

STROUD AND TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS REVISITED

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ABSTRACT: My aim is to show that there is a crucial ambiguity about the nature of transcendental arguments in the historical Stroud-Strawson debate. Transcendental arguments can be understood either as arguments against (Hume-like) skeptics or as arguments against (Hume-like) revisionary metaphysicians (reductionist idealists). In the first case, what is in question is the unperceived existence of particulars (and the knowledge thereof). In contrast, in the second meaning, what is in question is the underlying nature of those unperceived particulars. In this paper, I support two claims. First, I argue that when the target is a Hume-like skeptic, the transcendental argument is doomed to fail even when they are conceived more modestly as Strawson and Stroud have suggested in the eighties. In this regard, I argue that any anti-skeptical transcendental argument relies on the principle of epistemic closure, and what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the skeptic. Second, I present a reconstruction of the original Strawsonian transcendental argument as an argument against a Hume-like revisionary metaphysician, and argue that it is successful as far as any argument can be.

INTRODUCTION

The binomial "transcendental argument" was used for the second time in Strawson (1959) as a characterization of a *sui generis* argumentative strategy¹. The aim was to show that one could only formulate the question of the existence of unperceived particulars embedded in a certain "conceptual scheme" for which the conditions of application presuppose the truth of what is being denied. Strawson characterizes this form of reasoning with the following warning:

The form of this argument might possibly mislead. It is not that on the one hand we have a conceptual scheme, which presents us with a certain problem of particular-identification; while on the other hand there exist

¹ Austin was the one who introduced the binominal in 1939.

material objects in sufficient richness and strength to make possible the solution of such problems. It is only because the solution is possible that the problem exists. So with all transcendental arguments (1959: 40).

Nevertheless, the most we can extract from this description is a vague idea that a transcendental argument is an indirect *a priori* argument whose conclusion is supposed to be a condition of the very formulation of the problem. The argument tries to show to its adversaries that the very formulation of their question could only make sense when embedded in a certain conceptual scheme whose conditions of application exclude the questioning. The problem is who is the target of the transcendental argument: A Hume-like global skeptic who doubts the existence of unperceived particulars, or a Hume-like revisionary metaphysician who claims that he can account for the nature of unperceived particulars as constant and coherent associations of sense-impressions.

In several places, Strawson characterizes his opponent as a Hume-like global skeptic who doubts the existence or reality of unperceived particulars. And that is the sense according to which Stroud understands the binomial nine years later (1968), and it is the sense it is understood even today. Thus, a "transcendental argument" is meant as an ideal argument whose logical form is unknown and whose purpose is to refute a global skeptic. The structure of the argument is indirect, that is, it tries to show that the very formulation of the skeptical doubt could only make sense when embedded in a certain conceptual scheme whose conditions of application justify beliefs in the existence of enduring things.

Interestingly, the philosopher who ingeniously launched the challenge of finding the logical form of such an ideal argument, Stroud, is the very same who ultimately undermined the search using a series of devastating criticisms in the same seminal paper (1968). For twenty years or more, epistemologists of Kantian provenance were unsuccessfully searching for the form of such an argument against global, until the search lost its original impetus at the end of the nineteen eighties².

² Nevertheless, an enormous amount of recent literature is concerned with the quest for a transcendental strategy in general, several in connection with Kant's *refutation of idealism*. I limit myself here to mentioning only a few of the works that I consider noteworthy. Concerning the general discussion about the transcendental strategy, the following works are noteworthy: Strawson (1985), Cassam (1987; 1999), Brueckner (1989; 1996), Peacocke (1989), Stroud (1994; 1999), Stern, (2000; 2007), Glock (2003), Sacks (2005), and Bardon (2006). Regarding Kant's *refutation of idealism* in particular, the following works are noteworthy: Hanna (2000), Dicker (2008), and Guyer (1987; 2006). However, we first need to establish the definition of a "transcendental argument."

