TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS*

In recent years there has been widespread use of arguments described as Kantian or "transcendental" which have been thought to be special, and perhaps unique, in various ways. What exactly is a transcendental argument? Before looking closely at some specific candidates it will be useful to see some of the general conditions that such arguments must fulfill.

Kant recognized two distinct questions which can be asked about concepts.\(^1\) The first—the "question of fact"—amounts to "How do we come to have this concept, and what is involved in our having it?". This is the task of the "physiology of the human understanding" as practised by Locke. But even if we knew what experiences or mental operations had been required in order for us to have the concepts we do, Kant's second question—the "question of right"—would still not have been answered, since we would not yet have established our right to, or our justification for, the possession and employment of those concepts. Although concepts can be derived from experience by various means, they might still lack "objective validity," and to show that this is not so is the task of the transcendental deduction.

For example, Kant considered it

... a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us ... must be accepted merely on faith, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof (B xl).

\(^1\) I am indebted to many friends and colleagues for their criticisms of an earlier version of this paper. I would like to thank in particular Martin Hollis and Thomas Nagel.

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The transcendental deduction (along with the Refutation of Idealism) is supposed to provide just such a proof and, thereby, to give a complete answer to the skeptic about the existence of things outside us. We can therefore get some understanding of Kant's question of justification by looking at the challenge presented by the epistemological skeptic.  

Since the traditional epistemologist asks how it is possible to know anything at all about the world around us, he is not interested only in the specific question of whether there really is a tomato on the table. Consequently, he will not be answered if we simply appeal to one alleged matter of fact in order to support our claim to know another. You cannot show the skeptic that you're not hallucinating, and hence that you know there is a tomato on the table, simply by asking your wife if she sees it too—hallucinations of your wife's reassuring words are epistemologically no better off than hallucinations of tomatoes. At every point in the attempted justification of a knowledge claim the skeptic will always have another question yet to be answered, another relevant possibility yet to be dismissed, and so he can't be answered directly.

Doubts about whether some particular hypothesis is true can often be settled by following the ordinary, well-known ways of establishing matters of so-called empirical fact. But the skeptic maintains that the whole structure of practices and beliefs on the basis of which empirical hypotheses are ordinarily "supported" has not itself been shown to be reliable. As long as we have a public objective world of material objects in space and time to rely on, particular questions about how we know that such-and-such is the case can eventually be settled. But that there is such a world of material objects at all is a matter of contingent fact, and the skeptic challenges us to show how we know it. According to him, any justification for our belief will have to come from within experience, and so no adequate justification can ever be given. Transcendental arguments are supposed to demonstrate the impossibility or illegitimacy of this skeptical challenge by proving that certain concepts are necessary for thought or experience; but before trying to see exactly how they are thought to do this it will be instructive to consider a possible objection to what has been said so far.

When I speak of "the skeptic" I do not mean to be referring to any person, living or dead, or even to the hypothetical upholder of a fully articulated philosophical position. I use the expression only as a convenient way of talking about those familiar philosophical doubts which it has been the aim of the theory of knowledge, at least since the time of Descartes, to settle.
If transcendental arguments are meant to answer the skeptic's question and if, as many believe, that question makes no sense, then there will be little point in considering the exact nature of these alleged arguments. This line is reminiscent of that taken by Carnap. He, like Kant, distinguishes between two types of questions—ordinary empirical questions on the one hand, which are raised and answered from "within" a framework of concepts, beliefs, and recognized procedures of confirmation, and, on the other hand, questions raised by the skeptic or metaphysician about this framework, raised, so to speak, "from outside." To ask whether there are any objects more than ten billion miles from the earth is to ask an "internal" question to which there is an objectively right answer. It is a genuine "theoretical" issue which can be settled by discovering the truth of certain empirical statements. But to ask simply whether there are any objects at all is to ask an "external" question about the existence of the system of spatiotemporal material objects as a whole, and this is not a "theoretical" question with an objectively right answer at all. It is a "practical" question, a request for a decision as to whether or not we should think and talk in terms of material objects. Since there is no set of true propositions that would answer an "external" question, the issue cannot be settled by gathering evidence.

