

Transcendental Arguments Against Metaphysical External-World Scepticism

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Abstract: In this paper, I would like to unravel the metaphysical meaning of the expression “transcendental arguments” that has been overshadowed by the traditional epistemological meaning that emerged in the Sixties. The difference may seem subtle, but actually it is of utmost philosophical importance. We have here at least two different types of scepticism, one of which has been overlooked in the literature on transcendental arguments. The first is well the known Hume-like epistemological sceptic who doubts the existence of mind-independent permanent things in space and the knowledge thereof. The second is Hume-like metaphysical sceptic who doubts the ontological *import* of granting the existence of mind-independent permanent things in space. I shall argue that when conceived as an argument against the Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic it is doomed to fail, but when conceived as an argument against the Hume-like metaphysical external-world sceptic the argument is sound and convincing: the underlying nature of bodies is made up of out external, mind-independent particulars that appear to us as permanent things in space, but which are unknown in themselves.

Keywords: transcendental arguments; global scepticism; ontological reductionism;

Setting the Stage

Austin was the first to make use of the expression “transcendental argument” in the midst of an argument intended to prove that if there were no ontological categories of entities other than *sense* it would not be possible to refer to different *sensa* by a common name.¹ His aim was to provide an answer to a question in the form of “How is it that p?” in order to show that something is undoubtedly true. The

¹ See Austin 1939.

same expression “transcendental argument” reappears twenty years later in the work of Strawson as a characterization of supposedly a *sui generis* anti-sceptical strategy of Kantian inspiration.² The aim was to show that the *denial* of the existence of bodies and of other minds could only be formulated in terms of a certain “conceptual scheme” for which the conditions of application presuppose the truth of what is being denied. Strawson characterizes this form of reasoning as follows:

The form of this argument might 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 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).

To be sure, on a closer look at Strawson’s argument his Kantian inspiration is the Kantian Refutation of Idealism. However, the most we can extract from this description is a vague idea that a transcendental argument is an indirect a priori anti-sceptical dialectical strategy whose conclusion follows from the very formulation of the sceptical problem. Strawson’s argument tries to show some unqualified “sceptic” that the very formulation of his doubt could only make sense when embedded in a certain conceptual scheme whose conditions for application exclude his unqualified scepticism.

In any case, the concept of a transcendental argument, as we now understand it, only emerged nine years later with Stroud’s ingenious paper.³ In it “transcendental argument” is understood as an argument, whose logical form still remains unknown, but whose main purpose is to refute a Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic who challenges us to prove the existence of bodies or, alternatively, that our external-world beliefs in bodies are *true*. Consider this:

That our senses offer no impression as images of something *distinct*, or *independent* and *external*, is evident...(THN, 1.4.2.4, original emphases)

² See Strawson 1959. Although there is no direct textual evidence, I think it highly likely that Strawson had Austin in mind when he reintroduced the expression. For one thing, Strawson’s main opponent is what he describes as a “revisionary metaphysician” as opposed to himself as a descriptive metaphysician. This revisionary metaphysician is a Hume-like metaphysical external-world sceptic.

³ See Stroud 1968.

...If our senses, therefore, suggest any idea of distinct [mind-independent] existences, they must convey the impressions as those very existences, *by a kind of fallacy.*" (THN, 1.4.2.4, emphasis added)

In those famous passages, as in several others in the chapter "Scepticism with Regard to the Senses", Hume seems to question *the truth* of our external-world beliefs in bodies and the putative *validity* of any inductive inference from impressions to the truth of our external-world beliefs in bodies. Since then, the meaning of the expression has generalized and now we understand the "transcendental argument" as *sui generis* dialectical strategy against any epistemological external-world scepticism, regardless of its provenance. This is what we find in textbooks on contemporary philosophy.⁴

Interestingly, Stroud, the philosopher who ingeniously launched the challenge of finding the logical form of such an ideal argument, is the very same one who ultimately undermined the search with a series of devastating criticisms, by accusing the Kantians of either assuming some form of verificationism or relying on Kantian transcendental idealism.⁵ For twenty years or more, Kantian epistemologists unsuccessfully searched for the logical form of such an argument, until the search lost its original impetus at the end of the nineteen eighties[!]. A clear signal of their resounding failure is the most recent proposal of "modest transcendental arguments" made by Strawson, Stroud *et alia*.⁶