I aim to show that there is a crucial ambiguity about the nature of transcendental arguments in the historical Stroud-Strawson debate. Transcendental arguments can be understood either as arguments against (Hume-like) skeptics or as arguments against (Hume-like) idealists. In the first case, what is in question is the unperceived existence of particulars (and the knowledge thereof). In contrast, in the second meaning, what is in question is the underlying nature of unperceived particulars. In this paper, I support two claims. First, I argue that when the target is a Hume-like or Descartes-like skeptic, the transcendental argument is doomed to fail, even when they are conceived more modestly as Strawson and Stroud have suggested in the eighties. In this regard, I argue that any anti-skeptical transcendental argument relies on the principle of closure, and what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the skeptic. Second, I present a brief reconstruction of the Strawsonian original transcendental argument as an argument against a Hume-like revisionary metaphysician (idealist) and argue that it is successful as far as any argument can be.

This paper is conceived as follows. In the first two sections, I return to Stroud's criticism. In the third section, I consider critically the modest transcendental arguments suggested by Strawson (1985) and Stroud (1994). However modest, they are doomed to fail because they are still attached to the epistemological question of epistemic justification of our commonsensical belief in bodies. In the fourth section, I present my reconstruction of the original Strawsonian transcendental argument as an argument against a Hume-like idealist. My aim is to show that when the target is a Hume-like idealist rather than a Hume-like skeptic, Strawson's original arguments are immune to all of Stroud's criticism.

THE GAP IN STRAWSON'S ARGUMENTS

Stroud takes Strawson's "transcendental argument" to be Kantian, at least in tone, insofar as it tries "to establish the absurdity or illegitimacy of various kinds of skepticism" (1968: 245). To be sure, Strawson describes his opponent as a "skeptic" (1959: 35) (probably a global skeptic of Humean provenance, the one who doubts the existence of unperceived particulars). Still, it is not crystal clear that his arguments meant to establish the absurdity or illegitimacy of epistemological skepticism. For one thing, even though Strawson describes his opponent as a "skeptic," the major philosophical project of *Individuals* (1959) is to establish "descriptive metaphysics" in opposition to a "revisionary metaphysics."

Be that as it may, although the binomial "transcendental argument" came from Austin (1939) and Strawson (1959), it was in the precise sense as the anti-skeptical argument that Stroud understood it in 1968, and it is according to this sense that we understand it until today. A transcendental argument is an ideal anti-skeptical argument of Kantian inspiration. The idea is to refute global skepticism indirectly—that is, by showing to the skeptic (of Humean provenance) that the formulation of his very doubt could only make sense when embedded in a conceptual scheme whose conditions of application justify our knowledge claims. Direct refutations take either the form of Moore's proof of the external world or the form of verificationist challenges to the skeptical question as meaningless.

According to Stroud, Strawson's major argument (1959) aims to prove the following existential claim:

(6) Objects continue to exist unperceived (1968: 245).

However, the starting point of Strawson's major argument is a premise about how we think of the world around us as being:

(1) We think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system (1968: 245).

In this regard, Stroud argues that, if the truth of what the skeptic denies were supposed to be a necessary condition for the skeptical challenge to make sense in the first place, Strawson would have to show how a claim like (6) follows from claim (1), which seems to be epistemological in nature (1968: 246). Stroud reconstructs Strawson's major argument from (1) to (6) in terms of the following conditional premises:

(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.

However, the identification and reidentification could only be possible on the following basis:

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

Yet, if the truth of what the skeptic calls into question—namely, (6)—should be considered as a condition of possibility for the way we think about the world (1), there is a gap in Strawson’s major argument. According to Stroud, “it is clear that it does not follow from (1)–(3) alone that (6) is true, that is, that objects continue to exist unperceived” (1968: 246). According to Stroud, the most that Strawson’s arguments have established up to this point is that if the skeptical challenge makes sense, then we must have criteria on the basis of which we can reidentify a presently observed object as the same as one observed earlier, before a discontinuity in our perception of it (1968: 246). Furthermore, this does not imply (6) (objects continue to exist unperceived), because it is possible for all reidentifications to be false, even when they are made on the basis of the best criteria we can ever have for them.

I would now like to call the attention of the reader to something that went unnoticed for fifty years. We may read (6) as a metaphysical claim about the underlying nature of reality or as an epistemological claim about what we know as follows. In the epistemological sense, we have:

(7) I *know* that objects continue to exist unperceived.

