that after all. Our most basic assumptions, and our basic principles of inference, might fail to match the way things are."[82]

Quassim Cassam, in distinguishing between "world-directed" and "self-directed" transcendental arguments, characterizes transcendental arguments in ways similar to both Stern and Walker. World-directed transcendental arguments "aim to tell us something about the nature or existence of non-psychological reality," whereas self-directed transcendental arguments "purport to tell us something about the nature, legitimacy, or scope of various aspects of our own cognitive faculties."[83] For Stern, Walker, and Cassam, transcendental arguments are characterized as either those that conclude something about the world or those that draw conclusions only about aspects of one's thought-life. Cassam finds fault with world-directed transcendental arguments but lauds self-directed transcendental arguments and focuses on them throughout the essay. Thus, he, like Stern and Walker, champions a more modest reading of transcendental arguments.

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[82] Ibid., 27-28.
[83] Quassim Cassam, "Self-Directed Transcendental Arguments," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Robert Stern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 87.

In Stern's volume on transcendental arguments, Barry Stroud does not depart from his contention against ambitious transcendental arguments and further elaborates on his prior defense of a more modest version.[84] Stroud considers other (weaker) requirements for transcendental arguments that might still give it some argumentative teeth against (some forms of) skepticism. His first suggestion is that transcendental arguments assert connections "solely within our thought: if we think in certain ways, we must think in certain other ways."[85] He uses an argument made by Strawson as an example: that the world contains enduring particulars is a necessary condition for the possibility of thinking of a world independent of us (which we do). The ambitious transcendental argument would argue that the truth that there are enduring particulars is a necessary condition of our conception of an independent world. Stroud contends that, according to the weaker version of the transcendental argument, the argument only shows that if we think of a world independent of us, we must think of it as containing enduring particulars. Whether it really does or not (i.e., the truth of the matter) is a separate issue not affected by the transcendental argument.

And yet, Stroud continues, the conclusions of these weaker transcendental arguments still hold a special position or status in our thought. They are indispensable and, by implication, possess a certain invulnerability. More importantly, the indispensability of such conclusions implies their invulnerability against skeptical claims to the contrary; such conclusions do not, however, deny what skepticism says. Establishing the latter would require the ambitious form of transcendental argument.

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[84] Barry Stroud, "The Goal of Transcendental Arguments," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Robert Stern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 155-172. See his "Transcendental Arguments" for his contention against ambitious transcendental arguments and "Kantian Argument" for his previous defense of modest transcendental arguments.
[85] Ibid., 165.

Although, says Stroud, this weaker form of transcendental argument asserts connections solely within our thought, they "could still be said to represent a form of 'externalism' of content."[86] They would show that in order to have a belief of some particular sort (e.g., a belief in an independent world), the belief that the world contains enduring particulars is necessary (but *not* necessarily *true*). There is something 'outside' of the first belief that makes it possible, just as in externalist theories of mental content the "kinds of thoughts or beliefs a person can have . . . is determined in part by what is so in the [outside] world the person interacts with and that his thought and beliefs are about."[87]

Christopher Hookway, in his response to Stroud's essay, notes that in light of Stroud's modest version of transcendental arguments it is not clear that they retain any anti-skeptical force. In fact, Hookway makes the problem quite acute. But in the end, he suggests "a limited set of circumstances in which such arguments could possess anti-sceptical force."[88] In brief, Hookway's point concerning the apparent lack of anti-skeptical force in the modest transcendental arguments is that if they can't establish the truth of some proposition that the skeptic disputes, then the argument fails to dispel the skeptical possibility and, therefore, fails adequately to respond to or answer the skeptic. "[I]f transcendental arguments do not establish the *truth* of their conclusions, they do not warrant *belief* in them."[89]

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[86] Ibid., 169.
[87] Ibid., 168.
[88] Christopher Hookway, "Modest Transcendental Arguments and Sceptical Doubts: A Reply to Stroud," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Robert Stern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 187.
[89] Ibid., 181.

Yet the point of transcendental arguments, Hookway ultimately concludes, is not to prove the skeptic wrong and rescue him from his skepticism. Rather, their aim is to undermine the force of the skeptic's challenges, to keep us from being lured by the skeptical possibilities. This being the aim of transcendental arguments, they need not establish the truth of their conclusions. All they must do is to give us legitimate reasons for believing the conclusions. And this is what modest transcendental arguments in fact do.

Interestingly, Anthony C. Genova commented on this modest defense of transcendental arguments long before Stern's volume. But rather than cast the defense in a positive light, as those philosophers above have done, Genova argues that this defense

> provides no help at all to the true friend of TA's. It consists in a radical reinterpretation of what a philosophically significant TA is and what it is supposed to prove. It amounts to recasting the TA into a hypothetical form where the conclusion does not establish the objectivity thesis [that a particular conceptual scheme has objective validity] at all, but merely expresses what must be presupposed if one adopts a certain interpretation of experience expressed in the epistemic premise. . . . Rather than construing TA's as versions of indirect proof, the hypothetical interpretation construes them as version of conditional proof.[90]

In his response to the hypothetical interpretation of what counts as a philosophically significant transcendental argument, Genova differentiates between four styles of transcendental argument, each having a distinctive nature and purpose: hypothetical deduction (HD), metaphysical deduction (MD), transcendental deduction (TD), and transcendental refutation (TR). The differences among the three deductions—HD, MD, and TD—come down to two: (1) the sort of possible experience at work in the argument and (2) the uniqueness status of the conceptual scheme. The HD, for instance,

[90] Genova, "Good Transcendental Arguments," 474.

shows that a particular, non-unique conceptual scheme is a necessary presupposition of some contingent interpretation of possible experience. The MD justifies a unique conceptual scheme and refers to *all possible* contingent interpretations of experience. The TD, like the MD, justifies a unique conceptual scheme and, unlike both HDs and MDs, refers to all possible experience (interpreted or not) and thus provides a justification for the objective validity of a conceptual scheme. Finally, a TR has the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* and refutes skeptical challenges to a given conceptual scheme, which is taken to possess independent justification from one of the other three transcendental arguments.

The philosophically significant and interesting transcendental argument for Genova is the TD. The ingenuity of Genova's four-fold designation of transcendental arguments is that critics of transcendental arguments (e.g., Stroud and Gram) "may not sufficiently appreciate the difference between an MD and a TD."[91] An MD, in order to prove the objective validity of a conceptual framework (in keeping with the objectivity thesis), would require a verification principle. This is due to the fact that an MD is not *supposed* to prove such a thing and so would naturally need the help of a verification principle. But this isn't as much a criticism of MDs (or transcendental arguments) as it is mistaking the purpose of an MD, which is to justify the unique credentials of a conceptual scheme.

The upshot is that in the case of someone who, as Genova charges Körner, conflates MDs with TDs, a criticism of so-called TDs will not hold. Recall that Körner's objection to transcendental arguments is that they, contrary to their purpose, do not provide a uniqueness proof for a conceptual scheme. Transcendental arguments can

[91] Ibid., 482.

neither anticipate all possible alternative conceptual schemes nor can they prove the uniqueness of a conceptual scheme from within the scheme itself. The problem with Körner's objection, argues Genova, is that Körner thinks he is talking about TDs when he is really talking about MDs, for he describes a TD as an argument demonstrating that a particular conceptual scheme is a necessary presupposition of any possible contingent interpretation of experience, or, in Körner's phrase, region of experience.[92] This, however, is a description of Genova's MD, not a genuine TD.

Genova discusses Stroud's objection to Strawson in more detail. His problem with Stroud's portrayal is that the status of Strawson's argument is not clear. It appears to be a transcendental refutation; the question is then whether Strawson's argument is based on a previously given TD or MD. If it is based on a previous MD, then its validity is not affected by the lack of a verification principle. If it is based on a previous TD, then its being aided by a verification principle is of little consequence and of no affect on the argument, since, as Genova argues later, a verification principle *follows from* a TD, is not assumed by a TD, and does not figure among the premises of a TD. Either way, Stroud's criticism of transcendental arguments does not go through and there is thus no need to abandon ambitious transcendental arguments as legitimate arguments.

Genova's discussion of TDs and the verification principle raises the question about the relationship between transcendental arguments and the verification principle. For Genova, the verification principle is something to this effect: "one could not have a significant belief without knowing how, in principle, the belief could be verified or falsified; or that one could not have a significant concept without knowing how, in

[92] Körner, "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions," 318-319.

principle, to determine whether or not the concept could be instantiated."[93] Note the similarity to my version of Stroud's verification principle above. The possibility or intelligibility of a belief or concept depends on knowing (at least in principle) whether certain conditions are fulfilled (regarding either the verification of a belief or the instantiation of a concept). Genova sees Kant's TD as having a "Copernican principle" as its metaphysical background, a principle specifying "that the determination of objects of knowledge depends upon a prior determination of the conditions of human knowledge."[94] The upshot of this Copernican principle for Genova is that it "provides a general connection between the concept of an object in general and the conditions for human cognition."[95] Insofar as it does this, the Copernican principle provides the *basis* for a verification principle, which states that we can know how, in principle, certain conditions about the connection between concept and cognition are fulfilled. The Copernican principle simply provides a connection between human cognition, i.e., knowing, and concepts of objects; it falls short of showing *how* certain conditions for the instantiation of concepts, even in principle, are fulfilled. Such a showing comes at the *end* of the argument and does not figure among its premises. Thus, because of Kant's Copernican principle at work in his TD, the verification principle does not, as Stroud argues it does, figure among its premises but rather "follows from" the TD in the sense that the verification principle can only be established after the TD has gone through. The verification principle is something that would be established by a transcendental argument rather than be part of how the conclusion of the argument is itself established.

[93] Genova, "Good Transcendental Arguments," 492.
[94] Ibid., 486.
[95] Ibid., 492.

It is Genova's notion that a verification principle is established by a transcendental argument (specifically, in his case, a TD) that Stine enlists when he argues that "a justification of a principle of verification is precisely what transcendental arguments can be expected to provide. In other words, if there is an argument providing reasons for accepting a verification principle, it will be a transcendental argument."[96] The Stroudian skeptic criticizes transcendental arguments for drawing an inference about what is the case or knowing something to be true from what one believes is the case or is true. What allows the skeptic to make good on his criticism of transcendental arguments, claims Stine, is the legitimacy of the distinction between believing something to be true and knowing it to be true. The use of such a distinction "is dependent upon there being experiences of the sort which confirms that belief is compatible with lack of knowledge" (p. 50). These experiences confirm that sometimes believing something to be true does not match up with knowing it to be true.

These confirming experiences indicate that "the skeptic's distinction makes sense only if it is verifiable" (p. 51). The skeptic's distinction, then, depends on a verification principle to the effect that the distinction "has a legitimate use only if there are experiences which confirm that the belief is compatible with knowledge" (*ibid.*). But if transcendental arguments are able to show the necessary conditions for having *any* experience, then ipso facto transcendental arguments would also show the necessary conditions for the experiences justifying the legitimacy of the belief-knowledge distinction. So, in providing the ultimate justification for the possibility of experience, transcendental arguments would also provide the ultimate justification for the skeptic's use of the belief-knowledge distinction in criticizing transcendental arguments. Thus by

[96] Stine, "Transcendental Arguments," 47.

calling the transcendental argument into question, the foundation for the Stroudian skeptic's distinction crumbles and the skeptic is no longer entitled to his position. "The skeptic's position is thus seen to be self-defeating" (p. 50).

Stine argues for the justification of a verification principle being provided by a transcendental argument, but I contend further that this special justificatory position of a transcendental argument follows directly from Stroud's own account of Strawson's argument. Stroud says that the verification principle answers the skeptic by itself, there being "no further need to go through an indirect or transcendental argument to expose [the skeptic's] mistakes." In a sense, Stroud is correct: there is no more need to go through with the transcendental argument. But the reason is due to the fact that it has already been gotten through with! The verification principle, even in Stroud's own analysis, *follows from* the premises in the transcendental argument; it is not divorced from or foreign to it. Stroud paints the picture of either the transcendental argument doing the job or the verification principle doing the job. But the situation is actually that of "both-and" rather than "either-or." Stroud sets up a false dilemma that need not be, even by his own lights. The verification principle cannot be divorced from a transcendental argument precisely because it is a consequence of it.

3.4. *Conclusion*

Transcendental arguments have been the subject of many criticisms in recent decades. The most significant and influential of these concerns the transcendental argument's connection to a verification principle. One criticism charges that it is a verification principle alone, instead of one coupled with a transcendental argument, that refutes skeptical claims. But, as both Genova and Stine have argued, this criticism seems

to put the cart before the horse. A verification principle is not independent of a transcendental argument, as the criticism suggests; instead, there are good reasons to think that transcendental arguments are precisely the sorts of arguments that justify verification principles.

According to the Stroudian criticism, in refuting skeptical claims the verification principle spans the gap between what appears to be the case and what we can know actually to be the case. In response to this criticism, philosophers have opted for a more modest version of transcendental argument—one that does not purport to span the gap between appearance and reality. Instead, this recent challenge to ambitious transcendental arguments states that it is enough for transcendental arguments to establish subjectively necessary conditions for thought or experience, i.e., necessary conditions that hold within the net of one's beliefs, concepts, etc. Furthermore, contrary to what has been previously held, these modest transcendental arguments are sufficient to neutralize the skeptic's claims.

This well-intentioned response tries to give a reasonable defense of transcendental arguments in light of the Stroudian criticism. Although I do not wish to deny that there are transcendental arguments of the modest variety, I do not think that establishing merely subjectively necessary conditions is the most that can be gained by transcendental arguments. I propose that the Stroudian criticism can be most substantially overcome by considering the *motivation* for the verification principle rather than tackling the principle itself. The verification principle is deemed necessary for the validity of transcendental arguments because there is an assumed unbridgeable gap between though and world, knowledge and reality. But if the "gap theory" cannot be justified, does not stand under

critical pressure, then both the verificationist critique and the move from strong to modest transcendental arguments is unwarranted. My plan is to cast a doubtful eye on the validity of the gap theory and thereby provide a defense of ambitious, philosophically significant transcendental arguments.

This gap is assumed both by the Stroudian criticism and the response to it by way of modest transcendental arguments. Stroud, in "Transcendental Arguments," sees the need to provide a bridging principle in transcendental arguments for them to work. The principle brings two separate elements, thought and world, together so that the former could provide a justification for the latter. In order to see this as a problem to be overcome, the gap must be assumed at the outset. The "modest" responses to this criticism also carry over the assumption of an unbridgeable gap insofar as they accept and accommodate Stroud's criticism. Transcendental arguments, in arguing by way of the conditions for the possibility of experience, language, empirical thought, etc. can only conclude something about what one must *think* the world is like rather than conclude something about what the world is *really* like. There is a gap, but transcendental arguments are not supposed to cross it.

Not only is the gap assumed by both Stroudian critique and modest response, but it also is not explicitly addressed by defenders of ambitious transcendental arguments such as Stine and Genova. Stine seems to recognize the deeper issue of motivation for the verification principle as he considers the implications that his position on transcendental arguments has for the skeptic. The transcendental argument, in providing the justification for a verification principle, also provides the justification for the sort of experience that is the basis for drawing an appearance-reality distinction. A transcendental argument, in

establishing the necessary conditions for the possibility of any experience, will ipso facto establish the necessary conditions for the possibility of the sort of experience that gives rise to an appearance-reality distinction. "The skeptic's thought of there being the distinction he requires has as its necessary condition the truth of the very statement our knowledge of which that distinction was to preclude" (p. 50). Thus, if it is this distinction that allows the skeptic's criticism of transcendental arguments to stand, then the skeptic's position is self-defeating.

Such a response indicates that there are no rational alternatives to the conceptual framework in use. But does this response get us any closer to a rational justification of the framework? John Kekes, among others, insists that showing the impossibility of alternative frameworks and showing the rational justification of the framework in use are different issues.[97] The skeptic demands the latter, but responses like the above only indicate the former. Showing the impossibility of alternative conceptual frameworks comes down to, for Kekes, showing the coherence of the framework in use. "The alternative to the system in terms of which we make *what we take to be* the world intelligible is that we cannot render anything intelligible."[98] Kekes appears to say here that the coherence of the way in which we think about the world (i.e., the conceptual framework in use) implies that no other way of thinking about the world will do.

But this doesn't amount to a rational justification of the system. Such a justification would involve "establishing an inferential link between human beings thinking about the world in a certain way and the world being that way."[99] In familiar

[97] John Kekes, "Transcendental Arguments and the Sceptical Challenge," *Philosophical Forum* 4 (1973): 422-430.
[98] Ibid., 428, emphasis added.
[99] Ibid., 429.

terms, a rational justification of a conceptual system would mean bridging the appearance-reality gap. So, we have come back once again to this pestering gap theory: a sort of Cartesian divide between our inner world—what we believe, experience, and think—and the outer world—how things stand independently of our inner cogitations. It is such a divide that allows the skeptic to make good on his criticism and that must be overcome by the verification principle or transcendental argument. To call such an epistemologically dualistic picture itself into question, rather than accept it as something that must be demolished, would seem to undermine both Stroud's criticism and the modest responses. Both Stine and Genova are concerned more with reversing the order of dependence between transcendental arguments and the verification principle than with calling the motivation for the principle into question. In the next several chapters, I will attempt to call this dualistic picture into question through a consideration of the recent work of John McDowell.

