Ambition, Modesty, and Performative Inconsistency
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1. Introduction

Call statements expressed by substitution instances of

>(TC) y is a necessary condition for the possibility of x

'transcendental conditionals'.[1] According to what is perhaps the standard account of transcendental conditionals, any given instance of (TC) is interpretable in terms of an 'if-then'-sentence whose antecedent expresses a proposition to the effect that some x is possible and whose consequent expresses a statement to the effect that some y is actual.[2] Despite its wide acceptance, this standard reading of transcendental conditionals is problematic. The first goal of this chapter is to bring out why it is problematic and to suggest an alternative reading. Section 2 develops the alternative and sets out how it affects the inferential structure of transcendental arguments (henceforth, TAs). The second goal of this chapter is to argue that the much discussed distinction between ambitious and modest TAs, which has been developed and deployed by various authors in the wake of Stroud's influential critique of transcendental reasoning (Stroud 1968), may be pointless when applied to TAs from performative inconsistency that have moral statements as their conclusions. In what follows, I call TAs that have moral statements as their conclusions 'moral TAs'. Section 3 rehearses the distinction between ambitiousness and modesty, sketches an account of performative inconsistency and provides some justification for the following claim: If moral truth is assertorically constrained, then any modest moral TA from performative inconsistency is convertible into an ambitious moral TA from performative inconsistency. The concluding section 4 raises some open questions.

A caveat is in order. It may already be clear from my initial remarks that the discussion in section 3 will rely on a series of substantial metaethical assumptions. Jointly, these assumptions amount to a kind of (non-error-theoretic) moral cognitivism: Moral statements can be the conclusions of arguments; they are truth-apt; some of them are true; they can work together with non-moral truth-apt statements as premises in arguments (mixed inferences) and can occur as components of truth-apt logically complex (compound) statements whose other components, in their turn, may or may not be moral statements; they can be asserted (claimed to be true) and can be the contents of beliefs, which in their turn can be epistemically justified and criticised, i.e., rationally assessed with regard to the question of whether their propositional contents are true. Even though these assumptions may, arguably, lay good claim to expressing – in somewhat technical terms – important aspects of our performative self-understanding as participants in argumentative debates on moral questions, each of them can be, or has been, contested in the metaethical literature. Presumably, however, a philosopher who denies even just one of them will have little patience with moral TAs.[3] She will reject the philosophical project of devising TAs to

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[1] The term 'transcendental conditional' is borrowed from Illies (2003, p. 31 and pp. 35-40). Stern (2000, p. 6-11 passim) uses 'transcendental claim' to refer to the relevant conditional statements. Admissible substituents for 'x' and 'y' in (TC) will be specified in section 2.

[2] I use 'proposition' and 'statement' interchangeably. For ease of expression, I also use '<...>' as shorthand for 'the proposition that...'. For instance, '<humanity is valuable>' is to be read as 'the proposition that humanity is valuable', and '<p>' is to be read as 'the proposition/statement that p'; 'p' takes declarative sentences as substituents.

[3] Unless, that is, she assigns a kind of semantic value to moral statements that is different from truth but still allows for the collaboration of moral and non-moral (or more generally: normative and non-normative) statements as premises in arguments and as components of 'mixed' compound statements. This is what Habermas (1990, p. 56) seems to suggest when he distinguishes between "normative rightness" and "propositional truth" as the two

moral conclusions – not because she will find particular fault with that kind of argument to that kind of conclusion but for the sweeping reason that, on her count, there are no sound arguments to moral conclusions to be had, be they transcendental or not. I submit, then, that each of the metaethical assumptions listed above is indispensable if a constructive and sustained discussion of moral transcendental arguments is so much as to get off the ground. Since my purpose in this chapter is to engage in precisely this kind of discussion, I assume for the sake of argument that the moral cognitivism outlined above is roughly correct.