However, in the metaphysical sense, the question is not about the unperceived existence of objects, but rather about the nature of the unperceived existing particulars. In this reading, (6) becomes:

(6') The underlying nature of reality of our perceptual experience is made up of continued existent particulars (bodies).

I raise here no historical claims about any of the authors involved. But anyone familiar with Hume’s philosophy knows that Hume primarily targets (6') rather than (7). In contrast, in Stroud’s reading, the argument targets (7) rather than (6'). This appears very clear when we look at his reconstruction of what should be Strawson’s next step:

(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 (1968: 246; emphasis in italics are mine).

To be sure, Strawson has never explained what he means by a "conceptual scheme." However, by considering the starting point of his argument, it becomes clear that what he had in mind was our key frame of reference in a single comprehensive system of spatiotemporal relations. Thus, if we take (6') rather than (7) as the target, there is no gap in Strawson's primary argument. If we assume (1), then we must think (6'), that is, that the underlying nature of unperceived particulars is made up of bodies rather than of the constancy and coherency of impressions. Bodies are the fundamental category of our conceptual scheme or frame of reference. The gap is introduced when one reads the aim of the argument regarding a proof of (7). But how did Stroud come to see (7) as the desirable conclusion of Strawson's original argument?

Strawson is also responsible for this misunderstanding by his misleading characterization of his opponent as a "skeptic" who raises doubts about the identity of particulars (1959: 35). This characterization enables one to misread (6) as an ellipsis of (7), implying that the real target of Strawson's argument is the global skepticism of Humean provenance that challenges us to prove that we know the existence of bodies.

After all, the reader may wonder, what is the big difference? The answer is the logical independence of both metaphysical and epistemological questions. Hume's revisionary reductionism is a metaphysical hypothesis rather than an epistemological scenario. If the revisionary reductionist of Humean provenance turns out to be true, and the fundamental nature of reality does not consist of the existence of bodies but rather of logical constructions from the existence of sense-impressions, that is no reason to be skeptical about the knowledge of bodies. My belief that I have a body is still true and reliable enough to be considered as knowledge. My belief that this computer is a body is still true and reliable.

Moreover, this ambiguous characterization of the target of the argument could also mislead the reader into misconstruing the role that "satisfiable criteria" play in Strawson's original argument. In Strawson's argument, the existence of "satisfiable criteria" is a metaphysical condition for the assumption of the existence of a single spatiotemporal system (1959: 55). In contrast, we can clearly see in (4)

that in Stroud's reconstruction, it plays the quite different role of being an epistemic condition for (7).

Stroud's reshaping of Strawson's metaphysical "satisfiable criteria" as epistemological criteria for the knowledge of the existence of material objects brings a further and deeper misunderstanding. Insofar as Strawson inadvertently says that the fulfillment criteria for reidentification are a condition for the meaning of skeptical doubt (1959: 34), Stroud called the steps from (1) to (4) the "verification principle" (1968: 247). The idea behind it is that if the skeptic challenge makes sense, then we must have satisfiable criteria by which we can reidentify particulars (p. 246); otherwise, the challenge is meaningless. Since then, some of the literature has accused Strawson of "resurrecting" the old verificationist arguments of the Vienna Circle (Rorty, 1971; Hacker, 1972).

However, if we take the target as being (6') rather than (7), Strawson's accusation of meaninglessness comes down to the following. If the "skeptical" raises the metaphysical hypothesis of whether numerically identical particulars (bodies) are reducible to qualitatively identical ones (discontinuous sense-impressions) in the same place, then he must assume the existence of a single space-time frame of reference. Otherwise, his question makes no sense. There is nothing in this simple argument that might suggest, even remotely, that he is disqualifying global skepticism of Humean provenance as a meaningless question.

TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS AND EPISTEMIC CLOSURE

Beyond the epistemic gap, the transcendental argument (as conceived by Stroud) would fail for another crucial reason. According to Stroud, the conclusion (6) has a *categorical* form: objects continue to exist unperceived. However, Strawson's verification principle [from (1) to (4)] comes down to a mere *conditional*. If we think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system, *then* it must be possible for us to know whether objects continue to exist unperceived by our best criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies (1968: 246). Therefore, to achieve its categorical conclusion, Stroud argues, the conditional in Strawson's argument requires a factual premise that instantiates the antecedent of the conditional and, by *modus ponens*, generates the desired categorical conclusion (6). According to Stroud, this factual premise would take the following form:

(5) We sometimes know that the best criteria we have for the reidentification of particulars have been satisfied (1968: 247).