CHAPTER 4

JOHN MCDOWELL AND PRESUPPOSITION

Introduction

Transcendental argumentation is not a label that John McDowell applies to his own project. I propose, nevertheless, that it is characteristic of his work on the relation between thought and world, particularly the project he undertakes in *Mind and World*. I have suggested previously that the notion of presupposition plays a central part in understanding the nature and uniqueness of transcendental arguments. In this chapter, I will consider McDowell's treatment of presupposition in two of his essays, "Truth-Value Gaps" and "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space." These essays, I will argue, philosophically prepare the way for *Mind and World* and help to establish the link between McDowell and transcendental argumentation.[100]

In "Truth-Value Gaps" McDowell comments on presupposition in light of two different relations: the relation between a sentence and what he calls an "overlapping condition" that involves "the absence of the condition under which the sentence is said to be neither true nor false" (p. 202), and the relation between a singular sentence (or its utterance) and the conditions that must be satisfied for it to express a thought. I will show that presupposition, according to the overlapping condition description, is the relation between a sentence and the conditions for either its truth or falsity. This, I will suggest, parallels Palmer's claim that presupposition is ganderous. Although, as it turns out,

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[100] Both essays occur in John McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). All citations will refer to this volume.

McDowell does not endorse "neither true nor false" as a third truth-value, he wants it to apply as a lack of truth-value. This will help to connect McDowell's position with my account of transcendental arguments through the notion of presupposition.

As for the second relation, I will argue that the conditions[101] that must be satisfied for a singular sentence (or its utterance) to express a thought have a functional correspondence to the conditions of possibility in transcendental arguments. In addition to the findings from the first relation, this will also serve to connect McDowell's understanding of presupposition with my account of transcendental arguments. I will then show that the necessary conditions for a singular sentence to express a thought are given in "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space," where McDowell argues for the interpenetration, rather than compartmentalization, of thought and world. This interpenetration, I go on to suggest, finds its fullest treatment in the lectures of *Mind and World*.

4.1. *"Truth Value Gaps" and Presupposition*

In "Truth-Value Gaps" McDowell comments on presupposition with regard to two justifications he presents for the thesis that "if one utters an atomic sentence containing a singular term that lacks a denotation, then one expresses neither a truth nor a falsehood," a thesis that has been attributed to philosophers such as Frege and Strawson (p. 199). The focal issue in the essay is whether this truth-gap thesis requires the backing of a three-valued theory of truth, the three values being true, false, and neither-true-nor-false. Michael Dummett, who serves as something of an interlocutor for McDowell in the essay, argues that it does require such a theory, whereas McDowell argues that there need

[101] In speaking of conditions (plural) of possibility in this chapter, I include cases of there being only one condition (singular) of possibility.

not be such a requirement. Since the exchange between McDowell and Dummett is quite intricate, I will first outline the two justifications for the thesis before discussing them in more detail in the fuller context of McDowell's response to Dummett.

Both justifications turn on the notion of a denotationless singular sentence—a singular sentence containing a singular term that lacks a denotation. In the first justification, which McDowell refers to as 'Dummett's justification,' Dummett argues in favor of a three-valued theory of truth. Using classical, bivalent logic, it is natural to take a denotationless singular sentence such as "The king of France is bald" as being false. In this case, furthermore, it is also natural to take "The king of France is not bald" as being true. The problem Dummett has with this consequence is that it flies in the face of an indispensable connection he makes between truth and assertion. To respect this connection, the sentence "The king of France is not bald" should instead be counted as neither-true-nor-false.

Furthermore, Dummett thinks that the three-valued theory that this justification endorses puts the notion of presupposition in its properly secondary role to that of assertion. Thus, this correct view of the relationship between presupposition and assertion—that presupposition is secondary to assertion—in opposition to the implausible, incorrect view—that presupposition and assertion are equally fundamental—requires the three-valued theory. Consequently, anyone endorsing the correct view of the presupposition-assertion relationship apart from the three-valued theory is tacitly committed to the incorrect view of that relationship.

McDowell agrees with Dummett that this incorrect view of the presupposition-assertion relation is, indeed, implausible, but disagrees with Dummett that the three-

valued theory is required for the correct view. According to McDowell, what places presupposition in its properly secondary role is the intuition, reflected in Dummett's justification and entertained by Frege, that systematic theory of natural language via classical logic is not possible.

McDowell contrasts the first justification with a second, with which Dummett disagrees and which McDowell defends. This second justification states that when one utters a denotationless singular sentence, no thought is expressed by that utterance. Thus, the utterance should not have a truth-value, i.e., it should be neither true nor false insofar as it *lacks* a truth-value. Dummett's justification counts "neither true nor false" as a third truth-value, whereas this second justification treats it as an absence of truth-value.

As indicated by this brief outline, the broader philosophical context within which the discussion between Dummett and McDowell takes place concerns singular terms and their denotations. Singular thoughts, as McDowell notes in this essay and elsewhere, are thoughts that would not be available to be expressed if the object to which it refers did not exist (1982, p. 204; 1986, p. 228). Insofar as singular utterances contain singular terms, if there were nothing to which the singular term referred, if it were denotationless, then the utterances would be neither true nor false since it would express no thought at all. Thus, it would seem that we have three possible values that an utterance can have: true, false, and neither-true-nor-false. Nevertheless, neither Frege nor Strawson regard "neither true nor false" as a third value but as a lack or absence of truth value. Consequently, they do not make use of a three-valued theory in this case but regard natural language as having truth-value gaps.

Already there are similarities between, on the one hand, McDowell's truth-gap theory and, on the other hand, Palmer's account of presupposition. These similarities help to link McDowell's discussions to important aspects of presupposition and, consequently, to transcendental argumentation. First, both Palmer's notion of impropriety and the broader context of McDowell's essay involve the issue of denotationless reference. Propriety, within the context of presupposition, is defined by Palmer in terms of reference to states of affairs. One implication of this, in terms of the truth-value of statements, is that where a statement is proper and is about some state of affairs, it can thereby state something either truly or falsely about that state of affairs. Likewise, since an improper statement is not really about any state of affairs, it cannot thereby state anything truly or falsely about any state of affairs. Improper statements are thus neither true nor false. Palmer's improper statements correspond exactly to McDowell's denotationless singular statements in this regard: since both types of statements are not, strictly speaking, about anything, they are neither true nor false.

Second, McDowell's truth-gap theory and Palmer's account of presupposition both deny that the theory of bivalence captures every capturable semantic relationship. In other words, both agree that "every statement is either true or false" does not do justice to the semantic complexities of language. Recall that in Palmer's account, he credits presupposition with involving three values—true, false, and inappropriate or improper—in direct response to the failure of bivalence to exhaust the presuppositional possibilities.

This leads to the third similarity. The truth values involved in the presupposition relation and those discussed in "Truth-Value Gaps" are the same: true, false, and neither true nor false. A proper statement, in terms of the presupposition relation, is either true or

false; an improper or inappropriate statement, on the other hand, is neither true nor false. Whether or not a proper account of presupposition requires that the "neither true nor false" designation count as a third truth-value or the lack of truth-value is a separate issue to be discussed in what follows.

4.1.1. *Dummett's Justification*

Dummett's justification for the "neither true nor false" thesis has to do with how atomic sentences relate to the complex sentences they compose. Let us suppose, the justification goes, that a singular sentence of the form "The king of France is bald" is false if it contains a singular term that lacks a denotation. Given the two natural thoughts that "The king of France is not bald" is the negation of "The king of France is bald" and that a sentence is false if and only if its negation is true, we are then committed to counting the denotationless singular sentence "The king of France is not bald" true. The problem with this commitment is "the indispensable connection between the notions of truth and correctness" that serves as part of the background of the justification—a connection wherein the notion of the truth of assertoric utterances is grounded in what it is for the speaker of the utterance to be correct (p. 200). As Dummett says, the connection entails that "an utterance is true when the speaker is right [i.e., correct] in what he says, false when he is wrong" (1978, p. xvii). In the case of a singular sentence lacking a denotation, a speaker would not be correct in asserting it. So, the commitment to counting "The king of France is not bald" true in this case contravenes the connection between the notion of truth, when applied to assertoric utterances, and the correctness of asserting it. Thus, if we want to preserve the two natural thoughts above, we should retract our initial

supposition and count sentences containing singular terms that lack denotations as *neither* true *nor* false.

Given the similarities between the context of McDowell's discussion and key features of presupposition, it should be expected that talk of presuppositions would arise in McDowell's essay. And this is precisely the case: in the midst of discussing Dummett's justification for the "neither true nor false" thesis, McDowell first mentions the notion of presupposition. For sentences of the form "The king of France is bald," for instance, there are conditions under which the sentence could be true and conditions under which it could be false. These conditions, McDowell continues, overlap in that they "both include the absence of the condition under which the sentence is said to be neither true nor false" (p. 202). McDowell, following Dummett, calls the relation between the sentence and this overlapping condition "presupposition."

The overlapping would, presumably, be what the two conditions have in common, what they share. Since, on the one side, there are the conditions for the truth of the sentence and, on the other, the conditions for the falsity of the sentence, what they share are both the conditions under which the sentence could be said to be true and the conditions under which it could be said to be false. This accords well with my account of presupposition set forth in Chapter Two. In that section I noted that where "*P* presupposes *Q*," the more accurate formulation of the presupposition relation is "(*P* is true implies *Q*) and (*P* is false implies *Q*)" over and against the formulation "(*P* or not-*P*) implies *Q*."

This also accords well with McDowell's statement that the overlapping condition is an absence of something, namely the conditions under which a sentence is neither true

nor false: the logical space where the conditions under which a sentence is neither true nor false are *absent* indicates a space where both the conditions under which the sentence is true and the conditions under which it is false are *present*. Presupposition, then, is the relation between the sentence and both the conditions for the truth and the conditions for the falsity of the sentence.

McDowell's account of presupposition in terms of the overlapping condition parallels Palmer's claim that presupposition is ganderous. Recall that the ganderous nature of presupposition entails that where *S* presupposes *P*, not-*S* also presupposes *P*. An example given was that both doing well on an exam and doing poorly on an exam (i.e., not- "doing well on an exam") presuppose that the exam is taken. Put another way, the statement "I took the exam" is the presupposition of either the truth of "I did well on the exam" or the falsity of "I did well on the exam." Presupposition is thus the relation between the sentence "I did well on the exam" and the condition that must obtain for either its truth or its falsity. Again, McDowell's account of presupposition matches the account given previously in the dissertation.

In addition to his brief account of presupposition, McDowell also considers two views on the relation of presupposition to assertion. The relationship between the two is put in terms of both the ease with which presupposition is apprehended and its degree of independence from assertion. The first view, which both Dummett and McDowell agree is the correct one, states that with regard to a theory of language presupposition is not fundamental in the way that assertion is and is secondary to assertion. This difference between presupposition and assertion can be put metaphorically in terms of an internal-external distinction. With respect to a public "observation of the practice of speaking a

language," that is, externally to the structure of the language, it is easy to apprehend that an utterance is an *assertion* that a certain condition obtains, whereas the hypothesis that an utterance *presupposes* that a certain condition obtains does not even come up in such a context (p. 202). The relation of presupposition emerges not in the context of the observable practice of speaking a language but only in the context of considering, internally, as it were, the structure of a language, the goal of such consideration being the snugness of fit between the correctness and incorrectness of assertions and the practice of speaking a language (pp. 202-3). On this view, then, presupposition is not as easily apprehended as assertion and is dependent on assertion in terms of its reliance upon the structure of language.

The second view of the relation between presupposition and assertion, which both McDowell and Dummett consider the incorrect and "utterly implausible" view, states that presupposition is as equally fundamental as assertion. According to this second view, presupposition "is intelligible, and potentially informative about the meanings of utterances, without benefit of information or theory about structure" (p. 203). The idea here is that a difference in meaning between a pair of sentences can be easily ascertained via their presuppositions but independently of an account of the structure of those sentences, and, therefore, independently of assertions.

Although McDowell is in agreement with Dummett as to the correctness and plausibility of these two views, McDowell disagrees with Dummett's insistence that the three-valued theory alone places presupposition in its properly secondary role, and thereby gives it "its proper theoretical context" (*ibid.*). The upshot of this for Dummett is that anyone, e.g., Frege and Strawson, countenancing the use of presupposition apart

from the backing of the three-valued theory is committed to the second, implausible view that presupposition and assertion are equally, and independently, fundamental. McDowell resists this implication for Frege and argues that Frege should not be saddled with the second view of presupposition.[102]

McDowell's resistance is based on an intuition that Frege shares with Dummett's justification for the three-valued theory of truth, an intuition that "preclude[s] systematic theory of natural language as it stands" (*ibid.*). Arguments in favor of a "neither true nor false" thesis, whether designating a third truth-value or a lack of truth value, i.e., designating a truth-value gap, point out a certain incompleteness of classical, two-valued logic. Since classical logic, the line of thought goes, assigns only the values of "true" and "false" to statements in a language, it runs into problems with respect to those statements that do not fall under either assignation, i.e., those that are neither true nor false, such as denotationless singular statements occurring in natural language. Consequently, within the scope of a classical logic, systematic theory of natural language is precluded and a different logic is needed for natural language.

Frege expresses the same intuition that stands behind Dummett's justification, namely, the preclusion of a systematic theory of natural language, when he remarks that singular statements presuppose that the singular term contained in them refers to something. However, it sometimes happens in natural language that singular terms lack denotations; for Frege, the statements of which the denotationless singular terms are components are rendered truth-valueless. Thus, these statements cannot be analyzed in

[102] McDowell says that Strawson has also been saddled with this second view since he gives an account of presupposition without the backing of a three-valued logic. However, rather than defend him against Dummett, McDowell simply states that Strawson does not have the way of escape from Dummett's criticism that Frege has. It seems, then, that without this way of escape (given in the following paragraph above) the charge of being saddled with the second view of presupposition is legitimate.

terms of existing systematic theory; systematic theory of natural language as it stands, i.e., with the possibility of denotationless singular terms, is thereby precluded. For Frege, the problem lies not in a defect of the logic employed, whether classical or three-valued, but in natural language itself. Thus, he doesn't go as far as Dummett and replace classical logic with a three-valued logic. Nonetheless, McDowell claims, Frege's remark about denotationless singular statements and terms is driven by a similar intuition about the possibility of a systematic theory of natural language as is an approach using a three-valued logic.[103]

4.1.2. *The Second Justification*

Early in "Truth-Value Gaps," McDowell labels presupposition as the relation that obtains between a statement and the overlapping condition discussed above. I suggested that this overlapping condition is the condition under which the statement can be either true or false. Near the end of "Truth-Value Gaps," McDowell gives another definition of presupposition that is perhaps clearer, especially given what has been said in previous chapters about transcendental arguments. These arguments proceed in terms of conditions of possibility, which I have associated with the notion of presupposition. This association is precisely what McDowell maintains when he calls presupposition "the relation that a singular sentence, or an utterance of it, bears to the condition, or conditions, that must be satisfied if the utterance is to express a thought" (p. 210). Although he is not talking

[103] Along these same lines, Susan Haack separates the truth-value gap view, where such problematic statements are of the truth-valueless variety of "neither true nor false," from intermediate truth-value views, where statements have intermediate truth-values such as "partly true" or "half true." Haack claims that those logics that have the third truth-value of neither-true-nor-false, as Palmer's seems to be, are unfortunate assimilations of the two views and are subject to the counterargument that "one is not tempted to suppose that 'either-true-or-false' is an extra truth-value over and above 'true' and 'false'" (*Deviant Logic: Some Philosophical Issues* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974], 55-56). Although a case could be made against the efficacy of the counterargument, the point here is simply that the status of "neither true nor false" is not automatically that of a third truth-value and establishing that it is might require more, as an assimilation, than the truth-valueless view.

explicitly of possibility here but of sentences expressing thoughts, possibility talk is implicit, for he is speaking of the conditions for the possibility of a sentence expressing a thought: in order for it to be possible for a sentence to express a thought, certain conditions must be satisfied.

McDowell gives this second definition of presupposition in connection with the second justification for the "neither true nor false" thesis. The second justification begins with the notion of a singular thought: "a thought that would not be available to be thought or expressed if the relevant object, or objects, did not exist" (p. 204). The utterance, then, of a singular sentence that lacked reference to the relevant object(s) would not be available to be thought or expressed. Such an utterance, therefore, would not be expressing any thought at all and is neither true nor false. It is clear that McDowell means the phrase "neither true nor false" in this case to indicate a truth-value gap, the *lack* of a truth-value, rather than a third truth-value. For, later in the essay, contrasting these positions in terms of semantic role-playing and linguistic meaning, he indicates that the second justification leads to the view that there are truth-value gaps.

The contrast between these positions lies in whether denotationless singular sentences can be credited with a semantic role. The three-valued theory of truth, McDowell urges, seems necessary only on the supposition that a singular sentence containing a singular term that lacks a denotation is playing a semantic role and, therefore, has a truth-value. For, insofar as the singular term lacks a denotation, the sentence cannot be credited as being true or as being false: in the case of its being true, the statement would assert something true about the object referred to by the singular term; in the case of its being false, the statement would assert something false about the

object. But where the sentence lacks a denotation, no assertion is being made. So, if the sentence cannot be counted as true or as false, and if it must be credited with *some* truth-value since it means something in the language (i.e., plays a semantic role, makes a "move in the language game"), then it is reasonable to provide a third truth value for such a sentence: neither-true-nor-false.