2. Transcendental conditionals and transcendental arguments

It is sometimes said that what distinguishes TAs from other kinds of argument is that they either involve at least one transcendental conditional – i.e., at least one statement expressible by an instance of (TC) – among their premises or have a transcendental conditional as their conclusion (Stern 2000, pp. 6-7).[4] I take the disjunction to be inclusive since there is no obstacle to constructing arguments that have a transcendental conditional as their conclusion *and* involve transcendental conditionals among their premises. The relation expressed by '…is a necessary condition for the possibility of__' is usually, and plausibly, assumed to be transitive. If y is a necessary condition for the possibility of x, and z is a necessary condition for the possibility of y, it follows that z is a necessary condition for the possibility of x. Transitivity enables the construction of TAs from transcendental conditionals to conclusions that are themselves transcendental conditionals.[5] By contrast, given at least two transcendental conditionals that are inferentially connected via transitivity *and* a premise to the effect that the antecedent of the conditional initiating the transitive chain is true, one can proceed by repeated applications of Modus ponens and detach, in the final step, the consequent of the last member of the chain.[6] The latter is just a generalisation of the simple case in which we have one transcendental conditional, a premise to the effect that its antecedent is true, and a detachment of the conditional's consequent. In these regards, TAs exploit logical properties that are not at all peculiar to transcendental conditionals.

From what I have said so far, it is clear that 'involving a transcendental conditional' can at most be claimed to be a necessary condition of an argument's being a TA. An argument may have a transcendental conditional as one of its premises and fail to be a TA. Here is an example: Self-consciousness is a necessary condition for the possibility of agency. Whales are mammals. Therefore, self-consciousness is a necessary condition for the possibility of agency and whales are mammals. An argument may also have a transcendental conditional as its conclusion and fail to be a TA: Self-consciousness is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience or whales

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dimensions of "validity" of prescriptive (more generally, normative) and descriptive statements, respectively. I think that this move creates more problems than it solves but cannot discuss the relevant issues here.

[4] Franks (2005, p. 204, cf. also p. 209) seems to hold that only arguments whose *conclusions* are transcendental conditionals deserve the title 'TA' (emphasis in the orig.): "[A]nything that might helpfully be called a transcendental argument should issue in some *conditional* to the effect that some *conditioned* would be impossible, if not for some *condition*." I find this point plausible insofar as it seems clear that the hard work regards arguing for transcendental conditionals rather than their use as premises in arguments.

[5] Arguments of this sort would have to play a central role in pursuing the philosophical agenda envisaged by Stroud when he admits that by means of transcendental reasoning "we can come to see how our thinking in certain ways necessarily requires that we also think in certain other ways, and so perhaps in certain further ways as well" (Stroud 1994, p. 234).

[6] Korsgaard's TA for the value of humanity, for instance, clearly employs the transitivity assumption in this way (Korsgaard 1996, cf. Stern 2011, p. 90).

are fish. Whales are not fish. Therefore, self-consciousness is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience.[7] Involvement of at least one transcendental conditional distinguishes TAs from some, but not from all non-transcendental arguments. Let us say, then, that an argument A is a TA *only* if the following inclusive disjunction is true: At least one of A's premises is – can reasonably be taken to entail – a transcendental conditional or A's conclusion is – can reasonably be taken to entail – a transcendental conditional.

To give substance to the idea that TAs differ from non-TAs in that they involve transcendental conditionals, restrictions will have to be imposed on what is to count as the right kind of inferential involvement. In addition, more will have to be said about what distinguishes transcendental from non-transcendental conditionals.