However, whatever the *logical form* of a transcendental argument, there is crucial question that tends to be neglected the question remains: Who is the sceptic against whom the argument is supposed to be directed? Is the Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic the only opponent of the transcendental argument? The aim of this paper is to answer this question negatively. Consider this famous passage from Hume's "Scepticism with Regard to the Senses":

We may well ask, what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? *But 'tis vain to ask, whether there be body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings* (THN, 1.4.2.4, original emphases)

⁴ The best example that I know is provided by Bardon. According to him, a transcendental argument exemplifies a dialectic strategy *sui generis* of Kantian inspiration that would aim to refute a priori global external-world scepticism (Bardon 2005).

However, despite his immense philosophical impact, I believe that Stroud has misunderstood Strawson's original intention.

⁶ See Strawson 1985; Stroud 1999.

Here Hume is *not* wondering whether our external-world beliefs in bodies are *true* (epistemological external-world scepticism) or, alternatively, whether *there are* bodies. Instead, Hume, as the scientist of *man*, is assuming that *there are* bodies or, alternatively, that most of our external-world beliefs in bodies are *true*. What he is questioning is whether we can account for their underlying *nature* as particulars made up out of external, mind-independent and permanent things. A further indication that Hume is questioning not only the *existence* of bodies (epistemological external-world scepticism), but also their *underlying nature* (metaphysical external-world scepticism) is his assumption of a metaphysical of private mental tropes:

Tis also certain, that this very perception or object is suppos'd to have a continu'd uninterrupted being, and neither be annihilated by our absence, or to be brought into existence by our presence. ... Here may arise two questions; *Firstly*, how can we satisfy ourselves in supposing a perception to be absent from the mind without being annihilated. *Secondly*, after what manner we conceive an object to become present to the mind, without some new creation of a perception or image; and what we mean by this *seeing*, and *feeling*, and *perceiving*. (THN, 1.4.2.4, original emphasis)

Since all impressions are *internal and perishing existences, and appear as such*, the notion of their distinct and continu'd existence must arise from a concurrence of some of their qualities with the qualities of imagination; and since this notion does not extent to all of them, it must arise from certain qualities peculiar to some impressions... (THN, 1.4.2.4, emphasis added)

In this and in several other passages Hume is clearly assuming metaphysics of private mental tropes. Tropes are abstract particulars. They are *particular* without being *concrete* and *abstract* without being *universal*. They are *abstract* without being *universal* because they come into existence and cease to exist just as any other particular. The greenness of a leaf is a particular that when set on fire ceases to exist and the brownness of the leaf come into existence. However, greenness in general does not cease to exist when the fire is lit. They are *particulars* without being *concrete* because they are not substances of properties that remain the same numerically when one of their putative universal properties changes in the course of time. In this sense what seems to be two numerically identical tropes are in fact two quite similar tropes. What makes Hume's position even more idiosyncratic is the further assumption that impressions are mental and private tropes. They come into

existence when perception takes place. And they are annihilated when the perception is interrupted.

Based on this metaphysics of sense-impressions as mental tropes, the Humean epistemological external-world sceptic questions the *truth* of the belief in bodies. In contrast, Hume, the metaphysical external-world sceptic, questions the assumption that the underlying *nature* of bodies is made up out of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars and hence that the *nature* of our beliefs in bodies can be accounted for in terms of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars. As a revisionary metaphysician, he assumes that the underlying nature of bodies is made up out of a bundle of numerically distinct mental tropes that resemble each other.

In line with this concern, I would like to propose a new meaning for the expression “transcendental arguments” as a *sui generis* dialectical strategy not against the Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic, but rather as *sui generis* dialectical strategy against the Hume-like metaphysical external-world sceptic.⁷ Again, the common concern is with the a priori proof of the *existence* of bodies; that is, with the proof that most of our external-world beliefs in bodies are true. In contrast, my concern is with the a priori proof of the underlying *nature* of bodies. I shall argue in this paper that when conceived to counter the Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic the transcendental argument is doomed to fail, but when conceived as an argument against the Hume-like metaphysical external-world sceptic the argument is sound and convincing: the underlying nature of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent particulars that appear to us as permanent things in space, but which are unknown in themselves.