McDowell agrees that if a sentence plays a semantic role, it must have a truth-value. But statements "of the problematic kind," i.e., those containing a singular term that lacks a denotation, do not express any thought whatsoever and are thereby opting out of semantic role-playing altogether. They merely *appear* to play a semantic role. So, the statement does not count as a "move in the language game" and thus should not be credited with a truth-value at all. The neither-true-nor-false designation, as a third truth-value, is therefore not applicable. Rather, the statement has *no* truth-value. It continues to be a statement, although a problematic one that fails to express a thought and, therefore, fails to play a semantic role. It is in this sense of the *lack* of a truth-value that the utterance is neither true nor false. So, McDowell will want "neither true nor false" to apply to the problematic statements (since this is what the truth-value gap thesis states) but, apparently, not as a third truth-value.

4.1.3. *The Place of Presupposition*

It seems that in this essay McDowell is concerned to defend the notion of presupposition and to preserve a place for it in theorizing about meaning and truth in language. In the context of the first justification, McDowell defends Frege's conception of presupposition in its properly secondary role against Dummett's insistence that such a conception requires the backing of a three-valued theory of truth. In the context of the

second justification, McDowell also argues that presupposition has a natural and legitimate place apart from a three-valued theory of truth. When McDowell speaks of a statement's masquerading in a semantic role "of the kind constituted by the assertoric expression of a singular thought," he is speaking about what it takes for a singular thought to be expressed (p. 210). When a so-called singular statement fails to express a singular thought, when there is no corresponding something to which the singular term refers, that so-called singular statement is not really what it professes to be. The conditions that must be satisfied in order for the statement to express a singular thought have not been met.

As soon as we start talking about the conditions of the possibility of a statement's expressing a singular thought and its relation to the statement, we are talking about presupposition. This is the "natural use" that the notion of presupposition has in this case: it is legitimate to invoke the notion of presupposition in cases where a three-valued logic need not apply (in the present case, where a denotationless singular statement cannot be credited with a semantic role) so long as conditions of possibility are being considered.

In the midst of both justifications, McDowell makes it clear that presupposition emerges only in light of, and not independently of, considerations of sentence structure (pp. 202, 210). Thus, presupposition has its proper, and perfectly natural, place, not as equally fundamental to assertions or statements, but only as secondary to them and their structure. Whereas Dummett's discussion of the use of presupposition comes in the context of the structure of complex sentences, McDowell claims that presupposition has its use "in the context of considerations about the structure, not of complex sentences, but of atomic sentences themselves" (p. 210). Furthermore, when considering the structure of

atomic sentences, when reflecting on "how the structure of singular sentences suits them to express the kind of thought they are capable of expressing," presupposition uncovers the relationship between the singular sentences and the conditions under which it can express a thought (*ibid.*). In other words, presupposition centrally involves consideration of conditions of possibility for McDowell. Insofar as transcendental argumentation involves conditions of possibility, there is a connection between McDowell's notion of presupposition and transcendental arguments.

What conditions of possibility might McDowell be referring to? I propose that the conditions under which a singular sentence is *capable* of expressing a thought, whether it *actually* expresses one or not, is given by McDowell in "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space." There he outlines a view in which thought is in immediate and intimate contact with the world, in contrast to a Cartesian view where thought is absolutely isolated from contact with the world. According to McDowell, the Cartesian view in no way allows for the possibility that utterances of singular sentences can express thoughts, since there is no way for the thought to be about anything in the world. There is on this view, then, no question of whether a singular term has or even lacks a denotation. The conditions that must be satisfied in order for singular statements to express the kind of thought they are capable of expressing, I will argue, is this picture of intimate contact between thought and world. In the next section, I will discuss what McDowell says about this picture in "Singular Thought." In the next chapter, I will show how this picture is further developed and argued for by McDowell in *Mind and World*.

4.2. *"Singular Thought" and Conditions of Possibility*

In "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space," McDowell continues his treatment of singular expressions and begins the discussion with Bertrand Russell's notion of singular thought, which McDowell finds potentially helpful in solving some long-standing philosophical difficulties. But Russell makes additions to his notion that prevent it from having the desired curative effect. It is these additions that McDowell attempts to separate from what is helpful and central in Russell's notion of singular thought in order to pave the way for an analysis of the notion's philosophical significance. McDowell wants to salvage object-dependence in Russell's notion of singular thought from a restriction that Russell places on his notion, a restriction that for McDowell prevents what is important in Russell's notion from actualizing its curative potential. I will first discuss in some detail the meaning of "Russell's restriction," indicating two different but compatible ways in which McDowell describes the restriction. I will next present McDowell's claim that the restriction is ultimately founded on the notion that the impression of understanding a singular thought cannot be an illusion: where we understand ourselves to be expressing singular thoughts, we are not mistaken in our understanding. I will then show how McDowell links this denial of illusions of understanding with a Cartesian conception of inner knowledge, a conception that promotes the isolation of thought from the world. This leads McDowell to claim that the Cartesian picture renders singular thought impossible, thereby leading him to declare that the interpenetration of thought and world comprises a condition for the possibility of singular thought.

4.2.1 *Russell's Restriction*

The idea that McDowell views as essential and important in Russell's thought is the object-dependence of singular thought. Under this conception, singular thought has a particular "psychological application" and a "distinctive kind of configuration in psychological reality" in that it has a peculiar and redeeming status among thoughts: its object-dependence. But the usefulness of this notion is hindered by a restriction that Russell places on the possibility of singular thoughts being object-dependent: only "features of sense-data or items present to us with similar immediacy in memory, and (when Russell recognized them as objects) our selves" can count in object-dependent singular thoughts (p. 229). So, McDowell wants to separate Russell's idea of the object-dependence of some of our thoughts from this restriction that Russell places on them.

I want first to discuss two different and apparently competing interpretations of what McDowell calls "Russell's restriction," bringing McDowell's own discussions to bear on the interpretations. On the one hand, the phrase seems to refer to Russell's restricting of singular thoughts or propositions to those thoughts or propositions[104] containing logically proper names. In "Singular Thought," McDowell begins his discussion by apparently linking Russell's restriction to the use of logically proper names in singular expressions. He states that "Russell presupposes an interlocking conception of genuinely referring expressions ('logically proper names') and singular propositions" and that this "conception of singular (object-dependent) propositions is intended in part as a

[104] McDowell, it seems, has no problem treating singular thoughts and singular propositions equally in this case. Of singular propositions, he says that they "would not be available to be expressed at all if the objects referred to did not exist" ("Singular Thought," 228); and of singular thoughts, he also says that they "would not be available to be thought or expressed if the relevant object, or objects, did not exist" ("Truth-Value Gaps," 204). For brevity, I will use "singular expressions" to refer to singular thoughts, singular propositions, and singular utterances.

contribution to psychology" (p. 228). However, "Russell takes this psychological application of the idea [of singular propositions] to be possible only under a severe restriction in its scope," which McDowell, at the end of the paragraph, terms "Russell's restriction" (pp. 228-229). Since the only restriction or limit on the idea of singular expressions mentioned had been its link to logically proper names, it seems that this, in fact, is what McDowell means by "Russell's restriction."

A reading of McDowell's "Truth-Value Gaps" supports Russell's restriction being put in terms of logically proper names. For Russell, no singular expression would be expressed if the singular term contained in it lacked a denotation, if there were no existent object to which the term referred. McDowell wants to separate this core Russellian conception of singular expressions from two accretions that also show up in Russell's work. The first accretion McDowell discusses concerns Russell's conviction that "the only genuine singular terms are logically proper names" (p. 204). It follows from this conviction that genuine singular expressions, for Russell, will be those containing logically proper names. Why should this be thought to be "Russell's restriction"? For the simple reason that when discussing how to detach this first accretion from the Russellian notion of singular expressions, McDowell refers to Russell's conviction as a "radical restriction of genuine singular terms" (p. 205). So, "Russell's restriction" is the limiting of singular expressions to those containing logically proper names.

In addition to clues *within* both "Truth-Value Gaps" and "Singular Thought," there are also similarities *between* these two essays that lend credence to this first reading of Russell's restriction. The terminology of "radical restriction" in "Truth-Value Gaps"

mirrors that of "severe restriction" in "Singular Thought" when discussing this aspect of Russell's thought. The terminology itself suggests that McDowell believes Russell to have taken his important notion of singular expressions (important insofar as it registers a commitment to the object-dependence of thoughts) a bit too far. This is, in fact, what McDowell argues in both "Truth-Value Gaps" and "Singular Thought." In both essays, he attempts to detach Russell's notion of the object-dependence of singular expressions from some unhappy consequences that Russell draws.

On the other hand, it could be that "Russell's restriction" refers to the restricting of singular expressions to those expressions containing singular terms whose denotations are sense-data. In "Singular Thought" McDowell suggests that Russell's psychological application of his notion of singular expressions implies that the psychological topology "is partly determined by which objects exist in the world" (p. 230). The link between thought and world in this case is Russell's notion of acquaintance. Now, Russell's "paradigm of acquaintance is perception" and "Russell allows as objects of perceptual acquaintance only features of sense-data" (p. 231). It seems, then, that the "acquaintance" one will have with the world comes about only within this sense-datum epistemology.

McDowell's discussion of whether "Russell's restriction" can be justified by the Fregean principle that one must not be allowed to hold rationally conflicting attitudes to one and the same representational content gives weight to this second reading. McDowell argues that the principle does not provide a justification for the restriction, but why might it provide justification? Well, when we consider ordinary, middle-sized objects (rather than sense-data), their constituents might "be too coarsely individuated to conform to the Fregean principle" (p. 233). The principle, then, would justify the sense-datum

epistemological framework since the constituents would presumably be finely enough individuated. Since the principle might justify Russell's sense-datum epistemology, and since McDowell is asking whether the principle will justify "Russell's restriction," it seems that "Russell's restriction" refers to his sense-datum epistemology.

McDowell wants to detach Russell's restriction from other important and helpful notions of Russell. But the two descriptions of "Russell's restriction" sketched above seem very different from one another. Given the first account of "Russell's restriction," McDowell could be taken to serve a *logical* complaint against Russell. On this view, Russell's account is too restricting by virtue of the type of name (a logically proper one) associated with singular expressions. Given the second account of "Russell's restriction," McDowell could be taken to serve an *ontological* complaint against Russell. On this view, Russell's account is too restricting by virtue of the content of the singular expressions—their reference to sense-data rather than ordinary objects.

This situation could be seen as quite a dilemma. Which account of "Russell's restriction" is correct? Which should one choose? Stephen Schiffer's discussion of Russell also brings out these two seemingly divergent accounts of "Russell's restriction."[105] Schiffer divides Russell's theory of reference into two related theories: the description theory of *de re* thought and the description theory of singular terms. The former, he explains, is "a theory of the thought in the mind of a person using a singular term"; the latter is "a theory of the semantics of singular terms" (p. 172). This distinction seems to match, if only loosely, the logical-ontological distinction I just proposed between the two accounts of "Russell's restriction."

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[105] Stephen Schiffer, "The Basis of Reference," *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978): 171-206.

Regarding the *de re* theory, Russell held that "a person could believe—or stand in any other propositional attitude relation to—only those singular propositions of which he or his sense data were constituents" (*ibid*.). In McDowell's terminology, one might say that the restriction to the psychological application (in terms of propositional attitudes) of Russell's idea of singular expressions is that sense-data must be the constituents of the expressions. With regard to the first interpretation of Russell's restriction, I suggested that the restriction of the psychological application concerned logically proper names, not sense-data. Schiffer's analysis in terms of the *de re* theory seems to defeat that account and justify the second account.

However, regarding the semantic theory, Schiffer goes on to say that "certain terms do, or can, function in the way that that theory [the 'Fido'-Fido theory] says that all singular terms function—namely, to introduce their referents into the singular propositions asserted by the sentences containing them. Russell calls these terms logically proper names. . . ." (p. 173). Schiffer seems to indicate here that the only genuine singular terms are logically proper names, which would mean that the domain of singular terms, which is wider in the 'Fido'-Fido theory, is being restricted in Russell to logically proper names. It seems here that the first account above of "Russell's restriction" is justified, while the second is defeated.

However, rather than compound the dilemma, I think Schiffer ultimately provides a solution that takes both interpretations into account, so that there is no need to choose one over the other. "Russell calls these terms logically proper names, and he thought that there were at most really only two of them in use: 'I', and 'this', when used to refer to one of the speaker's present sense data" (*ibid*.). The self and sense-data: these are the

only two logically proper names available for Russell. There is, then, no need to choose between the "logical" and "ontological" accounts of "Russell's restriction." They are simply two facets of same thing, two aspects of "Russell's restriction" corresponding to each of the two logically proper names, respectively.

4.2.2 *Denying Illusions of Understanding*

It is important to be clear about the meaning of "Russell's restriction," for it ensures Russell's proper object-dependent connection between singular thoughts and the world of objects. Why must only the self and sense-data provide the proper connection and not also, as McDowell suggests, middle-sized objects? Because Russell insists on there being no illusion of understanding a singular expression. Now, it should be kept in mind that Russell doesn't deny that there are *any* illusions of understanding. His point is that we can entertain singular expressions "only where there cannot be illusions as to the existence of an object of the appropriate kind:" the self and sense-data.[106] All other expressions, even where they *seem* to involve singular reference, are subsumed under his extension of the original Theory of Descriptions.

Russell's original Theory of Descriptions treats definite descriptions as having a different logical form than singular expressions. Whereas the important thing about Russell's notion of singular expressions is that they are object-dependent, an expression containing a definite description, unlike an expression containing a singular term, might not be about any object at all. And if such expressions containing definite descriptions were accorded the same logical form, and thus the same status, as singular expressions, then the former expressions would fail to express any proposition at all. In order, then, to

[106] "Singular Thought," 229.

ensure that such expressions do, in fact, express propositions, Russell proposes in his Theory of Descriptions an alternative logical form for them. Thus, Russell argues against counting definite descriptions as genuinely referring expressions. Only those expressions that involve reference to objects can count as such; that is, only singular expressions backed by direct acquaintance with the self or sense-data can count as genuinely referring expressions.

Russell, however, ends up extending his original Theory to include not only definite descriptions but any expression one might take as exhibiting singular reference. There are two things that McDowell claims lead to this extension. One is the denial that there can be illusions of understanding singular expressions; the other has to do with an actual situation of being under the illusion that a range of singular expressions are, in fact, singular. In "Truth-Value Gaps," McDowell combines these in a *modus tollens* argument reconstructed from Russell: For any class of *apparently singular term* with members that can lack denotations, if these terms are genuinely singular, then no thought is expressed by uttering a sentence containing a denotationless member of the class. However, thoughts *are* expressed by such utterances since they are false, according to Russell. Therefore, it is not the case that such terms are genuinely singular.[107]

This leads Russell to restrict the scope of the class of genuine singular expressions. Since there cannot be illusions of understanding singular expressions, and since apparently singular expressions are precisely illusions of that sort, apparently singular expressions cannot be genuine singular expressions. This, in turn, leads Russell to extend the scope of the original Theory to include apparently singular expressions in

[107] "Truth-Value Gaps," 205.

order that they may count as expressing propositions, though not as expressing singular propositions. So, in addition to definite descriptions, he gives these apparently singular expressions an alternative form. He treats them as nonsingular expressions that they can be understood to express regardless of whether there is an object to which the expression refers.

According to McDowell, the extension involved in appending the Theory of Descriptions to Russell's position is an unfortunate accretion. The understanding of a singular sentence, claims McDowell, "is partly determined by" and requires contact with objects in the world. Definite descriptions, on the contrary, do not require such contact—they are constructed in such a way that "familiarity with the words and construction" of an expression containing a definite description is enough for entertaining the proposition.[108] Treating any apparently singular expression as an expression containing a definite description threatens the psychological application of singular expressions that proves so critical and central for the inspiration McDowell wishes to draw from Russell.

McDowell wants to salvage a "special plausibility" for Russell's original Theory of Descriptions while bringing into question the suppositions that led to the unfortunate (in McDowell's eyes) extension of the Theory. He does not want to toss out the Theory *tout à fait*, but wants to retain Russell's intuition that singular propositions (unlike definite descriptions, for instance) occupy a special place in the topography of thought. Ultimately, McDowell does this by arguing that a fully Cartesian picture of the inner life underlies Russell's denial that we can have illusions of understanding singular expressions and in this way McDowell calls that picture into question.

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[108] "Singular Thought," 230.

4.2.3. *The Fully Cartesian Picture*

McDowell argues that the Cartesian picture blocks the interpenetration of the inner and outer realms and, more importantly, in the end renders impossible the expression of singular thoughts or utterances. Recall that the denial of illusions of understanding singular expressions leads to Russell's restriction. In calling into question the basis for the denial, McDowell urges a lifting of Russell's restriction, which, he suggests, is attractive precisely because of its anti-Cartesian implications. "Recognizing object-dependent thoughts outside Russell's restriction," McDowell claims, "liberates us from Cartesian problems" (p. 237). In this way, McDowell can retain an important and helpful intuition from Russell, namely, that singular thought reflects a connection of mind with world, while setting aside other insights of Russell that serve to block the mind-world connection.

Laying out the damaging implications of the fully Cartesian picture for the connection between thought and world, and, ultimately, for the possibly of expressing propositions, is McDowell's chief concern in "Singular Thought." The insistence on the autonomy of the inner life in the fully Cartesian picture is for McDowell the culprit, the "disease of thought" of which other aspects, such as Cartesian immaterialism, are only symptoms. On this picture, the inner life of the subject is transparent to the subject through introspection. The whole of this inner realm is open to the subject; its contents, its appearances, are infallibly knowable facts. This is problematic because it isolates the inner life from outer circumstances so that the truth of the contents of the inner realm is established independently of external conditions.