The belief that "external" questions must be answered in the same way as ordinary empirical questions is what leads the epistemologist to the skeptical impasse. Carnap avoids skepticism by denying this and claiming that statements like 'There are material objects' assert nothing about the world at all and, hence, that we couldn't conceivably lack knowledge of their truth value. They have no truth value—they merely serve to express a policy we have adopted or a convention with which we comply.

If this conventionalist line is to be successful there must be no need for us to conceive of the world in terms of material objects in space and time; it must be perfectly possible for us to find the world and our experience intelligible in other terms. But transcendental arguments are supposed to prove that certain particular concepts are necessary for experience or thought; they establish the necessity or indispensability of certain concepts. Therefore conventionalism of this sort will be refuted if a sound transcendental argument can be produced. If there are particular concepts that are necessary for thought or experience then it is false that, for every one of our present concepts, we could dispense with it and still find the world or our

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experience intelligible. A sound transcendental argument therefore
would show that it is wrong to think (with the conventionalist) that
the only possible justification of our ways of thinking is "pragmatic"
or practical, and equally wrong to think (with the skeptic) that
they can be justified only by collecting direct empirical evidence of
their reliability. Although these look like difficult demands to meet,
they represent the minimum conditions that Kant set for the success
of a transcendental argument.

Recent attempts to demonstrate the "absurd" or "paradoxical"
nature of skeptical questions have taken various forms. It has been
argued that seeing a tomato in the clear light of day, when other
people say they see it too, when I can reach out and feel it, is simply
what we call "finding out that there is a tomato there." This is the
best possible case of knowing of the existence of a tomato, and since
situations like this certainly do occur, it follows that we do know that
there are tomatoes, and hence that there are material objects. But
from the fact that this is the best possible case of knowing of the exis-
tence of a tomato the most that follows is that "If this isn't a case
of knowledge of the external world then nothing is," or, in the more
familiar example, "If this isn't a case of acting of one's own free will
then nothing is." But the truth of such conditionals does not threaten
the skeptic; it is precisely because they are true that he is able to
challenge all of knowledge by considering only one or two examples.
In addition to establishing conditionals of this sort, then, one would
also have to show that it is false that there is no knowledge of the ex-
ternal world. But any attempt to show that by an appeal to other
empirical facts would lead back onto the skeptic's treadmill.

Defenders of the paradigm-case argument have failed to see that
the skeptic need not deny that we can make all the empirical distinc-
tions we do make (e.g., between what we call "hallucinatory" and
what we call "nonhallucinatory" perceptions), or that we all apply
certain concepts (e.g., "of his own free will") in certain circumstances
and withhold them in others. In Kant's terms, these are answers to
"questions of fact" and so are not sufficient to answer the "question
of justification." It is not a sufficient refutation of the skeptic who
doubts that p to present him only with a conditional to the effect that
if not-p we couldn't possibly do A. What is in question is whether we
ever "validly" or "justifiably" do A. This is shown, in the extreme
case, by the obvious weakness of the argument that runs: If no one
ever acted freely, then the ascription of praise and blame would be
impossible. But we do ascribe praise and blame. Therefore it is false
that no one ever acts freely.
In order to demonstrate the absurdity of skepticism, the paradigm-case argument had to rely on a theory of meaning to the effect that, at least for some words, if those words are to have the meaning they do have in our language, there must actually be things or situations to which they have been, and perhaps still are, truly applied. If this were true of the word ‘X’, for example, then from the fact that the question “Are there really any X’s?” makes sense it would follow that the answer to that question is “Yes.” This has been thought sufficient to demonstrate the “absurdity” of the skeptic’s question. But this theory of meaning is highly doubtful, for reasons that will be given later. In the meantime I shall examine some subtler and more persuasive recent anti-skeptical arguments.

The first half of Strawson’s Individuals, which is certainly Kantian in tone, gives the impression of relying on transcendental arguments to establish the absurdity or illegitimacy of various kinds of skepticism. Strawson starts by saying:

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

He emphasizes that this is a remark about the way we think of the world, about “our conceptual scheme” (15), and he wants to discover some of the necessary conditions of our thinking in this way. In discovering these conditions Strawson claims to have demonstrated that the skeptic’s doubts are illegitimate, since they amount to a rejection of some of the necessary conditions of the existence of the conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense (35). This can be understood in two ways, depending on what the skeptic is thought to doubt.