This paper is conceived as follows. As the Kantian Refutation of Idealism is ultimate source of inspiration of the very idea of a transcendental argument, I shall argue in a first section that it fails in rebutting a Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic. The main problem is not Kant’s putative **verificationism** or transcendental idealism (Stroud’s criticism), but rather the fact that knowledge is closed under known entailment (the so-called principle of closure). For those acquainted with epistemic logic that should not come as a surprise. Epistemological external-world scepticism relies on the principle of closure and transcendental

⁷ To my mind, this interpretation is implicit to Strawson (1959) and Austin’s (1939) original intentions when they introduced the expression, but was obfuscated by Stroud’s widespread epistemological interpretation. However, I do not raise any historical claims about Austin and Strawson’s original intents, let alone about Kant’s position on this matter.

arguments too. However, what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the sceptic.

In the next and last section, I shall argue that Kantian transcendental argument succeeds in refuting the Hume-like metaphysical external-world sceptic. The sceptic questions that commonsensical metaphysical assumption that the underlying nature of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars and assumes an alternative metaphysics that the underlying nature of bodies is made up of mental tropes that resemble each other. However, only by assuming what the metaphysical skeptic doubts is true, we can make sense of the consciousness of time-determination of our mental states.

The Failed Transcendental Argument

Stroud takes Strawson's "transcendental argument" to be Kantian insofar as it tries "to establish the absurdity or illegitimacy of various kinds of scepticism" (1968: 245). However, insofar as Strawson describes his opponent as an unqualified "sceptic", it is not crystal clear who the opponent of his transcendental argument is.

Now, Strawson's quotation of Hume suggests that he had Hume's epistemological external-world scepticism in mind. Consider this:

Since all impressions are *internal and perishing existences, and appear as such*, the notion of their distinct and continu'd existence must arise from a concurrence of some of their qualities with the qualities of imagination; and since this notion does not extend to all of them, it must arise from certain qualities peculiar to some impressions...(THN, 1.4.2.4, emphasis added)

To begin with the question concerning *external* existence, it may perhaps be said that ...as several impressions appear exterior to the body, we suppose them also exterior to ourselves. The paper, on which I write at present, is beyond my hand. The table is beyond the paper. ...First, that, properly speaking, it is not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions, which enter by the senses... Secondly, sounds, and tastes, and smells, though commonly regarded by the mind as continued independent qualities, appear not to have any existence in extension, and consequently cannot appear to the senses as situated externally to the body...Thirdly, even our sight informs us not of distance or outness (so to speak) immediately and without a certain reasoning and experience, as is acknowledged by the most rational philosophers. (THN, 1. 4. 2. 9; emphasis in original)

As to the *independency* of our perception on ourselves [mind-independency], this can never be an object of the senses; but any opinion we form concerning it, must be deriv'd from experience and observations. And we shall see afterwards, that our conclusions from experience are far from being favourable to the doctrine of the independency of our perceptions. (THN, 1.4.9, emphasis in original)

The quoted passages clearly suggest that Hume's epistemological external-world scepticism is based on so-called indirect realism, namely the doctrine that we never perceive the existence of external, mind-independent, and permanent things immediately, but of the ideas thereof in our mind. The existence of bodies is inferred as the plausible cause of the perception of the correspondent ideas. However, as we cannot rule out a priori other possible causes, including ourselves, we can never know for sure the existence of material things outside us.