According to the fully Cartesian picture, the whole region of the inner life is transparent to the subject. Nothing among its contents escapes infallible access. The inner realm is laid completely bare to the subject's view. But if this phenomenological transparency of the inner realm holds and the truth of the contents of the inner realm is established independently of the external world, then both those facts in the inner realm that constitute *actual* access to the external world and those facts that constitute *apparent* access to the external world will "look" the same *from within the inner realm*. Since the whole of the inner realm is transparent and there is not one area of it that is in question for the subject, the question of actual access or apparent access is no longer part of its makeup. Differences between two ways things might be in the inner realm (with regard to the question of access or apparent access) "must reside in facts external to a state of affairs that is common to the two disjuncts and exhausts the relevant region of the inner realm" (p. 241). Thus, McDowell concludes, the two realms are not interpenetrating for the fully Cartesian picture; knowledge of facts in the inner realm is independent of conditions that obtain in the outer realm.

Following McDowell, this discussion of the inner and outer realms as they relate to problems for the fully Cartesian picture can be applied to propositional attitudes, thereby bringing the discussion closer to the concerns of Russell's position. The disjunctive position regarding actual or apparent access to the external world amounts to the following: one is either entertaining an object-dependent thought or it only appears that one is entertaining an object-dependent thought. To say that the difference between these disjuncts "is external to the layout of one's inner world" is a version of the fully Cartesian picture. It is to say that the "intrinsic character of the thoughts in question is

something that can be constant across such variations; so that object-dependence is not an intrinsic feature of thoughts" (p. 248). So, for McDowell, conceiving of the fully Cartesian picture in terms of propositional attitudes makes it "no less problematic how it can be that they have a representational bearing on the world" (p. 249).

Why does McDowell find it problematic that "object-dependence is not an intrinsic feature of thoughts"? So long as the object-dependence of thoughts is understood independently of the nature of thought itself—whether it be understood as a feature of the external world or as a bridge linking thought to world, there will never be a connection between thought and world *from the standpoint of the inner realm*. As a result, there is no directedness of the mind toward the external world. Subjectivity remains, employing McDowell's metaphor, a dark interior, letting in no light from the outside. There is no possible interpenetration of the two realms. The world ends up having no representational bearing on thought whatsoever, and the relation between thought and world becomes no relation at all. And most importantly for the purposes of this study, the possibility of expressing singular thoughts vanishes.

4.3. *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have attempted to set the stage for an analysis of *Mind and World* and its use in defending transcendental arguments by connecting some of McDowell's thoughts on presupposition and three-valued theories of truth with aspects of Palmer's account of presupposition, which figures in transcendental inference, and with central features of transcendental arguments. In the midst of "Truth-Value Gaps," McDowell mentions presupposition in ways familiar from what I have said about presupposition and transcendental inference in previous chapters. He, like Palmer, connects the notion of

presupposition with the possibility of a statement being neither true nor false. In one formulation, McDowell's notion of presupposition marks the relation between a (singular) statement and the conditions under which it is either true or false, echoing the ganderous nature of presupposition. In the case of a presupposition's failing, the statement under consideration would be neither true nor false. This echoes Palmer's claim that a presupposition's failing (i.e., being false) makes the statement that presupposes it "inappropriate," which I have argued is tantamount to its being neither true nor false.

In another formulation of presupposition in "Truth-Value Gaps," McDowell connects presupposition with conditions of possibility, which, as I have said in previous chapters, is its key characteristic in relation to transcendental arguments. He calls presupposition the relation between a singular statement and the conditions that must be satisfied in order for it to express a thought, i.e., the conditions of its possibility. McDowell, I have argued, goes on to lay out such conditions in "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space." In that essay, he presents the picture of an intimate connection between thought and world, between the inner and outer realms. Unless such a picture is in place, McDowell suggests, the possibility of a singular statement expressing a thought does not even arise.

McDowell's discussion of presupposition in "Truth-Value Gaps" and "Singular Thought" and its connection with the account of presupposition I have given in this dissertation prepare the way to understand McDowell's argument in *Mind and World* as an instance of transcendental argumentation. In transcendental arguments, presupposition reveals the conditions of possibility, by which transcendental arguments proceed; that is,

transcendental arguments establish their conclusions by virtue of the consideration of conditions of possibility. McDowell shares the view of presupposition as that which uncovers conditions of possibility. Furthermore, in "Singular Thought" McDowell endorses an argument against the fully Cartesian picture along the lines of conditions of possibility talk. Given McDowell's way of arguing and its likeness to transcendental argumentation, one might expect a full-blown argument for his position to be a transcendental argument—arguing that his position, unlike the fully Cartesian picture, provides the necessary conditions for the possibility of singular thought. In the next chapter, I will argue that McDowell gives this full-blown, transcendental argument in *Mind and World*.

CHAPTER 5

JOHN MCDOWELL: *MIND AND WORLD*

Introduction

My ultimate aim in the present analysis of McDowell's *Mind and World*, to be completed in the following chapter, is twofold. On the one hand, I aim to offer McDowell's argument as an exemplar of strong transcendental arguments. In particular, his argument illustrates the key point made by Stine and Genova that verification principles follow from and are justified by transcendental arguments. On the other hand, I aim to use McDowell in order to provide a defense of strong transcendental arguments against familiar criticisms, namely, the Stroudian criticism that transcendental arguments are unable to establish metaphysical conclusions based on epistemic premises. This criticism assumes a justificatory gap between thought and reality that McDowell removes in *Mind and World*. Once the gap is disposed of, the Stroudian criticism is undermined and the legitimacy of strong transcendental arguments maintained.

In the previous chapter, I discussed some of McDowell's concerns about singular or object-dependent thought in my attempt to discern a pattern of thought that I see exhibited in his works. This pattern of thought, I am urging, will help to defuse an entrenched criticism of transcendental arguments first offered by Barry Stroud. The pattern I see emerging in McDowell, to put it in the language of his essay "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space," revolves around his insistence on the

interpenetration of the inner realm and the external world.[109] As we have seen, he arrives at this picture of the relationship between thought and world through a consideration of the conditions that would make object-dependent thought possible. Object-dependence cannot be understood simply as a feature of the external world independently of the nature of thought itself; but neither can object-dependence be understood as bridging the gap between thought and world. For, in both cases, from the standpoint of the inner realm itself, there would be no directedness to the external world, no light from the outside. In that case, the relationship between thought and world would cease to be a relationship at all.

This notion of the interpenetration of thought and world is continued in the lectures of *Mind and World*, even though McDowell does not explicitly employ the language of interpenetration in the lectures.[110] The image of the interpenetration of the inner and outer realms is meant to forestall the separation of the realms; even in proposals where the supposed gap between the realms is bridged, McDowell finds it problematic just how a bridge, different in nature from one or both realms, can effect a connection at all. In *Mind and World* McDowell does not discuss object-dependent thought *per se* but he instead discusses the empirical content of thoughts. Nevertheless, the two ideas are closely related: both have to do with the relationship between the content of thoughts and the goings-on of the external world. He offers a picture in which mind and world are connected through an intimate cooperation in which the impressions of experience are in

[109] John McDowell, "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space," in *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
[110] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

their reception possessed of conceptual content. By virtue of such a picture, McDowell hopes to neutralize motivations for seeing the need to bring mind and world together.

5.1. *Dispelling the Tension: McDowell's Motivation*

In *Mind and World*, McDowell is concerned with philosophical anxieties about the connection between empirical thought and the external world. Specifically, the sort of connection he is concerned with is how empirical thought can be *rationally justified* by experience of the world. The metaphor he offers for this connection is experience as a tribunal to which empirical thought must answer if it is to be thought at all.[111] Here McDowell places thought in a normative context in the sense that the correctness or incorrectness of our empirical judgments depends, at least in part, on how things are in the world (pp. xi-xii). It is this normative context that frames *Mind and World*.

McDowell traces the familiar philosophical anxieties about the possibility of being in touch with the world to a tension between two opposing forces. On the one hand there is, as I have mentioned, the idea that experience serves as a tribunal by virtue of which the directedness of thought toward the world is made intelligible; thought aimed at the empirical world fails to make sense unless it is rationally justified by experience of that world. McDowell calls this position "minimal empiricism" (p. xvi). On the other hand, there is reason to deny that experience could serve as a tribunal at all. Rational justifications seem to belong to "the logical space of reasons" (a phrase of Wilfrid Sellars' that McDowell employs throughout *Mind and World*), that is, a space of reasons, warrants, and justifications. But the idea of experience as impressions from the world seems to belong to what McDowell terms "the logical space of nature," an entirely

[111] The metaphor of the tribunal of experience comes from W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 41.

different logical space outside that of warrants and justifications. If the notion of a tribunal involves providing rational justification, and if experience falls outside of the space of rational justification, then experience cannot be a tribunal after all (*ibid.*).

Throughout the course of *Mind and World*, McDowell considers three resolutions to this tension, two of which he argues are pitfalls to avoid and the third of which is his own position. The first resolution is to renounce minimal empiricism, to deny that experience plays a rationally justificatory role in empirical thought. According to this resolution, sense experience, conceived in terms of impressions, cannot act as a tribunal, and since minimal empiricism claims that it does so act, so much the worse for minimal empiricism. The second resolution opts for a version of naturalism in which the logical space of reasons is part of and included in the logical space of nature. Accordingly, "the normative relations that constitute the logical space of reasons can be reconstructed out of conceptual materials whose home is the logical space [of nature]" (p. xviii). He calls this position "bald naturalism," in contrast to the sort of naturalism that figures in his own resolution of the tension. McDowell's own resolution resituates the dichotomy of the logical space of reasons and that of nature. In effect, he argues that we should not pit the natural *per se* against the normative and urges a different conception of what the logical space of nature involves. I will give a more detailed discussion of these resolutions in turn, but first I want to say a few general things about McDowell's resolution to the tension he presents.

McDowell's approach to the philosophical anxieties mentioned above is not to answer head-on, as it were, questions that reflect the tension between reasons and nature, i.e., questions about the relationship between empirical thought and the empirical world.

Such questions, and, hence, answers to them, contain an implicit acceptance of the tension; they are reactions to the tension and, as reactions, depend on the presence of the tension in order to be counted as answers to it. As he claims in the Introduction to *Mind and World*, McDowell's aim, on the other hand, is to neutralize the tension itself instead of presupposing it in order to resolve it. Rather than attempt to answer the question "How is empirical content possible?" he wants to uncover the motivations that give rise to such a question and show that such motivations, once made explicit, lead to the impossibility of empirical content itself (p. xiii).

As I mentioned in the previous section, one of the reasons for including McDowell in this study is that he seems to be arguing transcendentally for the position he puts forth in *Mind and World*. One way in which I have characterized transcendental arguments is in terms of a certain question they are put to answer, a question of the form "How is _____ possible?" If McDowell is giving a transcendental argument for the possibility of empirical content in *Mind and World*, as I will argue in the next chapter, it would seem that he would be answering the question "How is empirical content possible?" However, he explicitly states in the introduction to *Mind and World* that he is *not* going to give an answer to that question (p. xxi). This unhappy situation apparently poses serious problems for my overall thesis.

But the situation need not be so unhappy. McDowell is concerned with a very particular sort of "How possible?" question, one that "expresses a distinctive kind of puzzlement, issuing from an inexplicit awareness of a background to one's reflection that, if made explicit, would yield an argument that the topic of the questions is not possible at all" (*ibid.*). The puzzlement issues from a certain background that ends up giving an "It's

not possible" answer to the question. The "How possible?" question is put forth as a challenge since, given this background, the thing in question (whatever that may be: experience, empirical thought, etc.) would not be possible. With this in mind, the question "How is empirical content possible?" asks something to the effect: *Given that* there is this tension between reasons and nature, how can we make sense of empirical content?

What McDowell aims to do in *Mind and World* is challenge the metaphysical background that gives rise to the puzzlement rather than answer the question *as posed*, i.e., as posed within the problematic background. He does not seem to be committed to (or commit himself to) the idea that *all* "How possible?" questions are asked within such a background. The fact that he is at such pains to make the qualification in the type of "How possible?" question he is exorcizing suggests that he sees a distinction among ways of asking or taking "How possible?" questions. If I can show that the "How possible?" question in my account of transcendental arguments is not the result of the problematic background that McDowell challenges, then it is possible that McDowell, even by his own lights, could be addressing the unproblematic "How possible?" question that transcendental arguments can be said to address.

The puzzlement about empirical thought creates a "context" (dialectical, perhaps) within which McDowell exorcizes it; but McDowell is not guilty of giving in to the background that leads to the puzzlement (and, therefore, the problematic way in which the "How possible?" question is asked). It is the same with transcendental arguments: the "How possible?" question they are addressing is not giving in to the problem-producing

background of the skeptic. Rather, transcendental arguments challenge that very background by showing it up as groundless.

So, yes, transcendental arguments address a "How possible?" question in the context of a puzzlement brought about by the skeptic, but it is the *skeptic*, not the transcendental argument, that is expressing the puzzlement and anxiety about *X*. The skeptic, too, can be said to answer a "How possible?" question, but from the position of one who already doubts *X*'s possibility. The skeptic's position is analogous to the sense of asking of the "How possible?" question that McDowell takes to be problematic. What the transcendental argument is doing is analogous to McDowell's exorcizing (not answering) of the background that leads to the puzzlement behind the "How possible?" question. Insofar as the analogy holds and the transcendental argument is addressing an unproblematic "How possible?" question, McDowell could also be said to address an unproblematic "How possible?" question about empirical thought, which is precisely what I think he is doing in *Mind and World*. It is not that he fails to recognize that he is answering a "How possible?" question or that he is not answering *any* type of "How possible?" question. He is simply concerned in the Introduction to show what sort of "How possible?" question he is *not* answering, and prepares the way for the question to be addressed without presupposing an answer to it.

It should also be noted that McDowell does not find transcendental arguments in general to be problematic. He applauds the cogency of at least one transcendental argument, which he describes explicitly in terms of conditions of possibility.[112] This affirms the connection I have made in this dissertation between arguments made in terms

[112] John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

of conditions of possibility and transcendental arguments. It also strengthens my position that insofar as McDowell argues in *Mind and World* in terms of conditions of possibility, he is offering a transcendental argument.

McDowell is certainly concerned with the possibility of empirical content. He is concerned to show in *Mind and World* that certain ways of picturing the relationship between thought and experience lead to the unfortunate position that empirical content becomes impossible. In particular, he sets up an oscillation between two positions on the relationship that attempt to defend the legitimacy of empirical thought. He then goes on to point out the failures of these positions and argues how his own position provides for the possibility of empirical thought.

5.2. *Overcoming the Oscillation*

Most of the lectures in *Mind and World* are taken up with setting up a natural oscillation between two positions on the relationship between empirical thought and experience. One of these positions is a coherentism that fails to acknowledge an external rational constraint on thought; his exemplar here is Donald Davidson. The metaphor McDowell employs throughout is that such a position represents thought as a frictionless spinning in the void, cut off from rational constraint of the external world. The other position, exemplified by Gareth Evans, marks a recoil to the Myth of the Given where friction is ensured by a constraint believed to come from outside thought but which fails to offer rational justifications for thought.

The background for the oscillation, the way in which McDowell focuses the discussion, is put in terms of "a familiar philosophical outlook, which Donald Davidson has described as a dualism of scheme and content" or, better, a "dualism of scheme and

Given" (pp. 3-4). This dualism marks a distinction between the play of concepts in thought (scheme) and "bits of experiential intake" (the Given) that are called upon to supply the content of empirical thought apart from the play of concepts. Why, McDowell asks, are scheme and Given placed over against each other? What is the motivation for the separation?

Enter Kant. "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75). The first half of Kant's remark, that thoughts without concepts are empty, points out that unless there were something to think about, some content for the thought to be about, there would be no thought (or thinking) at all. Thought would simply be a play of concepts, what McDowell calls a "frictionless spinning in the void." The second half of Kant's remark, that intuitions without concepts are blind, points to what would supply the content: intuitions, or bits of experiential intake. For Kant, the fact that thoughts are not empty and intuitions are not blind arises out of the intimate interplay between concepts and intuitions. This interplay, in Kantian terminology, is between the understanding and sensibility, between spontaneity and receptivity. For Kant, then, the two aspects, broadly taken, of scheme and Given are conceptually distinct yet practically cooperative.

McDowell finds this picture of the cooperation between the "inner" and the "outer" in Kant quite attractive, although he will exploit it in a manner different from Kant. I will say more about what he finds problematic in Kant later in the chapter. But for now, the picture of an interplay between spontaneity and receptivity marks the key feature of how McDowell proposes an escape from the oscillation between a rationally unconstrained coherentism and the idea of the Given. It is in this sense that he thinks

"Kant should still have a central place in our discussion of the way thought bears on reality" (p. 3) But we must first consider what gives rise to the oscillation.