Strawson sometimes takes the skeptic to doubt or deny:

(6) Objects continue to exist unperceived.

Only on this understanding of the skeptic is there any plausibility in the claim that he is merely a “revisionary” metaphysician who rejects our conceptual scheme and offers a new one in its place (35–36).

* See J. O. Urmson, “Some Questions Concerning Validity” in A. Flew, ed., Essays in Conceptual Analysis (London: Macmillan, 1956), p. 120. According to the still fashionable view that all mathematical truths are true by virtue of the meanings of their constituent words, this assumption would also render “absurd” all questions of the form “Does 3695 times 1583 really equal 5748785?”. Given the meanings of the constituent words and numerals, it follows that the answer is “Yes.” Has the question therefore been “exposed” as “absurd”? * P. F. Strawson, Individuals, An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (New York: Doubleday, 1959).
But if the skeptic doubts or denies (6) and if the truth of what the skeptic doubts or denies is to be a necessary condition of those doubts' making sense, then Strawson would have to show that (6), a statement about the way things are, follows from (1), a statement about how we think of the world, or what makes sense to us. How could such an inference ever be justified?

Strawson's argument is this. The skeptic's doubts about the continued existence of objects make sense only if (1) is true. But it is a necessary truth that:

(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.

And again, necessarily:

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

Strawson's argument actually stops here, thus showing that he regards what has been established as sufficient to imply his diagnosis of skepticism, but it is clear that it does not follow from (1)–(3) alone that objects continue to exist unperceived. The most that has been explicitly established is that if the skeptic's statement makes sense then we must have satisfiable criteria on the basis of which we can reidentify a presently observed object as numerically the same as one observed earlier, before a discontinuity in our perception of it. And this does not imply that objects continue to exist unperceived if it is possible for all reidentification statements to be false even though they are asserted on the basis of the best criteria we ever have for reidentification. Only if this is not possible will Strawson's argument be successful.

A principle that would explicitly rule out this alleged possibility would be:

(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.

Either this is a suppressed premise of Strawson's argument or it is what he means by "criteria for reidentification of particulars"—in either case it is required for the success of his attack on skepticism. But the argument now comes down to the claim that if we think of the world as containing objective particulars, then it must be possible for us to know whether objects continue to exist unperceived. We could not make sense of the notion of unperceived continued exist-
ence without having criteria of reidentification, and if we have such
criteria then we can sometimes know whether objects continue to
exist unperceived. I shall call this result, which is the conclusion of
the argument from (1) to (4), the verification principle. If this prin-
ciple is not true Strawson's argument is unsound.

It does not follow from (1)—(4) that we actually do know that ob-
jects continue to exist unperceived and, hence, that (6) is true; but
that conclusion will follow if we add to the verification principle one
more premise to the effect that:

(5) We sometimes know that the best criteria we have for the reidenti-
fication of particulars have been satisfied.

The 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 conse-
quence 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. And this in turn shows
that Strawson was wrong to take the skeptic to be denying (6). If
the truth of what the skeptic denies is a necessary condition of that
denial's making sense, and if, as we have seen, it is not the case that
the truth of (6) is a necessary condition of the skeptic's making
sense, then the skeptic cannot be denying (6). On his grounds, to
deny this would be just as unjustified as our asserting it—he argues
only that our belief that objects continue to exist unperceived can
never be justified.

If this is so, then the factual premise that warrants the inference
to (6) is obviously superfluous. The verification principle that the
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. The skeptic says
that we can never justify our acceptance of the proposition that ob-
jects continue to exist unperceived, but now there is a direct and
conclusive answer to him. If the skeptic's claim makes sense it must
be false, since if that proposition could not be known to be true or
known to be false it would make no sense. This 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 mis-
takes.
Strawson's apparently more complicated account of skepticism about other minds is essentially the same as this. In order for me to understand, or make sense of, talk of my experiences, I must at least understand the ascription of experiences to others. But it is a necessary condition of my understanding this that I be able to identify different individuals as the subjects of such ascriptions. And this in turn is possible only if the individuals in question are such that both states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics are ascribable to them. But talk of identifiable individuals of this special or unique type makes sense only if we have "logically adequate kinds of criteria" for ascriptions of such predicates to them. Hence "the sceptical problem does not arise"—its very 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" (106). But what the skeptic "repudiates" is the possibility of my knowing that there are any states of consciousness other than mine, and so Strawson's characterization of the skeptic is correct only if 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. This must be either a suppressed premise of Strawson's argument or an explanation of "logically adequate criteria."