Even though Kant has never mentioned Hume as one of his opponents in his *Refutation*, he left no doubt that this opponent is an indirect realist:

The only immediate experience is inner experience, and that from that outer things could only be **inferred**, but, as in any case in which one infers from given effects to **determinate** causes, only unreliably, since the cause of the representations that we perhaps falsely ascribe to outer things can also lie in us. (B276, original emphasis)

This passage is echoed in the first note to the *Refutation*:

Note 1. One will realize that in the preceding proof the game that idealism plays has with greater justice turned against him. Idealism assumes that the only immediate experience is inner experience, and from that outer things could only be **inferred**, but, as in any case in which one infers effects to **determinate** causes, only unreliably, since the cause of representation that we perhaps falsely ascribe to outer things can also lie in us. Yet, here it is proven that outer experience is really immediate, that only by means of it is possible not, to be sure, the consciousness of our own existence, but its determination in time, i.e., inner experience. (B276-277. Original emphases)

Before proceeding I must make two things clear from the outset. First, so-called indirect realism is not the only source of epistemological external-world scepticism. The most powerful source of epistemological external-world scepticism is the Cartesian scenarios from the first *Meditation*: evil demon, dreams, etc.:

I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. (CSM II, 14–5, AT VII, 21–22)

The Cartesian argument from the first *Meditation* is absolutely irrefutable. In a nutshell the argument runs as follows. If we consider possible worlds *as actual*, most of our external-world beliefs turn out to be false. As we cannot know whether those possible worlds *are actual*, it follows that most of our external-world beliefs can turn out to be false. However, for all we know, there is no hint in Kant's work that he was targeting this powerful form of epistemological external-world scepticism that emerges in the Cartesian first *Meditation*. Most probably what Kant had in mind is a milder form of epistemological external-world sceptic that Descartes briefly contemplates in his third *Meditation* before his proof of God's existence. And this scepticism is also based on indirect-realism:

Yet I previously accepted a wholly certain and evident many things which I afterwards realized were doubtful. What are these? The earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I apprehended with the senses. *But what was it about them that I perceived clearly? Just that the ideas, or thoughts of such things appeared before my mind.* Yet even now I am not denying that these ideas occur within me. But there was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. This was that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. Here was my mistake; or at any rate, if my judgment was true, it was not thanks to the strength of my perception. (CSM 2: 24–5; AT 7: 35. Emphasis added)

Second, indirect realism is not only one among other sources of epistemological external-world scepticism. It is also one of the sources of Hume's metaphysical external-world scepticism. If we do not perceive the existence of bodies immediately, but infer such existence from ideas of them in our own mind, we may have a reason to assume that there are no bodies after all (epistemological external-world scepticism). However, we may also have a reason to question the

commonsensical metaphysical assumption that the underlying nature of bodies is not made up of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars.

Descartes and Hume's simple argument for his epistemological external-world scepticism can be set out along the following lines:

1) If the existence of things outside our minds can never be perceived directly, but only inferred as the most probable cause of our ideas, we can never be certain of this existence.

2) We can never be sure whether we perceive outer things directly.

3) Therefore, the existence of things outside our minds is doubtful.

The claim is that the Refutation of Idealism has turned the game that the idealist plays against himself by showing that outer experience is really immediate rather than inner experience as believed by the sceptic. The question is how Kant's Refutation is supposed to prove that outer experience is immediate rather than inferred from the putatively immediate inner experience. Let us first take a look at what Kant states. The conclusion of the proof takes the form of a theorem:

The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me. (B275; original emphasis)

- i. I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (B275)
- ii. All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. (B275)
- iii. But this persisting element cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined. (Bxxxix)
- iv. Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible through a **thing** outside me and not through the mere **representation** of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. (B275–B276)
- v. Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time

an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. (B276)

Let us focus on the crucial part of the argument:

- 1) I know that my mental states are determined in time.
- 2) If I know that my mental states are determined in time, then I know that the persistent objects of my experience exist in space.

Finally, by applying *modus ponens* to (1) and (2), I am entitled to conclude:

- 3) Therefore, I know that there are persistent objects in space.

The argument is obviously valid. What the Hume-like epistemological external-world sceptic can question is whether the argument is sound. To start with, it is not clear what the first premise means. According to Chignell, there is “a near-consensus among commentators” that this premise is to be understood as “the claim that I can 'correctly determine' (i.e., have a justified judgment or knowledge) that a series of mental states occurred in a specific temporal order” (2010: 490). Thus, (2) must be read as:

- 4) I know that my mental states occurred in a specific temporal order.

Second, it is even less clear whether the indirect-realist based on Hume-like external-world scepticism can accept it.