The term "spontaneity," as a description of one aspect of Kant's picture, is quite instructive. For McDowell, spontaneity captures two central and crucial aspects of the space of concepts: freedom and rational relations. These will weigh in heavily as McDowell unfolds his position in the lectures that make up *Mind and World*. But a consideration of these important aspects of the understanding shows how they give rise to the dualism of scheme and Given that McDowell wants to overcome. If the freedom of the understanding is seen as total, if there is no constraint from outside thought, then it seems that empirical thought would not have the grounding in external reality that it would presumably need if such thought is to "constitute warranted judgements about the world" (p. 5). The dualism of scheme and Given is a response to the worry that our empirical judgments about the world would not be rationally constrained by the goings-on in the world due to the complete freedom of the understanding. The self-containedness resulting from this freedom is compromised by making reference to the Given as the external rational constraint on empirical judgments or beliefs.

The introduction of the Given as an external rational constraint on the conceptual sphere seems to be enough to allay the worries about thought's bearing on the world. The picture suggested here is that the impingements of the world that constitute the Given are external to the sphere of concepts. And yet, since these impingements constitute rational relations, that is, since they serve as ultimate justifications for empirical judgments, they stand within the space of reasons. Thus, the space of reasons, or of rational relations, extends beyond that of the play of concepts. This picture of the role of the Given in

justifications of empirical thought and judgments is tempting; “the extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought.” But however tempting this picture is, McDowell claims that “it is useless for its purpose” (p. 7).

McDowell employs a number of special metaphors in describing this appeal to the Given, some of which we have already mentioned. There is the *space* of concepts, contained by the *boundary* within which concepts and rational relations are at play. This space of concepts is *circumscribed within* the space of reasons, so that, since the whole of the space of concepts sits within a portion of the space of reasons, the play of concepts, or spontaneity, also involves rational relations and justifications. But there is a portion of the space of reasons that sits outside the boundary of the conceptual; it is this non-conceptual space of rational relations that accepts impingements of brute experience at *its* boundary. These bits of unconceptualized experience in the space of reasons that lie outside the space of concepts are then able to provide justifications for what is going on in the space of concepts, since both spaces share the rational relations necessary for warranted judgments.

The problem that McDowell finds with this picture stems from his claim that “we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted [i.e., rational relations] except as relations within the space of concepts” (*ibid.*). The implication of this claim is that the supposed non-conceptual portion of the space of reasons that houses bits of experiential intake cannot really provide justification for judgments (which are made within the boundaries of the space of concepts) at all. In McDowell’s words, “the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted

justifications" (p. 8). It may then be that we cannot be blamed or held culpable for the impacts of outer experience on the boundary of the extended space of reasons. The causal impacts of the world, to exploit the metaphor of force that McDowell uses, are imposed upon us in receptivity so that we cannot help but have these bits of experience. They occur outside the space of concepts, outside our control. For McDowell, we can draw only a *negative* conclusion from this appeal to the Given—we cannot be blamed for the inward influence of the world—whereas we were seeking a *positive justification* for our judgments. An appeal to the Given, therefore, cannot provide justifications for empirical thought.

But, continues McDowell, if we reject the Given, we seem to be forced back into the unhappy position to which the idea of the Given was supposed to be an answer: the lack of an external constraint on empirical thought and judgment. An oscillation between two unacceptable positions results: On the one hand, there is the picture of maintaining an important role for the freedom of spontaneity but a failure to accommodate a role for receptivity as an external constraint. On the other hand, there is the picture of an external constraint on empirical thought through receptivity, but one which fails to supply the rational warrant we were looking for in the constraint.

The way of escape from this oscillation, McDowell argues, is to view the relevant conceptual capacities as being drawn on in receptivity itself (p. 9). In effect, McDowell is proposing that we do away with the space of reasons that lies outside the space of concepts in the picture brought about by an appeal to the Given. We should abolish the idea that receptivity provides bits of brute experience *upon which* one's conceptual capacities act; we should instead grasp the thought that "receptivity does not make an

even notionally separable contribution to the cooperation [between receptivity and spontaneity]" (*ibid.*). This answer reflects the Kantian insight that McDowell began with: intuition, experiential intake, is *already* riddled with conceptual content; experience *qua* experience *already* involves conceptual capacities.

The picture McDowell draws as an escape from the oscillation between the two unsatisfactory positions above invites an apparent conflict between the *activity* of spontaneity and the *passivity* of experience. Supposedly, in McDowell's picture, the passive nature of experience provides the limit or constraint on the freedom of spontaneity—the necessary friction to stop the frictionless spinning in the void—without making an appeal to the Given. How can there be *both* activity and passivity *in the same space*? McDowell's answer, in effect, is simply to point out that if it were *not* the case that both the passivity of receptivity and the activity of spontaneity were at work in the same space, we would fall back into the same problems from which his picture is an escape.

Should the space of spontaneity, for instance, not extend all the way out to the boundary of conceptual capacities, two things would result. First, the conceptual capacities that are supposed to be at work in receptivity would cease to be recognizable as conceptual capacities at all if they were at work only in operations of receptivity. "They would not be recognizable as conceptual capacities at all unless they could also be exercised in active thinking, that is, in ways that do provide a good fit for the idea of spontaneity," which is precisely what would *not* be the case if such conceptual capacities were exercised *outside* of the space of spontaneity but within that of receptivity (p. 11). Secondly, restricting the scope of spontaneity would just be another version of the Myth

of the Given, which is what McDowell finds so problematic in the first place. Instead of rational relations being present apart from spontaneity, as in the original formulation of the Myth, conceptual capacities operate in experience apart from spontaneity. But, says McDowell, talk of the *operation* of conceptual capacities outside of the active thinking involved in spontaneity "is mere word-play" (p. 13). Such conceptual capacities are not really conceptual capacities at all but are merely nominally so. Here, as with the original formulation of the Myth, the impingements of "so-called conceptual deliverances of sensibility" yield only exculpations where we wanted justifications (*ibid.*).

It is difficult to see a way out of the oscillation that McDowell describes; it is hard to consider a third option when faced with a choice between an unconstrained coherentism and an idea of the Given that fails to supply the needed rational justifications for thought. The reasons for the difficulty are, claims McDowell, deeply rooted. In order to illustrate the blind spot one might have for his escape route, McDowell considers the response of Davidson.

McDowell notes that he and Davidson are on similar grounds in some respects. Both are clear that impacts of experience from outside the space of concepts will fail to result in justifications for judgments and beliefs. Both deny that the space of reasons extends beyond the space of concepts. Both resist falling back into the Myth of the Given. What is problematic in Davidson's position, according to McDowell, is the idea that experience must be extra-conceptual and, therefore, outside the space of reasons. Experience, then, cannot contribute rational warrants for thought and thinking; instead, experience enjoys merely causal relevance. The only thing that can serve as a rational justification for a belief, says Davidson, is another belief—thus Davidson's coherentism.

This is problematic for McDowell insofar as it denies "experience any justificatory role, and the coherentist upshot is a version of the conception of spontaneity as frictionless, the very thing that makes the idea of the Given attractive" (p. 14). Whereas Davidson thinks that the causal connection between thought and the external world is enough to provide the needed friction for thought, McDowell contends that only a justificatory, and not merely causal, connection will allow empirical thought to come to rest. So, rather than help to avoid the way of thinking that leads to worries about empirical thought, Davidson's position endorses it (p. 15).

An analysis of Davidson's position along McDowellian lines thus invites a recoil back to the idea of the Given rather than an escape from the oscillation. This situation is exacerbated by the "confinement imagery" used by Davidson. McDowell cites Davidson: "Of course we can't get outside our skins to find out what is causing the internal happenings of which we are aware."[113] This is a confinement to the sphere of our beliefs and, thus, a severing of a justificatory connection between beliefs and the world. Davidson thinks he can prevent a recoil to the idea of the Given by way of his (transcendental) argument that "belief is in its nature veridical."[114] But even if his argument works (McDowell does not consider its cogency), McDowell insists that it "starts too late to certify Davidson's position as a genuine escape from the oscillation."[115] Again, what is needed to ensure the right sort of connection between thought and world is a position in which experience provides justifications, and not merely exculpations, for thought. It is such a justificatory connection that Davidson's position cannot provide. The

[113] McDowell, "Singular Thought," 312.
[114] Ibid., 314.
[115] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 17.

Myth of the Given is not called upon simply to combat what McDowell calls a "shallow skepticism," but to combat the worry that

> if spontaneity is not subject to *rational* constraint from outside, . . . then we cannot make it intelligible to ourselves how exercises of spontaneity can represent the world at all. Thoughts without intuitions are empty, and the point is not met by crediting intuitions with a causal impact on thoughts; we can have empirical content in our picture only if we can acknowledge that thoughts and intuitions are rationally connected. By rejecting that, Davidson undermines his right to the idea that his purportedly reassuring argument starts from, the idea of a body of beliefs. In that case his attempt to disarm the confinement imagery does not work, and his position is exposed as a version of one phase in the oscillation. A genuine escape would require that we avoid the Myth of the Given without renouncing the claim that experience is a rational constraint on thinking. (pp. 17-18)

5.3. *Escape From Idealism*

In Lecture II, McDowell considers "an objection on the score of idealism" to his position in order, he hopes, to clarify what he has offered in Lecture I. His view, as we have seen, says that the world is perceptible in experience, but this perception does not happen outside the conceptual sphere. Reality, although independent of thinking, "is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere" (p. 26). Hence, locating perceptible reality within the conceptual sphere may seem like a version of idealism, in that it seems to "slight the independence of reality." McDowell makes very short work of this objection: it reflects a false dilemma between the coherentist denial of a rational constraint on thinking from outside and an appeal to the Given. And if these are the only two choices, then of course it will seem that any position falling short of an appeal to the Given will be considered a slighting of reality and, thus, a version of idealism. The point of Lecture II is to see just how McDowell's position marks a viable third option and an escape from the charge of idealism.

He first puts the point in a way reminiscent of his earlier essays:[116] There is no ontological gap or distance, implicit in the idea of thought, between thought and the world. There is distance, in a sense, when one thinks something falsely about the world; nevertheless, it remains that "when one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case."[117] Now, the objector might insist that we can think what is the case because, true to an idealist attitude, what is the case is simply a reflection of our thought. In his response, McDowell notes an ambiguity in the term "thought" that could give rise to this idealist objection. "If we say that there must be a rational constraint on thought from outside it, so as to ensure a proper acknowledgement of the independence of reality, we put ourselves at the mercy of a familiar kind of ambiguity. 'Thought' can mean the *act* of thinking; but it can also mean the *content* of a piece of thinking: what someone thinks" (p. 28).

If the world were a reflection of the act of our thinking, then the objection would certainly stand. "It would indeed slight the independence of reality if we equated facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities—acts of thinking" (*ibid*.). However, the absence of an ontological gap between thought and world does not necessitate a priority of thought over world: the absence does not require a picture where the world is simply a reflection or shadow of thinking. But, continues McDowell, it would not slight reality in the least to suggest that "facts in general are capable of being embraced in thought in exercises of spontaneity" (*ibid.*). In this latter case, facts are not equated with acts of thinking but with thinkable contents that are impressed upon perceivers.

The sort of picture that does not shy away from an ontological connection between thought and world and yet wholeheartedly endorses the independence of reality

[116] McDowell, "Singular Thought" and "Truth-Value Gaps."
[117] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 27.

(thereby countering the idealist objection) is precisely the sort of picture McDowell is urging. McDowell claims that facts, when thought, already have conceptual content. The idealist objection takes this to mean that the constraint of the world on thought is thus essentially mental, since the constraint comes from within thinking. But when "thought" refers to thinkable content rather than the act of thinking, as in McDowell's position, "the constraint comes from outside *thinking*, but not from outside what is *thinkable*" (*ibid.*). How the world is must be capable of being embraced by acts of thinking. This is not to say, however, that facts about the world also have conceptual content when they are *not* thought. All that is being said about facts when they are not thought is that they are conceptualizable, possible contents of thought. So, the world cannot serve as a constraint from outside what is thinkable; and yet the passivity of experience in McDowell's position ensures that the constraint *does* come from outside the activity of thinking.

It is in the midst of his explication of how the world is embraceable in thought that McDowell presents what I take to be his initial formulation of a transcendental way of arguing. He says: "[O]ur picture of the understanding's equipment could not be what it needs to be, a picture of a system of concepts and conceptions with substantial empirical content, if it were not already part of the picture that the system is the medium within which one engages in active thought that is rationally responsive to the deliverances of experience" (pp. 33-34). Essentially, McDowell argues here that unless the picture of the relationship between mind and world were the one he is proposing, empirical thought would be impossible. This is the point he has been leading up to in the previous lectures. He has considered other positions and shown them in one way or another to fail as a grounding for a viable picture of empirical thought. Through a consideration of the

charge of idealism against his own position, McDowell shows how it succeeds where the others fail. Later in this study I will discuss in more detail the transcendental nature of his way of arguing. Now I want to consider some of his critical remarks on Kant's transcendental idealism.

I have suggested in an earlier chapter that in order to do justice to the contemporary accounts and instances of transcendental arguments, there should be a relatively clear line connecting them with a certain way of arguing that shows up in Kant. McDowell has freely employed both Kantian terminology and a Kantian picture of the relationship between spontaneity and receptivity. For both McDowell and Kant, there must be a cooperation between the two in order to have the appropriate justification for and possibility of empirical content. McDowell has been urging that the contribution receptivity (or experience) makes in the cooperation must not be separable from the contribution of spontaneity. This is what McDowell means when he credits experience with conceptual content in receptivity. The question he puts before us is whether or not Kant credits receptivity with a separable contribution. His answer is both "No" and "Yes"; the difference in the answers depends on the perspective from which the question is asked.

From the perspective of experience, the Kantian picture does not have receptivity making a contribution separable from spontaneity. To hold that it does is to agree to a version of the Myth of the Given, in which the space of concepts is grounded in something extra-conceptual outside of it. For Kant, however, "[i]n experience we take in, through impacts on the senses, elements in a reality that is precisely not outside the sphere of thinkable content" (p. 41). From Kant's transcendental perspective, however,

there does seem to be a separable contribution made by receptivity. In this transcendental picture, there is a "supersensible reality" (*noumena*) that supplies impacts on receptivity and yet is independent of our thinking in a stronger way than the picture McDowell has been recommending. Once the noumenal realm, the "supersensible world," is brought into the picture, it is cast as the "real" reality that is "really" independent of our thinking. The phenomenal realm, the "empirical world," ceases to appear so real and independent after all. Kant's introduction of this transcendental perspective seems to undermine any headway, by McDowell's lights, that Kant made within the empirical framework. McDowell summarizes: "It is as if Kant were saying that although an exculpation cannot do duty for a justification, and although, empirically speaking, we can have justifications for empirical judgements, still the best we can have for empirical judgements, transcendentally speaking, is exculpations" (p. 43). McDowell finds this aspect of Kant's philosophy "profoundly unsatisfactory" and identifies it as what actually led his successors to make Kant's philosophy consistently idealistic by dropping the supersensible out of the picture altogether.

McDowell finds Kant's "transcendentalism" problematic in terms of the metaphysical picture Kant ends up with. He does not fault Kant, at least directly, in terms of the way in which Kant argued but with the ultimate conclusion drawn. There is no inconsistency, then, in saying both that McDowell criticizes a "transcendental turn" in Kant's philosophy and that McDowell, like Kant, argues transcendentally. The former has Kant's metaphysics in mind; the latter, his way of arguing.

5.4. *The Conceptual Content of Perceptual Experience*

McDowell is putting forth a position in which impressions of experience, made by a world independent of thinking, already, in their very receptions, have conceptual content. In Lecture III he defends the conceptual nature of the content of experience. Just as in Lecture II he clarified his position in light of the idealist objection, so in Lecture III McDowell focuses the discussion by considering the position of Gareth Evans on the issue of the content of perceptual experience. McDowell defends his own position against Evans' opposing claim that the content of perceptual experience is *non*-conceptual.

On Evans' view, a perceptual experience is a non-conceptual informational state that is the result of the effects of perception on the subject's informational system. A subject possesses the capacities (informational system) to receive information about the world (perception), information that is itself non-conceptual but is nevertheless available to a faculty of spontaneity. The availability of the non-conceptual information states to the play of concepts allows judgments to be made that are based on perceptual experience, judgments in which concepts will be exercised. There are, then, two different states of the subject, according to Evans: one is an informational state with non-conceptual content (experience); the other is a cognitive state with conceptual content (judgment) (pp. 47-48).

Evans' picture, it should by now be clear, is in contrast to McDowell's. Essentially, according to the latter, perceptual experience *qua* perceptual experience already has conceptual content. Judgments based on such experience do not bring some new content into the picture. It should also be clear that McDowell sees Evans' view as a version of the Myth of the Given. The point at issue is the (even notionally) separable

contribution of receptivity to its cooperation with spontaneity. McDowell has been insisting that in order to have the proper external constraint on thinking, we must conceive of experiences as already involving the conceptual capacities at work in spontaneity, so that we can have rational justifications for beliefs and judgments instead of merely exculpations.

Now it may seem that since Evans makes his non-conceptual information states part of the informational system, of which the exercise of concepts is also a part, such states are ipso facto available to conceptualization. But inclusion in the same informational system is not enough to provide justifications where we need them. There must be something about the nature of experience that opens it up to conceptualization, and McDowell thinks that something is spontaneity's figuring in the determination of the content of experience. But in Evans' view, the content of experience is determined separately from spontaneity, and this fact commits him to a version of the Myth of the Given, where experience, supposedly providing a grounding for thought, remains insulated from spontaneity, the space of rational relations. Receptivity's being thus insulated and making a separable contribution to the so-called cooperation, the rational relations and justifications available to spontaneity cannot reach across the boundary to experience.