As before, then, the skeptic is seen as maintaining both that (i) a particular class of propositions makes sense and that (ii) we can never know whether or not any of them are true. For Strawson the falsity of (ii) is a necessary condition for the truth of (i), and the truth of (i) is in turn required for the skeptic's claim itself to make sense. Therefore the success of Strawson's attack on both forms of skepticism depends on the truth of some version of what I have called the "verification principle."

In *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* Shoemaker⁶ argues against the other-minds skeptic as follows (168–169). A person who understands 'I am in pain' cannot utter those words sincerely and without a slip of the tongue unless he is in pain. Therefore, if it is possible to know whether another person understands the word 'pain' it must be possible to know whether another person is in pain. But the word 'pain' could not have an established meaning if it were not possible for

people to be taught its meaning and possible for us to determine whether a person is using it correctly. Therefore to assert, as the skeptic does, that it is logically impossible for one person to know of another that he is in pain is to imply that the word 'pain' has no established meaning. But if the word 'pain' has no established meaning, then the putative statement that it is logically impossible for one person to know of another that he is in pain has no established meaning either. Therefore, either what the skeptic says has no established meaning, or it is false.

This conclusion is the same as Strawson's, but in summarizing the argument Shoemaker makes a further claim for it which appears to be mistaken. He says:

Of any sentence that appears to say that it is logically impossible to know that another person is in pain we must say either that it actually expresses no statement at all or that it expresses a statement that is necessarily false (170).

But it does not follow from the necessity of the conditional "if the skeptic's statement makes sense, then it is false" that the skeptic's statement is a necessary falsehood. Although Shoemaker does not go on to draw any conclusions from this summary of the argument that do not follow from the argument itself, later on he does claim that:

It is a necessary (logical, or conceptual) truth, not a contingent one, that when perceptual and memory statements are sincerely and confidently asserted, i.e., express confident beliefs, they are generally true (229).

One argument he gives for this starts out as follows:

(1) A primary criterion for determining whether a person understands such terms as "see" and "remember" is whether under optimum conditions the confident claims that he makes by the use of these words are generally true (231).

It is essential for anyone's using the words 'see' and 'remember' correctly—and hence for their having the established meanings they have—that statements made by the use of those words be generally true. Therefore, if perceptual and memory statements were not generally true then 'see' and 'remember' would not have the meanings they appear to have, and there would be no perceptual or memory statements.

To say that the words 'see' and 'remember' would not have the meanings they do have unless the statements people made by the use
of those words were generally true is explicitly to rule out the possibility of our understanding those statements when they are, unknown to us, always false, or false most of the time, although they appear to be true and hence we believe them. Therefore this argument too depends on the truth of the verification principle. But more is needed in order to prove that it is a necessary truth that perceptual and memory statements are generally true. The most that has been established is that the putative statement that it is not the case that perceptual and memory statements are generally true is either false or meaningless. But this alone does not imply that it is a necessary falsehood, and so does not imply that it is a necessary truth that perceptual and memory statements are generally true.

The rest of the argument is:

(ii) So to suppose that (a) it is a contingent fact, which could be otherwise, that confident perceptual and memory statements are generally true is to suppose that (b) we have no way of telling whether a person understands the use of words like "see" and "remember," or means by them what others mean by them, that (c) we can never have any good reason for regarding any utterance made by another person as a perceptual or memory statement, and that (d) we could therefore never discover the supposedly contingent fact that perceptual and memory statements are generally true. And this is a logically absurd supposition.7

But the conclusion that it is a necessary truth that perceptual and memory statements are generally true does not follow from this alone, because (b), (c), and (d) do not follow from (i) and (a). All that follows is that it is a contingent fact that any person understands 'see' and 'remember'. And that this is a contingent fact does not itself imply that (b) we can have no way of telling whether it obtains or that (c) we can never have any good reason for regarding any utterance as a perceptual or memory statement, since the contingency of 'p' does not in general imply that we can never find out that p. Without some independent support for this last step the argument would fail. Given (i), (c) and (d) do follow from the assumption that perceptual and memory statements are not generally true, but they do not follow from the quite different assumption that it is a contingent fact that perceptual and memory statements are generally true.