Given this, the first reply of the epistemological external-world sceptic takes the following form. Because knowledge, justification, and evidence are transferred from premises to conclusion, the transcendental argument relies on one of the fundamental principles of epistemic logic, the principle that knowledge is closed under known implications. The less controversial version of this principle is the following:

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

For the sake of simplicity, however, let us assume this formulation:

(CP = closure principle) If S knows that p and knows that p entails that S knows that q, then S knows that q.

The only way the argument works is by application of *modus ponens* to the conditional (2) using the factual premise (1). For example, let us assume (1), that I know that my mental states are determined in time. In addition, I know that, if I know my mental states are determined in time, I also know that external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars exist. Now, by applying *modus ponens* both to (1) and to (2), I am entailed to conclude (3) that I know that external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars exist.

Still, by the same principle of epistemic closure, it is open to the Humean epistemological external-world sceptic to challenge the key premise (1) that I know that my mental states are determined in time, by doubting that I know the existence of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars. For one thing, once we accept the principle of epistemic closure, what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for the sceptic. Let us say that the Kantian argues as follows: I know that external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars exist because I know that *if* my mental states are determined in time, then I know that external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars exist, and I actually know that my mental states are determined in time. Here, the Kantian applies *modus ponens* to the conditional, assuming the antecedent of this conditional as a factual premise. In contrast, the sceptic applies *modus tollens* to the very same conditional. He now assumes as a factual premise that I cannot know that external, mind-independent, and permanent things exist, and he concludes that he cannot know that his mental states are determined in time.

The Kantian may try to block the sceptic's *modus tollens* by suggesting the antecedent of his conditional belongs to what Stroud calls 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 argue 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 state truly in a certain way, or in a particular language. I can never truly say (aloud) "I am not now speaking." (1968: 253).

However, the question is this: how do we know that the factual premise in the Kantian argument belongs to this privileged class? According to Guyer and Dicker, for example, inner experience gives us introspective access to our past experiences, but there is nothing about these experiences, *qua* recollected, that could justify the claim that one of them preceded another in time.⁸ According to Dicker:

Experiences [do] not come adorned with little clocks, like the ones in the corner of a television sportscast, which would enable you to date or order them. Nor do recollections of your earlier experiences, considered purely as subjective conscious states or 'seemings,' come with a greater feeling or sense of 'pastness' than recollections of your more recent ones; *a fortiori* the recollected members of a series of increasingly temporally remote experiences do not exhibit a progressively greater feeling of pastness. (2008: 83)

Indeed, in §25 of the Deduction, Kant distinguishes the representation “I am” from the *determination* of one’s existence:

The **I think** expresses the act of determining my existence. The existence is thereby already given, but the way in which I am to determine it, i.e., the manifold that I am to posit in myself as belonging to it, is not yet thereby given. For that self-intuition is required, which is grounded in an *a priori* given form, i.e., time, which is sensible and belongs to the receptivity of the determinable. Now I do not have yet another self-intuition, which would give the **determining** in me, of the spontaneity of which alone I am conscious, even before the act of **determination**, in the same way as time gives that which is to be determined, thus I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being, rather I merely represent the spontaneity of my thought, i.e., of the determining, and my existence always remains only sensibly determinable, i.e., determinable as the existence of an appearance. Yet this spontaneity is the reason I call myself an **intelligence**. (B157 n., emphasis in the original)

Moreover, Kant also recognizes that the simple consciousness of one’s existence is not enough to get his anti-scepticism off the ground:

Here it is proved that outer experience is really immediate, that only by means of it is possible not, to be sure, the consciousness of our own existence, *but its determination in time*, i.e., inner experience. Of course, the representation I am, which expresses the consciousness that can accompany all thinking, is that which immediately includes the existence of a

⁸ See Guyer 1987: 306-307 and Dicker 2008: 83.

subject in itself, *but not yet any cognition of it, thus not empirical cognition, i.e., experience*; for to that there belongs, besides the thought of something existing, intuition, and in this case inner intuition, i.e., time, in regard to which the subject must be determined. (B277. Emphasis added)