According to Stroud, here the proponent of a transcendental argument faces a dilemma. On the one hand, without the factual premise (5), which instantiates the antecedent of the conditional (1)–(4) (verification principle), the argument cannot achieve its categorical conclusion (6), and is powerless in the face of the skeptical challenge. On the other hand, with this premise (5) in hand, there is no further need for any proof in the sense of an indirect argument according to which the skeptic doubt must be embedded in a conceptual scheme whose conditions of application rule it out. Now the response to the Humean skeptical challenge is direct: if we know that our best available criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies are satisfied, then we know that the claim (6) is true (1968: 247). Of course, Stroud's dilemma is rhetorical, since no direct argument à la Moore can ever succeed against global skepticism. Stroud's idea is simply to highlight the weakness of his concept of a transcendental argument: it is in no better a position than direct arguments.

Here, I make a second original claim. Assuming that the transcendental argument addresses a global skeptic, there is a much more devastating objection against it. Since in epistemological arguments, knowledge is transmitted from premises to conclusion, those arguments rely on one of the fundamental principles of epistemic logic, the principle of epistemic closure; that is, the principle that knowledge is closed under known implications. The less controversial version is this one:

(CP = closure principle) If S knows that p, and comes to believe q by a correct inference of q from its prior belief p, then S knows that q.

But for the sake of simplicity, let us assume this formulation:

(CP= closure principle) If S knows that p, and knows that, if p then q, then S knows that q, if S infers her knowledge of q from her knowledge of p.

Nevertheless, by the same principle of closure, it is open to the Humean to challenge the conclusion (7). For one thing, once we accept the epistemic closure, what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the Humean. Let us say that

the Kantian argues as follows: I know that the best available criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies are fulfilled, and I know that, if the best available criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies are fulfilled, then I can sometimes identify qualitatively identical particulars in the same place as one numerically identical body. Now the Kantian applies *modus ponens* to the conditional, assuming the antecedent of this conditional as a factual premise [(5) I know that the best available criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies are fulfilled], and concluding that (7) I know that there are material objects.

In contrast, the Humean applies *modus tollens* to the very same conditional. In contrast to the Kantian, however, the Humean assumes as a factual premise that I can never know whether qualitatively identical particulars in the same place are one numerically identical body. Thus, the Humean argues against the Kantian that we do not know whether the best available criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies are fulfilled. The existence of qualitatively identical particulars in the same place can deceive us massively about believing in the existence of bodies.

The Kantian may try to block the skeptic's *modus tollens* by suggesting the antecedent of his conditional is not Strawson's knowledge that the best available criteria for the reidentification of particulars as bodies are fulfilled, but something allegedly undeniable. Stroud suggests something along these lines when he mentions a *privileged class of propositions*:

There are some propositions which it is impossible for one particular person ever to assert truly. For example, Descartes cannot assert truly that Descartes does not exist—his asserting it guarantees that it is false. Also, there are some propositions which it is impossible for a particular person to assert truly in a certain way, or in a particular language. I can never truly say (aloud) 'I am not now speaking'... (1968: 253).

But the question is, how do we know that the factual premise in the Kantian argument belongs to such a privileged class? (1968: 254–5). Let us assume for the sake of argument that the Kantian finds that a factual premise is undeniable in the eyes of the skeptic. Now, the reasons that the epistemological skeptic possesses to doubt that we know the existence of an unperceived object are also overwhelming (i.e., we never know whether qualitatively identical particulars in the same place are one numerically identical body). Therefore, the defender of a transcendental

argument (in the epistemological sense favored by Stroud) finds himself grappling with an ancient form of epistemological skepticism, namely, the Pyrrhonian equipollence: the reasons for the anti-skeptical conclusion (7) have the same weight as the reasons against it (1).