This isolation of spontaneity, and thus the isolation of the space of rational relations and rational warrant, is crucial. Evans, says McDowell, "credits experience with representational content, even independently of the availability of spontaneity in virtue of which they count as experiences" (p. 52). This might seem to avert the charge, along Kantian lines, that such experiences (intuitions) are blind. Even though experiences, on

Evans' view, are without conceptual content, they are not without representational content. Their being representational is supposed to allow such content to count as reason-constituting. But, contends McDowell, this use of the word "content" as reason-constituting and yet outside the boundary of spontaneity is fraudulent.

> If these [rational] relations are to be genuinely recognizable as reason-constituting, we cannot confine spontaneity within a boundary across which the relations are supposed to hold. The relations themselves must be able to come under the self-scrutiny of active thinking. . . . The label ["content" that Evans gives to his non-conceptual informational states] serves to mask the fact that the relations between experiences and judgements are being conceived to meet inconsistent demands: to be such as to fit experiences to be reasons for judgements, while being outside the reach of rational inquiry" (p. 53).

No matter what sort of content Evans thinks experiences can have, so long as there is no contribution on the part of spontaneity to that content, so long as spontaneity and, consequently, rational relations themselves are isolated from the content of experience, such content will not be able to provide the needed rational grounding for beliefs and judgments.

Having given his main objection to Evans' position, McDowell goes on to consider three motivations that Evans appeals to, one of which McDowell considers at more length in a later lecture. These motivations do not stem from the "usual epistemological" one that McDowell emphasizes in the lectures, namely, "the recoil from a picture that threatens to leave empirical thinking out of touch with reality, and so not recognizable as empirical thinking at all" (p. 56). Insofar as Evans' view marks a version of the Myth of the Given, it is not for the reasons McDowell has been discussing up to this point in the lectures. So, in addition to pointing out how Evans' view is contrary to his own, McDowell sets out to consider, and neutralize, some motivations for Evans' view.

The first motivation for Evans' position has to do with the idea that our experience of the world is much richer than it seems our conceptual equipment will allow. McDowell, following Evans, discusses this point in terms of color experience. Phenomenologically, so the motivation goes, our experience of color seems to be more "finely grained" than our more coarsely grained concepts allow; experience of color is more detailed than our color concepts, like "red," "brown," or even "heather gray," make room for. One can discriminate shades of color more finely than one's broad concepts of shades reflects. A good explanation for this, along lines that Evans finds impressive, is that experience houses content that is (at least partly) non-conceptual. There is an aspect of fine-grainedness in experience that cannot be accounted for by the play of our coarser-grained concepts.

This picture of non-conceptual experiential content clearly flies in the face of McDowell's position being urged in the lectures. He has been arguing throughout *Mind and World* that concepts are already involved in the content of experience in a way that precludes the notion of non-conceptual content. All experiential content is conceptual; it all falls under the rational justificatory relations at work in spontaneity. But the motivation for the picture of non-conceptual content must be dealt with by McDowell. It seems to provide a problem for his position, since it leads so easily into a contrary view.

McDowell incorporates this apparent counterevidence into his position by questioning the color concepts to which our thinking is taken to be restricted. In addition to color concepts like "red," "blue," and "heather gray," it is possible to acquire the concept of a shade of color in general, which can be applied with as much fineness of grain as one's visual experience presents. There need not be a linguistic tag any more

determinate than "*that* shade" in order for the concept to capture colors adequately in as much detail and with as much determinateness as experience presents.

An initial response to this may be that the concept of "*that* shade" really isn't a concept at all. It is simply an ostensive pointing-to something *in*determinate, to which we attach the *in*determinate expression "*that* shade." The ostensive nature of this act restricts the use of the expression to cases where what the expression is supposed to capture is available. The expression, being an expression of a color concept, would be restricted to the occasions of its being uttered and no further (p. 57). Thus, the expression itself would not be available in cases where the corresponding sample were not present. If this were true, how, asks McDowell, could this expression be called an expression of a color *concept* at all? Concepts, he has been urging, are part of an active network within thought and thinking. But if a so-called concept is available only in the ostensive fashion just mentioned, it is not thereby an active part of a network available to thought and thinking. Thus, it is not really a concept at all.

"We can ensure that what we have in view is genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity if we insist that the very same capacity to embrace a colour in mind can in principle persist beyond the duration of the experience itself" (*ibid.*). McDowell insists that such is the case regarding his "*that* shade" concept. It can be given linguistic expression in the future (although, McDowell admits, the duration may be short-lived) should a "suitable sample" be present; or it could be "exploitable . . . in thoughts based on memory" (p. 58). McDowell's point here is that the very same concept, and not just an altogether different ostensive expression of "*that* shade," is at work across experiences and through time, if only a short time. This persistence ensures that it is a concept in the

strong sense McDowell means: a concept that is "rationally integrated into spontaneity" (*ibid.*).

McDowell makes a concession of sorts when he agrees that "we do not have ready, in advance of the course our colour experience actually takes, as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate" (*ibid.*). This is just to acknowledge, with the motivation above, that our advance concepts of "red," "blue," "heather gray" and the like are not enough to do justice to the fineness of grain and sharpness of discrimination exhibited in experience. "But," he continues, "if we have the concept of a shade, our conceptual powers are fully adequate to capture our colour experience in all its determinate detail" (*ibid.*). The question, ultimately, is not whether we have the necessary *advance concepts* to deal with the detail of experience, but whether we have the necessary *conceptual capacity* to do so. McDowell concedes that we do not have the former, yet he insists that we possess the latter, which is all we need to counter the motivation for taking Evans' picture as the most explanatorily viable one.

The question of advance concepts versus conceptual capacity highlights the Kantian flavor of McDowell's position. For Kant, experience involves the cooperation of sensibility and the understanding, the coming together of impacts from outside and the conceptual activity of spontaneity. The potential, as it were, of the categories of the understanding become actualized in experience. Similarly, McDowell notes that the "*that* shade" concept is a recognitional capacity, whose potential is actualized by the "impact on sensibility that is supposed to be captured by the associated concept" (p. 59). It is not so much a general concept available in advance of the experience as a catch-all concept with no real determinacy itself. The demonstrative (the "*that*") is instructive, but not

ostensive; it is restricted to the experience—in the sense that its capacity to capture a certain shade of color is initiated by the color instance present—in order to permit the necessary fineness of grain, but it is not restricted to the occasion of its expression.

The second motivation for Evans' view that McDowell considers is somewhat related to the first. The first marked a failure of one's conceptual repertoire to account fully for the determinateness of experience. The second asserts the belief-independence of states of the informational system; that is, "[t]he content of a perceptual experience cannot be explained as the content of an appropriate actual belief, since there may be no belief with a suitable content" (p. 60). Optical illusions provide examples of this: the illusion may continue presenting a particular content or appearance even when one has ceased to believe that it is as it appears. Evans puts the notion of belief squarely in the realm of judgments and rational relations—something belonging to the realm of spontaneity. Of course, McDowell has been urging this very thing in his lectures. But Evans uses the point about belief to separate the content of experience from the content of belief, thereby insulating experience from the activity of spontaneity.

Rather than try to incorporate the supposed threat to his position by the optical illusion type of situation (as he did regarding color recognition), McDowell simply points out that the inference Evans makes from such situations to the independence of perceptual experience from the play of spontaneity (belief) betrays a blindness to McDowell's own position. The inference results from the familiar false dilemma that McDowell mentions in previous lectures: if conceptual capacities cannot be exercised in experience, then either experience is not rationally related to empirical thinking

(Davidson) or the rational relations to empirical thinking are extra-conceptual (Myth of the Given) (pp. 62-63). Evans opts for the second horn of the dilemma.

5.5. *Rethinking Nature*

The third and final motivation, which McDowell considers in more detail in Lectures IV and VI, might take the form of the following analogical argument. We, who possess conceptual capacities, share perceptual experience with creatures who do not have conceptual capacities (at least not in the "demanding" sense that McDowell means). Insofar as we share perceptual experience or states of the informational system, that experience must be the same in both us and the creatures in question. Furthermore, insofar as the content of the informational states are non-conceptual for the creatures, they must also possess non-conceptual content, as perceptual experience, for us as well.

McDowell agrees that we have something in common with animals, namely "perceptual sensitivity to features of our environment" (p. 64). But it does not follow from this shared perceptual sensitivity that the *form* of the sensitivity is the same in both cases. Our modern mindset tempts us to separate rationality from the realm of nature *per se* and to think of the core of perceptual experience as non-conceptual. The idea here is that we share non-conceptual perceptual capacities with "mere animals"; but we human beings have the additional ability to conceptualize the perceptual content. But "if we do take this line, there is no satisfactory way to understand the role of the supposed core in our perceptual lives. We are confronted with the dilemma whose horns are embraced by Davidson and Evans" (*ibid.*). In order to avoid the dilemma, McDowell goes on to suggest, we must see human beings as having perceptual sensitivity *in a special form*

distinct from other animals'—a form in which it is *natural* (i.e., a part of nature) that "spontaneity might permeate our perceptual experience" (p. 70).

In Lecture IV, McDowell argues for a different conception of nature, for which Aristotle's ethical writings supply a model, that gives shape to his insistence throughout the lectures that we must have conceptual capacities at work in perceptual experience in order for that experience to have a rational constraint on our thought and in order to make empirical thought possible. For Aristotle, virtues are neither acquired by nature nor are they acquired against nature. Virtues arise in us by habit and practice, not by nature. Yet, we have the natural capacity and ability to acquire virtues; thus, their acquisition is not against nature. Furthermore, such capacity and ability is unique to us as human beings. So, practical wisdom—living a life of virtue—is neither given by nature nor are its demands reducible to facts that are independent of the virtuous life. In this sense, practical wisdom enjoys a certain autonomy: "The thought that the demands of ethics are real is something that comes into view only within the kind of thinking that conceives practical situations in terms of such demands" (p. 83). Yet practical wisdom arises within the realm of nature in terms of natural capacity and ability. Practical wisdom becomes second nature to us.

It is along these Aristotelian lines that McDowell wants to rethink a conception of nature that has been in place since the rise of modern science. The predominant medieval outlook took nature itself to be saturated with rationality or, in terminology that McDowell employs, to belong in the logical space of reasons. With modern science came a sort of intelligibility where rational relations are extruded and "natural law" reigns.

Nature is thus conceived as the realm of law. The problem with this modern picture is that

> we put at risk the very idea that spontaneity might characterize the workings of our sensibility as such. The faculty of spontaneity is the understanding, our capacity to recognize and bring into being the kind of intelligibility that is proper to meaning. We disclose this kind of intelligibility by placing things in a logical space that is *sui generis* [i.e., the logical space of reasons], by comparison with the realm of law. But sensibility, as I said, is part of our nature, part of what we share with mere animals. If that means its operations are what they are by virtue of their positions in the realm of law, it can seem incoherent to suppose that they might be shaped by concepts. (p. 72)

McDowell's solution involves putting spontaneity and rationality back into nature, while also keeping spontaneity autonomous and *sui generis* in its separation from the realm of law: "We need to bring responsiveness to meaning back into the operations of our natural sentient capacities as such, even while we insist that responsiveness to meaning cannot be captured in naturalistic terms, so long as "naturalistic" is glossed in terms of the realm of law" (p. 77); "to see exercises of spontaneity as natural, we do not need to integrate spontaneity-related concepts into the structure of the realm of law; we need to stress their role in capturing patterns in a way of living" (p. 78). The Aristotelian notion of second nature, for McDowell's purposes, makes it natural, i.e., legitimate within the realm of nature (but *not* within the realm of law), for our conceptual capacities to be at work in our perceptual experiences. "In Aristotle's conception of human beings, rationality is integrally part of their animal nature, and the conception is neither naturalistic in the modern sense (there is no hint of reductiveness or foundationalism) nor fraught with philosophical anxiety" (p. 109).

The essential fact to grasp about McDowell's quasi-Aristotelian solution to the problem of the possibility of empirical thought is that it reflects a rational justificatory

connection between thought and reality. In the next chapter, I will complete the task of showing that McDowell is arguing transcendentally for his solution.

5.6. *Conclusion*

In *Mind and World*, McDowell considers how empirical thought can be rationally justified by experience of the world. He uncovers certain philosophical anxieties about the possibility of rational justification for empirical thought and traces these anxieties to a tension. On the one hand, it seems that experience serves as a tribunal by virtue of which world-directed thought is justified. On the other hand, experience doesn't seem connected in the right way to thought-life: the latter resides in the logical space of reasons while the former makes its home in the logical space of nature, neither of which are related (at least by way of justificatory relations). Consequently, it does not seem that experience can serve as a rational justification of empirical thought after all.

This tension gives rise to two responses that McDowell finds problematic but to which one is naturally drawn. One response, a coherentism exemplified by Davidson that reserves a place for the freedom of spontaneity, fails to acknowledge the need for a rational constraint on thought by experience. The other response, exemplified by Evans, is a recoil to the Myth of the Given in which bits of experience are thought to offer the rational constraint necessary to resolve the tension. It is easy, claims McDowell, when considering problems with one response to get pulled to the other position and thus to get caught in a seemingly interminable oscillation between problematic positions. It seems, for instance, that in order for empirical thought to be possible, intelligible, or justified, there must be constraint from the world; thus the absolute freedom that Davidson's position gives to the understanding and its rational justificatory relations appears

untenable. But a position like Evans' also fails to provide necessary rational constraint on thought: the bits of Given that are offered as the basis of justification are completely outside the space of reasons and so are unable to offer rational justification for empirical thought.

McDowell's own response attempts to escape this oscillation while also arguing for a position that makes empirical thought possible. This position preserves the important Kantian insight of spontaneity's freedom and autonomy, not reduced to explanation in terms of the realm of law. Yet, McDowell's position shows the necessity of thought's reaching all the way to the boundaries of experience and of experiential intake being already riddled with conceptual content. Only with such a picture in hand, he claims, can experience serve as a rational constraint on and justification for world-directed thought. Only such a picture of the relationship between mind and world can make empirical thought possible. McDowell then clarifies what such a picture might look like with his quasi-Aristotelian view of human nature.

In this chapter, I have attempted to set the stage for my task of showing McDowell to be arguing transcendentally in *Mind and World*. I have argued that McDowell is interested in establishing that empirical thought is indeed possible and, subsequently, can be rationally justified by experiential intake from the world. In the next chapter, I will complete the task of showing that McDowell argues transcendentally for his position and then suggest how McDowell can be used to defend ambitious transcendental arguments.

CHAPTER 6

THE CALL OF METAPHYSICS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed a portion of McDowell's writings dealing with the relationship between thought and world. I showed there that he is concerned to establish a certain justificatory connection between these two supposedly disparate realms. I have included this analysis of McDowell in the present study in order to counter a certain influential criticism of transcendental arguments, a criticism that assumes a justificatory gap between appearance and reality. The criticism is meant to call into question the aim of "ambitious" or "strong" transcendental arguments, which purport to reach non-psychological conclusions, i.e., metaphysical conclusions about the independent world, from psychological premises, i.e., statements about belief or experience.

This criticism has led many to deny the validity of ambitious transcendental arguments and to focus, instead, on a tamer "modest" type of transcendental argument in which the aim is simply to draw necessary psychological conclusions from psychological premises. While I do not deny the legitimacy and usefulness of such modest transcendental arguments, I call upon McDowell in my defense of ambitious transcendental arguments. In the present chapter, I will discuss how McDowell's position provides such a defense.

I will also argue that McDowell's position follows from a transcendental argument that he gives in *Mind and World*. McDowell's transcendental argument will serve as an exemplar illustrating the key point made by Stine and Genova, contra Stroud, that verification principles follow from and are justified by transcendental arguments. This will also aid my defense of ambitious transcendental arguments against Stroudian criticism. I will then consider some potential problems with this approach to the validity of ambitious transcendental arguments and mark fruitful avenues for future research.

In the opening chapters of the dissertation, I outlined some common and essential features of transcendental arguments, the chief of which is that they argue on the basis of conditions of possibility. This seemed to be the best way to describe the uniqueness of transcendental arguments. There are difficulties in trying to pin down a unique logical form for transcendental arguments, as the different accounts outlined in Chapter Two indicate; nevertheless, certain common characteristics can be discerned.

Transcendental arguments, as deductive arguments, display a certain inferential necessity, but they are set apart from other deductive arguments. They are distinctive in that the progression of these arguments in terms of conditions of possibility, or presupposition, is central to the inferences of transcendental arguments and is enough to set them apart from garden variety deductions. Not only is a unique logical form insufficient to guarantee the uniqueness of transcendental arguments *qua* arguments; neither will the subject matter of transcendental arguments be enough to establish their uniqueness. Their subject matter typically deals with epistemic notions, but so might the subject matter of non-transcendental arguments. Transcendental arguments have been given for a wide range of things, many of which I have noted in previous chapters. What

makes an argument transcendental is neither its logical form nor its subject matter *per se*, but the way in which the argument proceeds: on the basis of a consideration of conditions of the possibility of whatever subject matter is under investigation. These other characteristics provide additional, though less central, properties of transcendental arguments.