Now, the Kantian might retort that claim (1) is something that is accepted by Hume himself. Indeed, if Hume talks about the false belief in continued existence of particulars emerging from the *constancy* and *coherency* of mental tropes in time-order, he must have assumed that he knows (1) that his mental events are determined in time. However, whosoever insists that Hume could have assumed (1) misses the dialectical point in the epistemological sceptical argument. Regardless of whether Hume could have endorsed the assumption that one knows that one's mental states occurred in a specific temporal order, the problem is *that such knowledge is not a necessary condition for his epistemological external-world scepticism*. To formulate his epistemological doubt, all that Hume needs is to assume is that he only immediately experiences his own ideas.

However, let us assume for the sake of argument that the Kantian finds his factual premise undeniable. The reasons the epistemological sceptic has for doubting that we know the existence of unperceived objects are overwhelming. Now the defender of a transcendental argument against an epistemological external-world sceptic finds himself grappling with an ancient form of epistemological scepticism, namely, the Pyrrhonian *equipollence*: the reasons that support the epistemological anti-sceptical conclusion have the same weight as the reasons against it.

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 epistemological external-world scepticism, but also 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. Further, what is *modus ponens* for the Kantian is *modus tollens* for his opponent.

Here, the transcendental strategy is seen grappling with a real insoluble dilemma. On the one hand, the proponent of the transcendental argument in Stroud's sense must accept CP; otherwise, it would be impossible for him to transfer

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,⁹ it would be impossible for him to reason from (1) to (3). Worse than that, if he rejects the principle of epistemic closure, the skeptical challenge could never get off the ground, and the transcendental argument would become otiose. Without epistemic closure, we have no reasons to take epistemological skepticism seriously.

The Successful Transcendental Argument

Now we want to suggest that Kant's opponent is not Hume the epistemological external-world sceptic, but rather Hume the metaphysical external-world sceptic. As we saw, the first questions *the truth* of our external-world beliefs in bodies. In contrast, the second questions that the underlying *nature* of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars in space. Hume opens his famous *Treatise* by announcing his project of the science *of man*, that is, a cognitive science, a moral psychology, and a social history:

It is evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature: and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on **the science of man**; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. It is impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and could explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasoning. And these improvements are the more to be hoped for in natural religion, as it is not content with instructing us in the nature of superior powers, but carries its views farther, to their disposition towards us, and our duties towards them; and consequently we ourselves are not only the beings, that reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason. (THN, 1, introd., iv; emphasis in bold added)

Clearly, in this passage his concern is not with normative epistemology, or with the question of whether our external-world beliefs are true. Instead, his concern is with a naturalistic account of how we process beliefs as overwhelming output from

⁹ For example, Dretske 1971; Nozick, 1981.

meagre input: impressions. Thus, epistemological external-world scepticism is not an issue for Humean Cognitivism. Indeed, if the truth of external-world beliefs is not in question, the validity of inductive inference is not either. Consider this:

As to those impressions, which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and' twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being. Nor is such a question any way material to our present purpose. We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they are true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses (THN, 1.3.5.2)

Consider again the following passage:

We may well ask, what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? *But' tis vain to ask, whether there be body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings* (THN I, 1.4.2.4, original emphases)¹⁰

However, if the truth of our external-world beliefs in bodies is not an issue for Hume's pioneer project of cognitive science, there is no doubt that in Hume's

¹⁰ The first who sees the independency of Hume's Science of man from Hume's putative normative epistemology was Smith in 1941. According to Smith, Hume's science of man (a putative study of the human mind modelled after Newton's study of the physical world) attempts to show how our beliefs and other cognitive states emerge naturally from our perceptions working together with our imagination.