My thesis here is that this objection is devastating to any epistemological conception of the transcendental argument. It not only ruins once and for all the transcendental argument that aims to rebut a global skepticism, but also, as I shall show in the next section, the most "modest" epistemological versions of transcendental arguments. For one thing, however epistemologically modest the conclusion might be, the epistemological argument must rely on some version of closure since in epistemological arguments, knowledge, justifications, and evidence are supposed to be transmitted from premises to conclusion. And what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for his opponent.

Here the transcendental strategy (in Stroud's epistemological sense) is seen grappling with a real insoluble dilemma. On the one hand, the proponent of transcendental argument in Stroud's sense must accept CP. Otherwise, it would be impossible for him to transmit knowledge from the premises to the conclusion. In that case, however, he has to concede *modus tollens* to his opponent and his transcendental argument becomes entirely inconclusive. If on the other hand the Kantian rejects this principle like many contemporary epistemologists (Dretske, 1971; Nozick, 1981), it would be impossible for him to reason from (1) to (7). Worse than that, if he rejects epistemic closure, the Humean challenge could never get off the ground, and the transcendental argument would become otiose. Without epistemic closure, we have no reasons to take skepticism seriously.

MODEST TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT

Strawson (1985) recognizes that transcendental arguments in Stroud's sense face a dilemma:

Either these arguments, in their second form, are little more than an elaborate and superfluous screen behind which we can discern a simple reliance on a simple form of verification principle, *or* the most that such arguments can establish is that in order for the intelligible formulation of skeptical doubts to be possible or, generally, in order for self-conscious thought and experience to be possible, we must take it, or *believe*, that we

have knowledge of, say, external physical objects or other minds; but to establish this falls short of establishing that these beliefs are, or must be, true (9).

If the first alternative of the dilemma is unacceptable in Strawson's eyes, the second seems attractive to him. Transcendental arguments would have no way of proving that the application of our best criteria for reidentification leads to the knowledge of the existence of bodies. However, they would show the skeptic that:

(8) I have to believe that I know the existence of material objects.

The global epistemological skeptic must *believe* in the existence of bodies, to the extent that he formulates his questions and these require the use of those criteria. Accordingly, what matters to a transcendental argument in the epistemological sense of Stroud is not to refute epistemological skepticism, but rather "to demonstrate something about the use and interconnection of our concepts" (1985: 9). Further, "A transcendental argument, as now considered, claims that one type of exercise of conceptual capacity is a necessary condition of another" (1985: 22).

In the same vein, years later, Stroud (1994, 1999) suggested a modest transcendental argument. While the original transcendental argument tries to show that we have *knowledge* of the external world, the goal of Stroud's "modest" transcendental argument is just to show the indispensability of some belief in the existence of the external world. The conclusion such arguments hope to draw is not a refutation of the epistemological skepticism of Cartesian or Humean provenance, but rather a demonstration of the unsustainability of a global epistemological skepticism:

(9) I have to believe in the existence of an external world.

As with the modest Strawson argument, the modest Stroud argument concedes to his opponent that he cannot refute Humean global skepticism. The idea is to show that the very belief in the existence of the outside world is a necessary, given our conceptual scheme. This argument, Stroud argues, would be sufficient to entitle one to ignore external-world skepticism.

The advantage of Strawson's and Stroud's new modest transcendental arguments is to avoid Stroud's old verificationist objection to Strawson's original argument (see Bardon, 2005). All that such arguments seek to show is that we must believe something, not that the world must be a certain way. In that sense, there is no gap to be closed between showing that the world must appear a certain way and eliminating the possibility that the world is not that way.

One may wonder here whether the "modest" transcendental argument is dealing with global epistemological skepticism as all proponents of the idea hold (see Bardon, 2005). We all, as a matter of fact, do believe in the external world. The epistemological skeptic challenges us to provide proof that we have knowledge beyond our belief. There are not any real epistemological skeptics out there. So, if the proponents of the modest strategy intended it as counsel to would-be skeptics, they have no audience. If their purpose is instead to demonstrate that even skeptics must believe in the external world, then they have no target. As Stern has argued:

The difficulty, of course, for all such modest conceptions of transcendental arguments, is to show what their anti-skeptical force amounts to, and thus how transcendental arguments so conceived can still be made to do useful work (2000: 48).