In a recent essay, Barry Stroud takes a similar stance towards what makes transcendental arguments distinctively transcendental (and not simply, e.g., deductive or conditional).[118] "What makes [a transcendental argument] transcendental is not its logical form or its subject matter, but its aim or goal. We might speak rather of a transcendental strategy or project, or a transcendental enterprise. . . . What they are meant to do is what counts."[119] What they are *not* meant to do, argues Stroud in an earlier article, is to move by necessary inference from thought or experience to conclusions about how things are in the world independent of thought or experience.[120] In the more recent piece, Stroud echoes, but does not rehearse, his earlier pronouncement upon ambitious transcendental arguments: they "deduce the truth of certain conclusions about the world from our thinking or experiencing things in certain ways. That strong condition of success is what I continue to see as the stumbling block for such ambitious transcendental arguments."[121] Ambitious transcendental arguments, Stroud seems to say, are not *meant* to draw the problematic inference because they *can't* draw it. If transcendental arguments are going to have any philosophical usefulness, we must look to a more modest aim for them.

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[118] Barry Stroud, "The Goal of Transcendental Arguments," in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Robert Stern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).
[119] Ibid., 157.
[120] Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968): 241-256.
[121] Stroud, "The Goal of Transcendental Arguments," 163.

In response, therefore, Stroud and others seek to bring the aim or goal of transcendental arguments into line with a modest version of the argument. Rather than require transcendental arguments to make unjustifiable inferential jumps from thought to reality, these arguments can do useful philosophical work within the sphere of thought itself. I have already discussed in some detail the benefits, and limitations, these proposals attribute to transcendental arguments. I hold, however, that there is no need to abandon ambitious transcendental arguments in this recoil to less ambitious versions, provided a justification for the problematic inferential jump may be found. I believe that just such a justification can be found in McDowell's position.

6.1. *McDowell's Transcendental Argument*

Earlier in the dissertation I attempted to link current conceptions of transcendental arguments with the work of Kant, particularly with his mode of argumentation in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There is at least a broad connection between Kant's project in that work and what McDowell does in *Mind and World* insofar as McDowell characterizes his project in *Mind and World* as a completion of the Kantian project.[122] Certainly, this connection alone does not prove that McDowell proceeds, argumentatively, in the same way as Kant does in the *Critique*. The similarity McDowell draws with Kant does show, however, that McDowell is concerned in *Mind and World* with the same aim that, on McDowell's conception, concerns Kant in the *Critique*.

6.1.1. *McDowell and Kant*

What, according to McDowell, is Kant's aim in the *Critique* (and, ipso facto, McDowell's aim in *Mind and World*)? McDowell answers this question by first speaking

[122] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 111.

of the task modern philosophy undertakes. It is typically "called on to explain how, starting from independently available data of consciousness, we work out into a justified confidence that there is an objective world" (p. 110). Modern philosophy undertakes the task of moving from thought to world, from the psychological to the non-psychological. This movement, moreover, involves drawing some sort of inference from one to the other; at the very least, it gives a picture where a "justified confidence that there is an objective world" is in some way based on the "data of consciousness," the latter providing a justification for maintaining the former.

"Kant," continues McDowell, "aims to supercede that conception of philosophy's task" (*ibid.*). It is not that Kant is showing that such a task can be accomplished or just how it might be accomplished. Rather, according to McDowell, Kant is calling into question that this is the task of philosophy in the first place. What, then, is Kant trying to do instead?

> He tries to make it plausible that the very idea of data for consciousness is interdependent with the idea that at least some states and occurrences of consciousness constitute glimpses of an objective world. In that case, it makes no sense to think we might start with contents of minds and build up to objective reality. (*ibid.*)

The departure of this Kantian aim from the aforementioned task of modern philosophy has to do with the "building up" movement rather than with experience being a starting point of investigation or argument. For both parties, the data of consciousness are the beginning point. However, their methods of argumentation are radically different. Kant asks "How is consciousness possible?" and argues indirectly through a consideration of the possibility of consciousness to the conclusion. This Kantian movement is the core of his transcendental argumentation. The method of modern philosophy (particularly before

Kant), on the other hand, attempts to infer the existence of an objective world directly from the contents of the data of consciousness.

What I have been urging in the previous few paragraphs is that it should be no surprise if we find McDowell offering a transcendental argument for his position in *Mind and World*. In fact, this is what we should expect given the similar projects in which Kant and McDowell find themselves engaged. They both attempt to paint a philosophical picture in which "at least some states and occurrences of consciousness constitute glimpses of an objective world." Kant goes about it by considering how such states and occurrences are possible. I argue that McDowell proceeds in the same way in *Mind and World*. I will first highlight several passages where I see him arguing along these lines before I give what I take to be his transcendental argument.

6.1.2. *Transcendental Argumentation in* Mind and World

McDowell tries to give an account of how "our picture of the understanding's equipment" could be "a picture of a system of concepts and conceptions with substantial empirical content." He argues that his idea that "the world is embraceable in thought"

> constitutes a background without which the special way in which experience takes hold of the world *would not be intelligible*. . . . What is in question could not be the thinkable world, or, to put it another way, our picture of the understanding's equipment *could not be what it needs to* be . . . if it were not already part of the picture that the system is the medium within which one engages in active thought that is rationally responsive to the deliverances of experience. . . . *To understand empirical content in general*, we need to see it in its dynamic place in a self-critical activity, the activity by which we aim to comprehend the world as it impinges on our senses. (pp. 33-34, emphasis added)

McDowell is speaking here of the possibility or intelligibility of empirical thought, arguing that empirical thought would not be possible or intelligible unless the relationship between thought and world were according to the position he urges.

The "unless" of the previous sentence might suggest that McDowell is presenting a classic *modus tollens* deductive argument: If it were not the case that the world is embraceable in thought, then empirical thought would not be intelligible; empirical thought is intelligible; therefore, the world must be embraceable in thought. The problem with this reconstruction of McDowell's argument is that he nowhere gives it or anything like it. He repeats the first premise and the conclusion often enough; but he nowhere asserts the second premise or anything similar to it as part of a larger argument. He, like Kant, does not *assert* that empirical thought is intelligible or possible; rather, he *asks how* empirical thought is intelligible or possible. The answer to this question is that the relationship between thought and world must be according to the position McDowell gives in *Mind and World*.

Elsewhere McDowell employs talk about intelligibility with regard to the "grounding relations" in which the world stands to thought:

> *To avoid making it unintelligible* how the deliverances of sensibility can stand in grounding relations to paradigmatic exercises of the understanding such as judgements and beliefs, we must conceive this co-operation [of sensibility and understanding] in a quite particular way: we must insist that the understanding is already inextricably implicated in the deliverances of sensibility themselves. Experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content. (p. 46, emphasis added)

The force of the "must"s is that unless "the understanding is already inextricably implicated in the deliverances of sensibility" and "experiences . . . already have empirical content," then it would be a mystery how it is possible for empirical thought ("judgements and beliefs") to be grounded in those experiences and deliverances of sensibility. In order for it to be possible for thought to stand in a justificatory relation to

experience (as "impressions made by the world on our senses"), the relationship between thought and world must be conceived in a particular way.[123]

McDowell, summarizing what he is doing in *Mind and World*, rehearses the two choices one is faced with in the absence of a consideration of his own position, choices that he attributes to Davidson and Evans: a frictionless coherentism or an appeal to the Myth of the Given, both of which fail to provide the proper justificatory, reason-giving grounding relations between thought and world.

> I have been urging that this is intolerable: within this conception of the possibilities, there is no way to credit thought with friction against independent reality, but we must have that *if we are to have empirical content in our picture at all*. (pp. 67-68, emphasis added)

In this brief passage, McDowell moves away from his talk of intelligibility, but he nevertheless makes the same point as before: unless the relationship between thought and world were as he is urging in *Mind and World*, empirical content would not be possible or "in our picture at all."

These passages indicate that McDowell is arguing in the way that is central to transcendental arguments, namely, by means of conditions of possibility or intelligibility. Specifically, McDowell is arguing about the possibility of empirical thought. Using these passages as a springboard, let me construct a formalized version of McDowell's transcendental argument.

As suggested in Chapter Two, transcendental arguments can be put in the following form:

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[123] Here McDowell is not making the merely psychological point characterized by modest transcendental arguments, namely, that we must think ("conceive") of reality in a particular way in order for empirical thought to be possible. It is trivially true that conceiving the world in a particular way is involved. McDowell is making the further point that this is the way thought and world must be connected.

1. X *presupposes* A, B, . . . or, alternatively, A, B, . . . *are the necessary preconditions for the possibility of* X.
2. X *is the case*.
3. *Therefore, conceptual framework* Y*, within which* A, B, . . . *are possible or intelligible, is the case*.

Using this form, McDowell's argument can be formalized as follows:

1. Empirical thought presupposes:
    A. that experience stands in reason-providing relations to thought (and not only causal relations per Davidson) and
    B. that the employment of conceptual capacities be at work in the act of experience (and not compartmentalize the logical spaces per Evans)
2. We have a conception of what empirical thought is for us as human beings.
3. Therefore, our picture of the relationship between mind and world must be one in which the receptivity of experience already involves the play of concepts—it is simply the way in which human beings do, in fact, experience the world. Our picture of this relationship must allow for a justificatory, reason-providing connection between mind and world. Specifically, a quasi-Aristotelian picture of the logical space of nature, invoking the conception of "second nature" specific to human beings *qua* human beings, provides the framework within which (A) and (B) in premise (1) make sense.

I will now give a brief discussion of my reconstruction of McDowell's transcendental argument.

Beginning with premise (2) of the argument, McDowell does not actually argue or provide support for the claim that we as human beings have empirical thought. Rather, he offers a common conception of what empirical thought is for us and argues that for this unproblematic conception to be possible, a certain relationship between mind and world must be in place. "[O]ur picture of the understanding's equipment could not be what it needs to be, a picture of a system of concepts and conceptions with substantial empirical content, if it were not already part of the picture that the system is the medium within which one engages in active thought that is rationally responsive to the deliverances of experience" (pp. 33-34). It is taken for granted that he is arguing within a particular conception of empirical thought—but one that is generally acceptable.

Establishing premise (1) comprises a great part of *Mind and World*. McDowell argues for this premise within the context of the oscillation between two attractive but ultimately problematic positions exemplified by Davidson and Evans. Recoil to the Myth of the Given cannot provide the necessary legitimation for empirical thought because it isolates the logical spaces of spontaneity and receptivity to the effect that experience is unable to provide empirical justifications for thought. Davidsonian coherentism cannot account for empirical thought insofar as it offers only causal relations between mind and world, according to which experience is unable to provide reasons justifying empirical thought.

It appears that McDowell is here giving what Genova calls transcendental refutations, what I have elsewhere called impossibility of the contrary arguments, in support of premise (1). He argues against Davidisonian coherentism and the Evansian Given by showing how they fail to account for the possibility of empirical thought. In my reconstruction of McDowell's transcendental argument, I have suggested how these refutations make their way into the premise set. Specifically, McDowell seems to use them in establishing what is presupposed by empirical thought: since Davidson's and Evans' positions fail to account for empirical thought, the "contrary" of their claims might do the job.

However, this reading of McDowell seems to compromise my claim that McDowell is giving a full-blown transcendental argument. Genova claims, as I have noted previously, that a transcendental refutation will be based on a previously given hypothetical, metaphysical, or transcendental deduction.[124] This claim is meant to do

[124] See Chapter 3.3.

justice to Kant's insistence that such refutations are secondary to deductions and cannot, apart from them, establish what the deductions are supposed to establish. McDowell's transcendental refutations, on the contrary, are not based on a previously given deduction but figure rather in the transcendental argument itself. It seems, then, that McDowell's refutations are not so secondary after all, and the connection between my account of transcendental arguments and Kant's thoughts on them is thereby weakened.

Despite appearances to the contrary, I contend that Kant's insistence on the secondary nature of transcendental refutations can still be maintained, and McDowell's transcendental argument defended, in the absence of Genova's claim that transcendental refutations must be based on a previously given deduction. I maintain that McDowell's transcendental refutations are still secondary, in keeping with Kant, but not in the way that Genova claims. McDowell's refutations remain secondary as aides to his "primary" transcendental argument insofar as they figure in the premises of the argument by pointing out two necessary preconditions of empirical thought.

Transcendental refutations, on my view, are not independent justifications for a unique conceptual scheme, but they do possess a sort of psychological force, as Kant concedes. In the midst of dialectical engagement, they have a great persuasive value, though they may lack justificatory efficacy. Furthermore, it is certainly the case that their validity depends on the establishment of a unique conceptual scheme, for since the conceptual scheme is the ultimate grounding for the epistemic action in the premise set and, consequently, its presupposition(s), the scheme will be the reason why the refutation goes through. The deduction that backs it need not be previously given in a *temporal*

sense, but it does have a certain *logical* priority over the refutation. It is ultimately in this logical sense that the refutation is secondary.

In his use of transcendental refutations, McDowell is not offering them as substitutes for a more primary transcendental argument or as independent justifications but as aides to such an argument. They are used to persuade the reader of the presuppositions of empirical thought, the necessary preconditions that must be the case for empirical thought to be possible. In this way the secondary status of McDowell's transcendental refutations is maintained.

The conclusion of McDowell's transcendental argument points to the conceptual framework that is able to account for presuppositions of empirical thought and, consequently, provide for the possibility of empirical thought. The framework in this case marks a relationship between mind and world that reflects a metaphysically and epistemologically intimate justificatory connection. It is one that, given the conception of empirical thought with which McDowell is working, makes sense of and allows for the possibility of the idea that our thoughts about the world can be justified by experience of the world. McDowell goes on to specify what such a picture might look like in terms of a quasi-Aristotelian notion of second nature. A reassessment of our conception of (the logical space of) nature along Aristotelian lines explains how it can be that our rational capacities are at work in experience and yet still be a part of human nature instead of being alien to it. This quasi-Aristotelian picture, in other words, explains how empirical thought is possible.

In his argument, McDowell attempts to establish a link between thought and world by considering a type of experience that is conceptual through and through. It

might seem odd that he thinks he has established contact with the non-conceptual through a consideration of something that is thoroughly conceptual. Indeed, this would be an odd move, and McDowell says as much in his critiques of Davidson and Evans. This way of perceiving the move—from the conceptual to the non-conceptual—is itself the target at which McDowell aims his argument. The conception of experience that McDowell has in mind in his argument is one that is capable of substantial empirical content. It is an experience of facts about the world, facts that are capable of rationally responsive relationships with thought. It is conceptual, but not *merely* conceptual—as if its being conceptual rules out the availability of the world in experience.

It is just this picture of unavailability that McDowell says stands behind the type of "How possible?" question he wishes to exorcize in *Mind and World*. This picture of unavailability assumes from the outset that a link between thought and world is problematic and in need of justification. What McDowell achieves in his argument is that as soon as one accepts the unproblematic position that facts about the world are capable of playing rationally responsive roles in experience, one *cannot* maintain that the world is unavailable in experience, and one *must* maintain that there is a rationally justificatory connection between thought and world. The condition for even the possibility of facts playing such a role in experience is that the boundary of experience must reach all the way out to the world.

Maintaining a tight justificatory connection between thought and world, however, does not itself guarantee either that not all of our judgments will turn out to the false or that we are employing the right concepts in our judgments. It may be that on McDowell's picture, we will never have guarantees. But the truth-value of judgments and the accuracy

of concept employment are empirical matters that can only be decided on the supposition that there is a tight justificatory connection in the first place. In order for it to be possible to decide whether or not our judgments are false or whether we are employing the right concepts, there must already be the sort of connection between thought and world for which McDowell argues.

6.2. *McDowell's Transcendental Argument and Stroud's Criticism*

As I've noted throughout the dissertation, Stroud does not think that ambitious transcendental arguments can effectively silence the skeptic. He criticizes these arguments for not being able to make the inference from how things seem to how things really are. I have argued that this criticism espouses a justificatory gap between thought and reality. In order to make the problematic inference, transcendental arguments must employ some version of the verification principle among their premises. However, argues Stroud, the verification principle alone is able to span the gap; there is, therefore, no need for the transcendental argument to silence the skeptic.

I have suggested that, if Stroud's characterization of transcendental argument is accurate, his criticism stands principally by virtue of a background assumption that draws a justificatory wedge between how things seem and how things really are, between thought and reality. One way, then, to neutralize the criticism is to undermine it by showing its background assumption to be untenable. That there is no such justificatory gap between thought and world is precisely what McDowell's transcendental argument in *Mind and World* shows. Because thought, according to McDowell, makes contact with the way things are via its justificatory relations, we are justified in having the psychological content "Things are thus-and-so" for the straightforward reason that things

really are thus-and-so. Suppose that McDowell's argument is cogent and that he presents an accurate account of mind's relationship to reality; then the gap of justification vanishes. There is no justificatory buffer either separating or bridging the two. If there is no gap of justification between thought and world, there is thus no need, per Stroud's criticism, to provide a bridge between them.

This intimate connection, both epistemologically and metaphysically, does not entail that one is automatically justified in drawing an inference from thought to world. Whether one is or is not justified in drawing the inference is a separate issue. McDowell's position does not *guarantee* success. It simply makes success possible, for without the connection between thought and world he argues for, success would not be a possibility.

But Stroud does endorse successful inferences from thought to world by way of a verification principle. Given that the success of the inference presupposes a justificatory connection between thought and world, it seems Stroud is committed to that connection. However, as I have argued previously, his criticism of transcendental arguments rests upon a justificatory gap between thought and world. Thus, in offering his criticism, Stroud involves himself in a contradiction: he is tacitly committed to the connection (via his endorsement of success) and he is tacitly committed to a gap (via his criticism that transcendental arguments cannot legitimately move from thought to world). In the very presentation of his criticism, he undermines it. Thus, his criticism of ambitious transcendental arguments does not stand.