In the twentieth century few other readings of Hume follow Smith's pioneering interpretations. One that is noteworthy is Stroud's.¹⁰ According to him, Hume's naturalism signalizes a rupture with the traditional Cartesian epistemology of beliefs:

"Philosophers have been especially interested in the epistemic credentials of what they call our belief in the 'external world', but Hume does not concern himself with the truth or reasonableness of that belief at all. He does not begin by asking whether there are bodies or not, or whether we know or reasonably believe that there are. As a scientist of man, he asks why we have the belief, or how we come to have it". (1977 96) Strawson too:

"Hume's ...pretensions of critical thinking are completely overridden and suppressed by Nature, by an inescapable natural commitment to belief: to belief in the existence of body and in inductively based expectations". (1985, 13–14)

Janet Broughton describes those reactions as follows:

"One broad interpretative strategy we might deploy is to deny that Hume himself actually endorses the skeptical conclusions of the arguments he has presented. Then although the skeptical conclusions of the arguments would be incompatible with Hume's naturalism, we would not have to say that Hume himself was being inconsistent, since he would not himself be committed to the correctness of the skeptical arguments he gives". (2008, 433)

The very same rupture with the traditional a priori thinking is signalized by Morris & Brown when they claim that

"Hume is proposing an *empiricist* alternative to traditional *a priori* metaphysics. His empiricism is *naturalistic* in that it refuses to countenance any appeal to the *supernatural* in the explanation of human nature. As a naturalist, he aims to account for the way our minds work in a manner that is consistent with a Newtonian picture of the world". (Morris & Brown 2014, 12; emphases in original)

original framework he saw as suspicious the commonsensical metaphysical assumption that the underlying nature of bodies is made up out of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars. Moreover, as we saw in the last section, the source of this metaphysical external-world scepticism is the very same as that of epistemological external-world scepticism, namely indirect realism. If we do not perceive the existence of bodies immediately, but only infer such existence from their ideas in our own mind, we may have a reason to assume that there are no bodies after all, but also to question the commonsensical metaphysical assumption that the underlying nature of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars.

Hume's simple argument for his metaphysical external-world scepticism must be very similar to his argument for his epistemological external-world scepticism. It can be set out along the following lines:

1) If bodies can never be perceived as external, mind-independent and permanent particulars, their underlying nature cannot be made up of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars.

2) We are never sure whether we perceive bodies as external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars.

3) Then their underlying nature cannot be made up of external, mind-independent, and permanent particulars.

4) What seems to us external, mind-independent, and permanent is nothing but a bundle of connected mental tropes (impressions).

Let me remind the reader of the steps of Kantian Refutation:

5) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. (B275)

6) All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. (B275)

7) But this persisting element cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined. (Bxxxix)

8) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible through a

thing outside me and not through the mere **representation** of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself. (B275–B276)

9) Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me. (B276)

Again, let us focus on the crucial part of the argument:

1. I know that my mental states are determined in time.
2. If I know that my mental states are determined in time, then I know that the underlying nature of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent, and persistent particulars.
3. Therefore, I know that the underlying nature of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent, and persistent particulars.

As before, the conclusion follows from 1 and 2 by applying *modus ponens* to them. As before, the problem starts with the first premise. Can the Hume-like metaphysical external-world sceptic accept it? There is a significant dialectical difference between the two arguments. In the first transcendental argument the awareness of one's own mental events as determined in time is not a necessary condition for epistemological external-world scepticism: all that the epistemological external-world sceptic needs to assume is that he has no cognitive access to outside bodies except by inference that can never be justified.

In contrast, the awareness of one's own mental events as determined in time is certainly a necessary condition for metaphysical external-world scepticism. For one thing, I cannot suspect that the underlying nature of bodies is made up of permanent particulars, without assuming that I know that mental tropes succeed one another or are simultaneous. Consider this:

When we fix our thought on any object, and suppose *it to continue the same for some time*, tis evident we suppose *the change to lie only in the time*, and never exert ourselves to produce any new image or idea of the object. The faculties of the mind repose themselves in a manner, and take no more exercise, than what is necessary to continue that idea, of which we were

formerly possess, and which subsists without variation or interruption. *The passage from one moment to another* is scarce felt, and distinguishes not itself by a different perception or idea, which may require a different direction of the spirits, in order to its conception. (THN, 1.4.2.4, emphases added.)¹¹

The bone of contention between Kant and Hume is the underlying nature of bodies. According to Hume, the underlying nature of bodies is made up of mental tropes that resemble each other in time. In contrast, according to Kant the underlying nature of bodies is made up of external, mind-independent things in themselves that appear to us as permanent particulars in space as a condition for time-determination:

For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined. (Bxxxix)

The argument here is a classical regress. This permanence cannot be a mere representation in me because as such it is also in time and hence it also requires something permanent for its own time-determination. In this way a regress is launched. The only way to detain this regress is to assume that what is causing the changes of mental states is something external to one's representations, namely, a mind-independent thing-in-itself that appears to us as a permanent particular in space. The remaining question is how Kant proves that this thing-in-itself causing the changes of mental states in time is represented by those states.