However, the main problem of those modest transcendental arguments is, once more, closure. To transmit justification or evidence from the premises to the conclusions (8) or (9), the proponents of the argument need to rely on the epistemic closure under known implications. Let us assume, once more, (5) that I know that the best criteria available for reidentification of objects are satisfied. Further, I know that if the best criteria available for reidentification of objects are satisfied, then I can identify qualitatively identical particulars in the same place as one numerically identical body. Thus, (8) or (9) I have to believe that objects continue to exist unperceived.

Once more, since the argument is epistemological in nature, what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for his opponent (whoever he is). It is open to the Kantian opponent to deny (5) that he knows that his best available criteria are satisfied by assuming that he never identified qualitatively identical particulars in the same place as one numerically. Now, to reject (8) or (9), he needs only *modus tollens*. If I can never identify qualitatively identical particulars in the same place as

one numerically identical body (I might be dreaming or I might be fouled by a Cartesian demon), how can I be entitled to believe that I know or to believe that particulars exist unperceived? Thus, by *modus tollens*, the Kantian opponent concludes that he does not know that the best criteria available for reidentification of objects are satisfied.

THE ANTI-IDEALIST TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENT

Now I want to suggest that all this recent literature proposing a less ambitious transcendental argument has contributed much to overshadowing the anti-idealist transcendental argument. As I advanced in the summary and introduction, Hume's original problem is accounting for the *nature* of unperceived particulars as an association of sense-impressions guided by the principles of constancy and coherence. Accordingly, a transcendental argument is better seen as an argument against a Hume-like idealist rather than against Hume-like skepticism. Such argument aims to show that the underlying nature of reality is made up of bodies.

Now my proposal is to review Strawson's original argument, having as target a Hume-like idealist. According to Strawson:

But really all we have, in the case of non-continuous observation, is different *kinds* of qualitative identity. If we ever mean more than this in talking of identity, in cases of non-continuous observation, then we cannot be sure of identity; if we can be sure of identity, then we cannot mean more than this (1959: 34).

Strawson's starting point must be a metaphysical description of the major features of our conceptual scheme:

(1') We think of the world as containing objective particulars.

If we think of the world as containing objective particulars, the sentences in this world-view could not turn out to be true, unless certain conditions are fulfilled. First, we must be able to refer to particulars as individuals belonging to a type. Second, we must be able to identify them unequivocally as the objects of our reference. Strawson defines this identifying reference as the audience's discovery of

the object in a certain domain that a speaker has in mind when he is making use of referring expressions.

Thus, we come to the second premise of my reconstruction of Strawson's original transcendental argument:

(2') If we think of the world as containing objective particulars, then we must be able to identify objective particulars.

Now, direct identifying references play a key role in our fundamental frame of reference: It is through the employment of indexicals through space-time perception that we become able to relate definite descriptions and proper names to their intended objects in an unequivocal way (what Strawson calls "contextual identification"). That presupposes in its turn, however, the existence of a space-time description for each object that is present in our perceptual field. In other words, all contextual identification rests on the possibility of direct space-time identifications.

That must be the third premise of the argument:

(3') All contextual identification rests on the possibility of direct spatiotemporal identifications by means of indexicals.

Such spatiotemporal descriptions would be impossible if there were no single space-time system in which each particular could be related to all other particulars. Thus, we come to the fourth premise of Strawson's argument:

(4') If all contextual identification rests on the possibility of spatiotemporal direct identifications by means of indexicals, then we must assume the existence of a single system of spatiotemporal relations.

Thus, the existence of a single space-time system in which each particular relates to all other particulars is the theory of reality that is shared by both Strawson and his opponent. Therefore, the question is, to which entities are we ontologically committed by the shared assumption of the existence of a single system of spatiotemporal relations?

Now, what characterizes such a system is the correlation of all places and times in a single comprehensive system. The existence of a single spatiotemporal

frame of reference presupposes that some of its elements, located at unconnected partial spatiotemporal systems, are numerically identical particulars that we reidentify qua material objects that continue to exist when unperceived. If there were no possibility of reidentifying particulars as mind-independent material objects that exist even when unperceived, we would have in each perception a new partial system of spatiotemporal relations, without any connection to other systems of spatiotemporal relations (1959: 38).