I have suggested a way in which McDowell's transcendental argument overcomes Stroud's criticism of ambitious transcendental arguments. This tact may seem rather circumspect: employing a transcendental argument to defend transcendental arguments.

Indeed, it would be a problematic use of McDowell if his transcendental argument were susceptible to Stroud's characterization of transcendental arguments and, consequently, Stroud's criticism of them. I contend, to the contrary, that McDowell's transcendental argument does not, in fact, fall under Stroud's characterization and, therefore, is not susceptible to his criticism. In particular, McDowell's transcendental argument does not employ a verification principle as a premise.

As I have indicated, both McDowell's transcendental argument and the object of Stroud's criticism move from thought to world, from the necessary preconditions of empirical thought to what must be the case. If they made this move in the same way, then McDowell's transcendental argument would employ, either covertly or overtly, a verification principle. Recalling my formulation given in Chapter 3.2, the principle would be characterized something like the following: *In order for empirical thought to be possible or intelligible, it can sometimes be known that certain conditions are fulfilled, conditions the fulfillment of which implies that either our conceptual system is capable of substantial empirical content or it is not*. The conditions mentioned here are the presuppositions of empirical thought given in premise (1) of my formulation of McDowell's transcendental argument. For, like presuppositions, the conditions mentioned in the verification principle are of possibility or intelligibility.

McDowell's transcendental argument, however, does not implicitly or explicitly employ this principle as a premise, as Stroud's characterization would have it. I suspect that the reason why it could easily be taken as an implicit premise is because the verification principle shares elements in common with the premises of a transcendental argument. First, the principle speaks of intelligibility, or, as I have also put it, possibility:

for X *to make sense or be intelligible*. Transcendental arguments, as I have characterized them, proceed on the basis of considering conditions for the possibility of *X*. Second, and also related to the central characteristic of transcendental arguments, the principle speaks of the conditions or criteria to be fulfilled in order for *X* to make sense or be possible: *it can sometimes be known that certain conditions or criteria are fulfilled*. Third, the principle states that *the fulfillment of these conditions implies that either* X *is true (or obtains) or it is not true (or does not obtain)*. This is a fairly straightforward characterization of the ganderous nature of presupposition discussed in Chapter Two. Granting the "*X*" of the verification principle, we have the central components of any transcendental argument. It comes as no surprise, then, that Stroud would claim that such a principle counters the skeptic without the aid of a transcendental argument. The additional fact that we can sometimes *know* or be justified in believing these conditions to be fulfilled is something gained at the *end* of a transcendental argument and does not figure among its components.

That the verification principle is something that seems to be available only after a transcendental argument has gone through harkens back to Chapter Three, where I briefly discussed Genova's and Stine's respective claims that the verification principle is established by a transcendental argument (rather than figuring among its premises) and that a transcendental argument is just the sort of argument that one would expect to justify the verification principle. I contend that Genova and Stine are correct in their assessment of the relationship between transcendental arguments and the verification principle, that Stroud is thus mistaken in his characterization of transcendental

arguments, and that a verification principle is indeed established by and is even justified by McDowell's transcendental argument.

A Stroudian critique of McDowell's transcendental argument would insist that the argument employs a verification principle as a premise, in consequence of which it could sometimes be known whether or not our understanding's equipment is such that it enjoys substantial empirical content. But for McDowell, one could not know such a thing unless it were already the case that there is a justificatory relationship between thought and world, which is the conclusion of his argument. The verification principle that McDowell's transcendental argument is supposed to employ as a premise, then, cannot be established apart from the conclusion of the argument itself. It is in this sense that the verification principle "follows from" the transcendental argument; it is established by the argument rather than being a part of the establishment or justification of the conclusion of the argument.

The principle stands upon a justificatory connection between thought and world, between what can be known or thought and what conditions are (objectively) the case or fulfilled. According to the principle, one can have thoughts about the world, i.e., empirical thoughts, and also be justified in having them, i.e., knowing that certain conditions about them are fulfilled. This is not something employed as a premise in McDowell's argument in advance of the conclusion, nor is it something required for the argument to draw its conclusion legitimately, e.g., as an implicit premise. McDowell's transcendental argument, then, falls outside the scope of Stroud's characterization and criticism. It can therefore be employed legitimately to defeat the criticism and provide a defense of ambitious transcendental arguments.

Stroud states that "what we need to know at this point is whether or not some version of the verification principle is true. It is not my intention to discuss that issue now, but I do want to insist that it is precisely what must be discussed by many of those who look with favor on the much-heralded 'Kantian' turn in recent philosophy."[125] Not only did Stroud not discuss whether the verification principle were true then, so far as I am aware he has not discussed it since. The more interesting question than that of the truth of the verification principle is what would serve as a basis for accepting or proving the verification principle. I have just given reasons for accepting Genova's claim that a verification principle supposedly implicit in McDowell's transcendental argument does not, in fact, act as a premise in his transcendental argument. Here I want to give reasons for accepting Stine's claim that a transcendental argument is just the sort of argument that would provide a justification for the verification principle.

The verification principle cannot be justified directly by an appeal to empirical evidence. Whether one is justified in epistemologically grounding knowledge in empirical evidence is itself what needs to be established. An indirect justification, on the other hand, is precisely what a transcendental argument amounts to. The indirectness is achieved through a consideration of conditions of possibility—a key component of the verification principle, as I showed above. If a proof for being justified in holding that certain conditions for the possibility of *X* are satisfied (conditions which are presupposed by *X*) is to be had, it seems that a transcendental argument is the sort of argument to give it. The central push of a transcendental argument leads to just this kind of proof. It is this

[125] Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," 256.

type of argument, if any, that can be expected to provide a proof for the verification principle.

It is just this kind of proof that McDowell's transcendental argument provides. It presents a reason-providing connection between thought and world. Specifically, it shows that such a picture accounts for the necessary preconditions of the possibility of empirical thought. It is this picture that can serve as the basis for the verification principle: *for* empirical thought *to make sense or be intelligible, it can sometimes be known that certain conditions or criteria are fulfilled, the fulfillment of which implies that either our conceptual system is capable of substantial empirical content or it is not*. That such conditions can sometimes be known *requires* the justificatory connection between thought and world for which McDowell argues. The principle does not state that the conditions will always or necessarily be known; it states that such knowledge is *possible*. It is the intimate contact between thought and world that is the basis for the possibility, but not the necessity or guarantee, of knowing that certain conditions for the possibility of empirical thought are fulfilled.

Not only does the verification principle fail to figure as a premise of transcendental arguments, these arguments are admirably suited to provide a basis for accepting such a principle—McDowell's transcendental argument being a good illustration of this. Moreover, McDowell's argument precludes the need to suppose a justificatory gap, bridgeable or unbridgeable, between thought and reality in the first place.

6.3. *Concluding Remarks*

Transcendental arguments have been offered principally as arguments against certain skeptical attacks, particularly those that demand justification of a given conceptual framework. What this type of skeptical attack amounts to is a demand for how one can know that one's conceptual framework matches up with reality in the relevant, justificatory ways. The transcendental argument proceeds by laying out necessary preconditions for the possibility of general, epistemic states of affairs: experience, knowledge, empirical thought, meaningfulness in language, etc. Given that the state of affairs under consideration is the case or is conceived in a commonly accepted way (esp. one that is accepted by the skeptic), the argument concludes that the conceptual framework in question provides the context within which the conditions of possibility can be known to be fulfilled. Thus, the skeptic is forced either to give up (his conception of) experience, knowledge, empirical thought, meaningfulness in language, etc. or to accept the argument's justification for the conceptual framework.

I have set out to neutralize a certain influential criticism of transcendental arguments first made by Barry Stroud that is based on their making a problematic inference. This inference has been put in a variety of ways: they draw non-psychological conclusions from psychological facts, they make an inference from epistemic premises to metaphysical conclusions, they infer how things really are from how things seem to be, they draw necessary conclusions about reality from contingent propositions about appearances. In other words, there is a gap of justification between thought and reality such that consideration of the former cannot provide the sort of justification for the latter that transcendental arguments purport. The criticism maintains that the inference cannot

go through in a transcendental argument without a principle that says one can know certain conditions of intelligibility to be fulfilled, the fulfillment of which implies that the thing under discussion can be known to be either true or false. Furthermore, since the principle is able to bridge the gap of justification on its own, the transcendental argument is superfluous and rendered impotent to achieve its supposed aim.

This principle, I contend, fails to ground adequately the criticism on a number of points. First, the principle, far from acting as a premise in a transcendental argument, follows from a transcendental argument. It cannot, therefore, act as a premise that guarantees the validity of a transcendental argument (although, as I mentioned above, it is in a sense involved in the validity of a transcendental argument). Second, insofar as the verification principle is capable of justification, it will be proven acceptable by a transcendental argument. This is, I have shown, exactly what McDowell's transcendental argument does. Third, McDowell's argument undermines an assumption that leads one to treat the verification principle as a premise of a transcendental argument. The assumption is that there is a justificatory gap between thought and world that needs to be bridged. An implication of McDowell's argument is that there is no gap to be bridged after all.

I have cast Stroud's criticism as influential insofar as it has been the basis for rejecting what have been termed ambitious transcendental arguments and yet accepting a more modest form of transcendental argument—one that established necessary connections among thoughts and beliefs rather than connections between belief and reality. My treatment of Stroud's criticism has, I believe, provided a defense of ambitious transcendental arguments—at the very least, it has provided reasons for dismissing Stroud's criticism.

I have argued that ambitious transcendental arguments are free from Stroud's criticism against their legitimacy. In this final section, I want to consider whether they are also free from a criticism I mentioned earlier in the dissertation. In so considering, I will suggest some potentially profitable avenues for future research on transcendental arguments. In Chapter Three I mentioned a criticism of transcendental arguments, begun by Körner, to the effect that because transcendental arguments proceed from within a particular metaphysical framework or conceptual paradigm, they cannot establish claims that extend beyond the framework or paradigm. Körner's point was that these arguments cannot establish a unique framework because of this constraint (unique in the sense that no other position can provide the necessary preconditions of possibility for the thing under consideration in the argument). This criticism calls into question the global applicability of transcendental arguments.

Genova, who in other places appears to be a defender of ambitious transcendental arguments, seems to follow Körner when Genova claims that the validity of a transcendental argument will depend on, among other conditions, a "philosophical background principle" that informs the particular determination and broad philosophical context of the criteria and concepts at work in the argument—experience, knowledge, meaningfulness, etc. Genova says:

> Although Kant fails to clarify the logical status of his Copernican principle, I contend that *without it he cannot establish his objectivity thesis*. This is not to suggest that the context-dependent character of Kant's TD is a defect in his argument. On the contrary, the point is rather that a serious attempt to criticize TA's in abstraction from the philosophical context in which they occur is jejune—a mistake, I think, that is all too common among recent critics. In this sense, I suppose that the central task of this paper is to show that TA's have been typically analyzed in abstraction from their relevant philosophical contexts, and that it is

> only by restoring their respective contexts that we can then tell which TA's do or do not, and in what sense, presuppose a verificationist principle for validity.[126]

Although Genova claims that the dependence of transcendental arguments on a philosophical background principle is not a defect in the arguments, one may wonder what strength and applicability then remains for them. If all transcendental arguments are ultimately conditioned by a metaphilosophical framework, then it does not seem possible for them to conclude something about reality *without qualification*. There will always be a qualification imposed by the framework itself. Each metaphilosophical context will provide criteria for a particular range of metaphysical options. Where transcendental arguments are given from within different contexts, they will establish metaphysical positions within different ranges of options. They will, therefore, be supporting different, and perhaps incommensurable, metaphysical positions. Where the positions are incommensurable, they cannot all obtain. We are then forced to conclude that these transcendental arguments cannot draw sure inferences about reality simply on the basis of epistemic premises. In other words, these transcendental arguments cannot be ambitious but must remain modest.

Where the concepts, criteria, and descriptions in the premise set of a transcendental argument are informed by a particular conceptual system, the argument will not conclude anything beyond the system. This type of modest transcendental argument will justify a conceptual system but only in the sense of showing its coherence. It will be showing necessary connections among beliefs within the system for someone who already buys into the system's interpretation of the descriptions, concepts, and criteria in the premise set of the argument. These arguments will be more or less in-house

[126] Ibid., 487, emphasis added.

arguments—the "house" being the conceptual system. I suspect, however, that transcendental arguments are admirably suited to provide justifications for conceptual systems and metaphysical theories themselves.

Genova takes the "house" more broadly to be the metaphilosophical context. Where the premises are informed by this context (rather than more narrowly by the conceptual system), transcendental arguments take a step toward the ambitious kind and away from the modest variety. In this case, a transcendental argument will seek to establish a unique conceptual system among those possibilities within the given metaphilosophical context. In other words, the objective validity of a system *within the metaphilosophical context* is established but not *across* metaphilosophical contexts universally. The descriptions, concepts, and criteria will not be narrowly construed by the conceptual system being established; they will instead be "metaphysically open" with reference to the system but not to the metaphilosophical context.

But perhaps transcendental arguments could go further and be arguments for a metaphilosophical context itself. The conditions specified in the premise set in this case must be metaphysically open with reference to *any* metaphilosophical context. Insofar as this is possible, a transcendental argument will be a truly ambitious one, arguing for the objective validity of an entire metaphilosophical context. Although this would be a monumental and exceptional undertaking, it would still only establish the metaphilosophical context within which a unique conceptual system could be established by another argument.

Although, as I have suggested, Genova seems tacitly to accept Körner's criticism, John Kekes does so explicitly. He notes that

> [i]t can be shown [by transcendental arguments] that some components are necessary *vis-à-vis* a particular system, but not that a component is necessary *vis-à-vis* any conceptual system, since this would require having the unattainable knowledge of all possible systems. The problem is that if the necessity of a system cannot be demonstrated, then the force of the transcendental argument is simply the injunction that if one wants to use a particular system, then he is committed to the presuppositions of the system. And this falls far short of demonstrating the rationality of the system.[127]

He then goes on to discuss the lack of rational justification for a conceptual system in the now familiar terms of correspondence with reality.

> The skeptic does not dispute the coherence of the system, he disputes the possibility of demonstrating that the system corresponds to anything real at all. It is true that the world being as we think it is is materially sufficient to account for us having the system. But it is also true that the mere thought that the world is as we think it is is also materially sufficient to account for the system.[128]

Kekes does not think that transcendental arguments are able to provide a justification for a correspondence between a conceptual system and reality. I have given reasons to think that this sort of justification is precisely what transcendental arguments can be expected to give.

Nonetheless, Kekes believes that the skeptical challenge can be answered. It is customary, he notes, for pragmatic justifications to be given where a conceptual system is justified as the best one available because it works the best, explains the most, and so on. But, Kekes continues, if pragmatic considerations were the only ones employed, the connection between rationality and truth (understood as correspondence with reality) would be severed. Pragmatic explanations must be supplemented.

> The supplement to pragmatism ought to provide an explanation which, in turn, yields understanding. The explanation is the provision of a tentative and possible picture of the nature of the world; it is a conjecture about reality. The point of it is that if reality were the way the conjecture suggests it is, then we would

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[127] John Kekes, "Transcendental Arguments and the Sceptical Challenge," *Philosophical Forum* 4 (1973): 425-426.
[128] Ibid., 428.

> understand what was previously puzzling, namely, why it is that some approaches to problem-solving and purpose-achieving work, while others do not. There is a time-honoured name for the activity that should supplement pragmatism: metaphysics. The suggestion which now marks the end of this paper is that the only way of meeting the sceptical challenge is by doing metaphysics.[129]

Developing a metaphysical theory, Kekes insists, would show that only if the world were, *in reality*, as the theory described it could proper pragmatic explanations be possible. The argument would be that only where such a picture of the world is actually the case "could we explain and understand our success and failure in solving problems and achieving purposes."

How might an argument for such a powerful position proceed? Let me suggest that a transcendental argument is just the kind of argument that could provide such a proof. Kekes fails to consider that a transcendental argument has both justificatory and explanatory aspects. He simply charges those who have put forth transcendental arguments with answering the wrong type of skeptical challenge and failing to address the problem of the lack of correspondence of the conceptual system to the world. Trudy Govier puts the intermingling of argument and explanation in transcendental arguments this way:

> In a transcendental argument, we try to justify a principle by showing that because its truth is a necessary condition of knowledge that we have, it is true. . . . But the principle that is justified as a necessary condition is also supposed to explain the existence of that knowledge of which it is the condition. It helps to make that knowledge possible and is thus part of the explanation as to how we got that knowledge—knowledge which is assumed both in the justification of the principle and in the accompanying explanation.[130]

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[129] Ibid., 430.
[130] Trudy Govier, *Problems in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (Providence, R.I.: Foris Publications, 1987), 169.

Substituting Kekes' "metaphysical theory" for Govier's "principle," the metaphysical theory argued for in a transcendental argument is true because it is the necessary condition of knowledge and also explains the existence and possibility of that knowledge. Such an explanation would ipso facto and ultimately also be an explanation of the success of that knowledge.

The call of metaphysics to provide a way of meeting the skeptical challenge may thus be answered by transcendental arguments. They are indeed powerful arguments, fit for justifying fundamental conceptual frameworks. Since these frameworks themselves stand behind interpretations of experience, justifications for them cannot appeal directly to experiences themselves but must be made indirectly by appealing to the necessary preconditions for the possibility of experience, or knowledge, or thought, itself.

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