Shoemaker's independent argument is that, in trying to discover by inductive means the allegedly contingent fact that perceptual

7 Ibid., pp. 231–232. In this and the previous quotation I have inserted numerals and letters into Shoemaker's text.
and memory statements are generally true, I could not rely on anything that I believe on the basis of observation or memory. But there is no other way in which I could come to know it; therefore I could never know it. From the assumption (shared by the skeptic) that if it is a contingent fact that \( p \) then our acceptance of ‘\( p \)’ can be supported only by experience or by inductive means, and the fact that we could not rely on perception or memory in order to establish that our perceptual and memory beliefs are generally true, Shoemaker concludes that it is a necessary truth that those beliefs are generally true. But this does not follow, and the most that he has shown, as he himself sometimes points out (cf. 238), is that a conditional statement to the effect that “if . . . , then perceptual and memory beliefs are generally true” is a necessary truth.

What should the antecedent of such a conditional be? Shoemaker says that “it follows from the logical possibility of anyone’s knowing anything about the world that perceptual and memory beliefs are generally true” (235), but this alone raises no difficulties for the skeptic who denies that we can know anything about the world. He too insists on the truth of that conditional. It is no accident that those concerned with all of our knowledge of the world have concentrated on perception and, to a lesser degree, on memory.

Rather than dealing with the conditions of knowledge, then, those conditionals must assert that the truth of what the skeptic doubts or denies is a necessary condition of the meaningfulness of that doubt or denial. But even this could fail to be a conclusive refutation of the skeptic. If only a restricted class of propositions is in question, it is always open to the skeptic to accept the argument and conclude that talk about, say, the continued existence of unperceived objects really doesn’t make sense to us. Although he wouldn’t, and needn’t, say this at the outset, he would be forced into it by an argument that relied on the truth of the verification principle. Far from refuting skepticism, this would make it stronger. Not only would we be unable to know whether the proposition allegedly expressed by a certain form of words is true; we would not even understand those words.8 A successful anti-skeptical argument will therefore have to be completely general, and deal with the necessary conditions of anything’s making sense, not just with the meaningfulness of this or that restricted class of propositions.

Furthermore, it won’t be enough to deal simply with all of lan-

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8 That this result follows from an application of the verification principle seems to me more an argument against the verification principle than against skepticism. A. J. Ayer expresses a somewhat similar belief in discussing Strawson; see The Concept of a Person and Other Essays (New York: St. Martin’s, 1963).
usage as it now is. David Pears described the conclusions of Strawson’s arguments as “conditional necessities” to the effect that such-and-such is necessary if we are to think and speak as we now do. But even if such conditionals are true, it is still open to the conventionalist to claim that no “theoretical” justification has been given for our acceptance of the propositions the skeptic doubts or denies, since we could simply give up our present ways of thinking and speaking (of which they are the necessary conditions) and adopt others (of which they are not). Transcendental arguments must yield more than “conditional necessities” in this sense—they must make these skeptical and conventionalist replies impossible.

Kant thought that his transcendental proofs counted in a unique way against both skepticism and conventionalism because their conclusions were synthetic and could be known a priori. They are shown to have this status by a transcendental argument which proves that the truth of its conclusion is a necessary condition of there being any experience or thought at all. If the conclusion were not true, there could be no experience to falsify it. For Kant, proofs that such-and-such is a necessary condition of thought or experience in general, therefore, have a special feature which is not shared by other proofs that one thing is a necessary condition of another, and because they have this feature they can answer the “question of justification.”