Thus, there is no further obstacle to thinking that our sensory states are by their own metaphysical nature representations; that is, sensible intuitions of outside things. The argument takes the following form:

- a) I know that I exist as a thinking being in time.

¹¹ It is also controversial whether Descartes has ever assumed something along the lines of the premise (1). According to Descartes himself: "So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind." (CSM II: 16-17). The Latin text made the temporal uncertainty about one's own existence even more clear: "Haud dubie igitur ego etiam sum, se me fallit: et fallat quantum potest, nunquam tamen ef ciet, ut nihil sim **quamdiu** me aliquid esse cogitabo. Adeo ut, omnibus satis superque pensatis, denique statuendum sit hoc pronuntiatum, *Ego sum, ego existo*, **quoties** a me profertur, vel mente concipitur, necessario esse verum" (AT, VII, 5. Emphasis added). Given this, it is hard to see how Descartes could accept the claim that a series of mental states occurred in a specific temporal order.

b) I could not know that I am a thinking being in time unless I could introspectively know that my sensory states change in time.

c) Now, the introspective self-knowledge of this alteration presupposes something permanent in perception.

Now Kant against Hume:

d) This permanence cannot be a mere representation in me, because as such it also changes and so a regress is launched.

e) Therefore, the changing mental states are a representation of something external rather than objects.

f) What underlies my introspective self-knowledge of my mental representations as time-determined is a reality made up of mind-independent things-in-themselves.

g) The ontological conclusion: the underlying nature of bodies is made up of unknown mind-independent things-in-themselves.

Even though the argument also relies on the principle that knowledge is closed under known entailments, there is no *modus tollens* for the idealist as there is for the external-world sceptic. For one thing, the first premise of the argument is presupposed by the metaphysical external-world sceptic.

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Nevertheless, there is still an enormous amount of recent literature concerning not only the general search for a transcendental strategy but also Kant's *refutation of idealism* in particular. 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 remarkable: Strawson (Strawson 1985), Cassam (Cassam 1987; 1999), Brueckner (Brueckner 1989; 1996), Peacocke (Peacocke 1989), Stroud (Stroud 1994; 1999), Stern (Stern 2000; 2007), Glock (Glock 2003), Sacks (Sacks 2005), and Bardon (Bardon 2006). In particular, regarding Kant's refutation of idealism, the following works are noteworthy: Hanna (Hanna 2000), Dicker (Dicker 2008), and Guyer (Guyer 1987; 2006).

However, appearances can be deceiving. Almost none of them seek an argument that, once and for all, refutes a global skeptic either of Cartesian or Humean provenance. Most now agree that more modest goals are required if such arguments are to remain relevant. For example, Strawson (1985), Stroud (1994; 1999), Stern (2000; 2007) and Bardon (2006) gave up the original goal of refuting Cartesian skepticism and seek less ambitious epistemological arguments. Thus, despite Kant's remaining defenders, it does not seem to be an exaggeration to say today that, after so many decades, no one in contemporary epistemology cares about the idea of finding a transcendental argument to refute a Cartesian skeptic. As Bardon (2006) has recently stated: “However, few now believe that transcendental arguments can yield a direct refutation of epistemic skepticism.” (p. 26)

The only exception that is noteworthy is Westphal (2003). He is still more confident than most that some of Kant's core transcendental arguments can be successful against a Cartesian skeptic. He argues that Kant does convincingly prove that we legitimately apply certain concepts a priori as a necessary condition of coherent consciousness, and that there are, in fact, “enduring, perceptible, causally interacting physical objects.” However, his reconstruction of Kantian arguments cannot stand against Stroud's devastating objections in 1968.