It is evident from this that the argument does not depend on the successful employment of criteria for the reidentification of particulars. Strawson's talk of criteria for reidentification is completely misleading here. The key connection is the link between the existence of a single comprehensive spatiotemporal frame of reference and the metaphysical assumption that some qualitatively identical particulars, located at unconnected partial spatiotemporal systems, are numerically identical bodies that exist as material things even when unperceived.

That, therefore, must be the fifth premise of the argument:

(5') If there is a single system of spatiotemporal relations, then there are some particulars that continue to exist unperceived.

Now, assuming that there is a single system of spatiotemporal relations and by applying *modus ponens* to (5'), we reach the conclusion:

(6) Some particulars are objects that continue to exist unperceived.

Therefore, as a result of our initial worldview (1') we are ontologically committed to the existence of bodies as the fundamental ontological category. I hope that it is also clear from this characterization that what is at stake in Strawson's original is a metaphysical argument for a fundamental ontology of bodies, rather than an epistemological argument aiming to refute skepticism of Humean provenance.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF STRAWSON'S TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS IN THE LIGHT OF STROUD'S CRITICISMS

Now, let us consider that Strawson's opponent is the revisionary metaphysician, namely the idealist reductionist who does not deny the existence of

unperceived particulars, but rather assume that we can account for their nature by some association of sense-impressions guided by the principles of constancy and coherence. The argument takes the classical form of a *reductio*. On the one side, the idealist claims that we have no good reasons to assume that qualitatively identical particulars that are located in the same space, but observed discontinuously, are numerically identical to bodies that continue to exist when unperceived. That question can only be formulated by assuming the existence of a single comprehensive system of spatiotemporal relations. However, the condition for the existence of such a system of spatiotemporal relations is nothing but the metaphysical assumption that qualitatively identical particulars, located at different partial systems of spatiotemporal relations, are also numerically identical to bodies that continue to exist when unperceived.

If this description is correct, all Stroud's ingenious criticisms fall away. First, as what is at stake in Strawson's argument is a proof for a fundamental ontology of bodies, there is something inappropriate in characterizing the conclusion of Strawson's arguments as (7). The goal of Strawson's argument is (6') rather than (7). The reason for this is already known: Strawson's argument is not against a global skeptic who challenges us to prove that we know the existence of material things or the external world, but rather a reductionist who claims that bodies are nothing but logical constructions of qualitatively identical particulars.

That said, there is no gap between Strawson's premises and his ontological conclusion (6') that could even remotely suggest that his argument displays a "verificationist" form and thus could require a factual premise such as (5) ("we know that our best criteria for reidentification are satisfied") in order to reach the conclusion (6). The crucial step in Strawson's argument is the assumption of the existence of a single system of spatiotemporal relations to the metaphysical conclusion that qualitatively identical particulars, located at different partial systems of spatiotemporal relations, are also numerically identical as bodies that continue to exist when unperceived.

Moreover, in the sense I am proposing here, Strawson's original argument does not progress from epistemic premises to an epistemic conclusion, and hence it is not based on any version of epistemic closure like CP. If the conclusion were (7) (namely, we know that objects continue to exist unperceived) as in Stroud's reconstruction of Strawson's original argument, we would face the same problem as before: what is *modus ponens* to the Kantian is *modus tollens* to the skeptic. That is not,

however, the case. We are not transmitting knowledge, justification, or evidence from premises to conclusion. Its starting point is the existence of a conceptual scheme, and its conclusion is the existence of material objects as the only explanation for the assumed existence of such a scheme. Therefore, there is no *modus tollens* to the skeptic that is equipollent to Strawson's *modus ponens*.

Finally, it makes no sense to object to the conclusion of the argument that, at most, it would establish that we know the existence of bodies outside of us only in the empirical sense, but never in the transcendental sense. What is at stake is not proof that we have cognitive access to things outside of us in the transcendental sense, but rather an argument that aims to show we must assume the unperceived existence of material things. The conclusion is not compromised when we take it that objects outside us only exist in the empirical sense.

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