Suppose we have a proof that the truth of a particular proposition \( S \) is a necessary condition of there being any meaningful language, or of anything’s making sense to anyone. For brevity, I will say that the truth of \( S \) is a necessary condition of there being some language. If we had such a proof we would know that \( S \) cannot be denied truly, because it cannot be denied truly that there is some language. The existence of a language is a necessary condition of anyone’s ever

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10 “Through concepts of understanding pure reason does, indeed, establish secure principles, not however directly from concepts alone, but always only indirectly through relation of these concepts to something altogether contingent, namely, possible experience. When such experience (that is, something as object of possible experiences) is presupposed, these principles are indeed apodeictically certain; but in themselves, directly, they can never be known a priori. Thus no one can acquire insight into the proposition that everything which happens has its cause, merely from the concepts involved. It is not, therefore, a dogma, although from another point of view, namely from that of the sole field of its possible employment, that is, experience, it can be proved with complete apodeictic certainty. But though it needs proof, it should be entitled a principle, not a theorem, because it has the peculiar character that it makes possible the very experience which is its own ground of proof, and that in this experience it must always itself be presupposed.” Kant, _op. cit._, A 737.
asserting or denying anything at all, and so if anyone denies in particular the proposition that there is some language it follows that it is true. Similarly, it is impossible to assert truly that there is no language. This suggests that there is a genuine class of propositions each member of which must be true in order for there to be any language, and which consequently cannot be denied truly by anyone, and whose negations cannot be asserted truly by anyone. Let us call this the "privileged class."

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," but everyone else can sometimes say this of me without falsity, and I myself can write it or think it without thereby demonstrating that it is false. Similarly, DeGaulle cannot truly say "DeGaulle cannot construct an English sentence," but anyone else can truly say this of DeGaulle, and he himself can truly say in French that he cannot construct an English sentence. Furthermore, there are some propositions which it is impossible, not just for one person, but for any member of a particular class of people to assert truly. A Cretan cannot assert truly that every statement made by a Cretan is false—if he does assert this it must be false—but of course any non-Cretan can assert this without thereby guaranteeing its falsity. But the "self-guaranteeing" character of the members of the privileged class is more general than that of any of these. There is no one, whoever he might be, whatever language he might speak, or whatever class of people he might belong to, who could truly deny any of the members of the privileged class of propositions.

Now no true proposition could be denied truly by anyone. But for any proposition S that is a member of the privileged class, the truth of S follows from the fact that somebody asserted it, or denied it, or said anything at all; and this does not hold for all true propositions generally. It might also be argued that, since a necessary truth could not be false under any circumstances, it could not be denied truly under any circumstances either, and hence that all necessary truths belong to this class. This might be so, but from the fact that a proposition is a member of the privileged class it does not follow that it is a necessary truth, and so it seems that there are some propositions, such as 'There is some language', the truth of which is necessary for anyone's ever asserting or denying anything, but which
are not themselves necessary truths.\textsuperscript{11} It could have been, and undoubtedly was, the case at one time that there was no language, and it probably will be again. Although it could not be truly denied, still it might have been, and might yet become false.

The existence of the privileged class is obviously important, since if it could be proved that those propositions which the skeptic claims can never be adequately justified on the basis of experience are themselves members, then from the fact that what the skeptic says makes sense it would follow that those propositions are true. This would be a way of replying to the skeptic while still acknowledging the contingency of the things he questions. If those propositions could be shown to belong to the privileged class, there would appear to be no more skeptical questions left open, as there are at every point when we try to answer his questions directly. In general, giving an answer to the question "What are the necessary conditions of $X$?" does not tell one way or the other about the answer to the question "Do those conditions obtain?" But in the special case of asking for the necessary conditions of there being some language, giving an answer to the first implies an affirmative answer to the second. One's asserting truly that the truth of $S$ is a necessary condition for there being some language implies that $S$ is true. Therefore there is no other question about the truth value of $S$ yet to be answered, and anyone who denied that we know $S$ and still demanded empirical evidence for its truth would have failed either to understand or to be convinced by the argument. In either case the proper reply would be to go through the argument again.

The question now arises whether there is anything special, and perhaps unique, about transcendental arguments even when they deal with the necessary conditions of language in general, or of anything's making sense. Is it only because Strawson's and Shoemaker's arguments are limited in scope that they depend on an appeal to the verification principle? There are some general reasons for being pessimistic on this question. Although it seems to me unlikely that there should be no members of the privileged class, we have yet to find a way of proving, of any particular member, that it is a member.

\textsuperscript{11} The tendency to confuse these two different kinds of necessity has seemed an almost inevitable occupational hazard in transcendental philosophy, with its claims to establish necessary or "conceptual" truths (cf. Shoemaker). If to say that a proposition is "necessary" or "conceptual" is only to say that it must be true in order for us to have certain concepts or for certain parts of our language to have the meanings they have, then it does not follow that "necessary" or "conceptual" truths are not contingent. Perhaps my privileged class will provide a way of keeping these different kinds of necessity distinct.
More specifically, we have yet to show that those very propositions which the epistemological skeptic questions are themselves members of this class. It is obviously extremely difficult to prove this, and not just because talk about "language in general" or "the possibility of anything's making sense" is so vague that there seems to be no convincing way of deciding what it covers and what it excludes. That is certainly a difficulty, but there are others. In particular, for any candidate S, proposed as a member of the privileged class, the skeptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language possible if we believe that S is true, or if it looks for all the world as if it is, but that S needn't actually be true. Our having this belief would enable us to give sense to what we say, but some additional justification would still have to be given for our claim to know that S is true. The skeptic distinguishes 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.

Any opposition to skepticism on this point would have to rely on the principle that it is not possible for anything to make sense unless it is possible for us to establish whether S is true, or, alternatively, that it isn't possible for us to understand anything at all if we know only what conditions make it look for all the world as if S is true, but which are still compatible with S's falsity. 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; hence the meaning of a statement would have to be determined by what we can know. But to prove this would be to prove some version of the verification principle, and then the skeptic will have been directly and conclusively refuted. Therefore, even when we deal in general with the necessary conditions of there being any language at all, it looks as if the use of a so-called "transcendental argument" to demonstrate the self-defeating character of skepticism would amount to nothing more and nothing less than an application of some version of the verification principle, and if this is what a transcendental argument is then

12 This suspicion is strongly confirmed by Judith Jarvis Thomson's excellent account of the verificationism in Malcolm's argument against the possibility of a private language, in "Private Languages," American Philosophical Quarterly 1, 1 (January 1964): 20-21.

Stuart Hampshire's discussion of the necessary conditions for any language in which a distinction can be made between truth and falsity, while of the required generality, will have force against skepticism only if it is interpreted as resting on a verification principle (i.e., if in order for us to "successfully identify" an X, X's must actually exist). Hampshire himself does not directly apply the argument to skepticism; see Thought and Action (New York: Viking, 1960), ch. 1.
there is nothing special or unique, and certainly nothing new, about
this way of attacking skepticism.

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. It could be that we
are not so far as we might think from Vienna in the 1920's.

For Kant a transcendental argument is supposed to answer the
question of "justification," and in so doing it demonstrates the "ob-
jective validity" of certain concepts. I have taken this to mean that
the concept "X" has objective validity only if there are X's and that
demonstrating the objective validity of the concept is tantamount
to demonstrating that X's actually exist. Kant thought that he
could argue from the necessary conditions of thought and experi-
ence to the falsity of "problematic idealism" and so to the actual
existence of the external world of material objects, and not merely
to the fact that we believe there is such a world, or that as far as we
can tell there is.

An examination of some recent attempts to argue in analogous
fashion suggests that, without invoking a verification principle
which automatically renders superfluous any indirect argument, the
most that could be proved by a consideration of the necessary con-
ditions of language is that, for example, we must believe that there
are material objects and other minds if we are to be able to speak
meaningfully at all. Those propositions about what we believe or
about how things seem would thereby have been shown to belong
to the privileged class. Although demonstrating their membership
in this class would not prove that skepticism is self-defeating, it
would refute a radical conventionalism of the kind outlined earlier.
It would then be demonstrably false that, for every one of our pre-
sent concepts, we could dispense with it and still find our experience
intelligible. But until this much has been shown, not even part of the
justification Kant sought for our ways of thinking will have been
given.

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