A useful way to start the discussion is to ask the following question: What, if anything, is the difference between y's being a necessary condition for the possibility of x and y's being a necessary condition of x?[8] There are several suggestions in the literature as to what distinguishes transcendental conditionals from more familiar necessary-condition statements, such as 'handing in a paper is a necessary condition for passing the exam'. For the most part, these suggestions concern the subject matter of – and/or our epistemic position with regard to – the antecedent x of candidate transcendental conditionals. For instance, some philosophers follow Kant in saying that a given necessary-condition statement is a transcendental conditional only if it is to the effect that some y is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. Others are more permissive and say that the possibility of experience is but one promising starting point of transcendental reasoning among others. What is important, according to these philosophers, is rather that for a proposed transcendental conditional to be plausible and philosophically useful, x has to be such that its being actual – a fortiori its being possible – cannot be rationally denied. Now, the thought goes, a good way to start searching for something that we cannot rationally deny is reflecting on what we presuppose as true in the very attempt to deny (assert the contradictory of) any proposition whatsoever. This latter thought – I will return to it in the next section – underlies the idea of TAs from performative inconsistency.

With the aim of complementing, rather than supplanting, these, and similar, approaches at characterising transcendental conditionals by imposing epistemological, dialectical, and topical restrictions on x, I here want to draw attention to two more formal points about (TC) and, accordingly, about its instances. First, (TC) can be read in two different ways:

(i) y [is a necessary condition for] the possibility of x.

(ii) y [is a necessary condition for the possibility of] x.

The square brackets are intended to indicate the following points. In (i), what y is said to be a necessary condition for, is the possibility of x. This reading of (TC) suggests that transcendental conditionals employ the same notion of necessary condition-hood that is employed in more familiar necessary-condition statements. If anything, it would then have to be the modal status of x – its being hypothesised as a possibility rather than as an actuality – that distinguishes transcendental conditionals from more familiar kinds of necessary-condition statement. Reading (ii), by contrast, takes the three-word string 'the possibility of' to be part of the expression that is used to refer to the relation which is stated to hold between x and y. This suggests the thought

that transcendental conditionals employ a notion of necessary condition-hood that is distinct from and, presumably, intended to be stronger than the one employed in more familiar necessary-condition statements. Let us refer to the envisaged notion by 'necessary* condition'. In (ii), then, what y is said to be a necessary* condition for, is x, rather than the possibility of x. I will come back to readings (i) and (ii) shortly.

The second point to notice concerning (TC) is that, grammatically, 'x' and 'y' occupy positions which require substitution by expressions that can function as nouns (compare '*freedom of will* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *moral responsibility*', '*having free will* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *being a moral agent*'). Replacing 'x' and 'y' with declarative sentences yields results that are not grammatically well-formed. This is an obstacle to interpreting transcendental conditionals straightforwardly in terms of 'if-then'-statements. The latter, however, is desirable in that it would allow us to conspicuously represent the inferential roles, as premises and conclusions in arguments, that such conditionals are usually taken to be able to play. The obstacle to using instances of (TC) as premises in arguments can be brought out by considering the following widely used schematic representation of a TA:

(TA$_{\text{schematic}}$)

1	(1)	x	premise
2	(2)	y is a necessary condition for the possibility of x	premise (transcendental conditional)
1, 2	(3)	y	(1), (2), ?

At line (1) we have to take 'x' as occupying sentence position – otherwise we could not think of line (1) as a schematic *premise*. At line (2), however, both 'x' and 'y' occupy noun position. In the conclusion (3), in turn, 'y' occupies sentence position. Syntactically, then, premises (1) and (2) do not connect in a way that makes them yield the conclusion (3).

The obstacle can be overcome by means of truth-talk, more precisely, by means of talk about the truth of propositions. For what follows, I restrict the range of admissible substituents for 'x' and 'y' in (TC) to one particular kind of noun-phrase, namely to instances of 'the truth of the proposition that...'.[9] This gives us the following schema of transcendental conditionals:

> (TC1) The truth of the proposition that q is a necessary condition for the possibility of the truth of the proposition that p.

(TC1) is bulky. However, it has the advantage that its schematic letters are in declarative-sentence positions – even if these positions are still embedded within noun constructions. Consider an instance of (TC1):

> (Instance) The truth of the proposition that we have free will is a necessary condition for the possibility of the truth of the proposition that we are agents.

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[9] Against this move it might be objected that it illegitimately forces transcendental conditionals into a semantic mold, excluding by fiat that the point of a transcendental conditional may very well be ontological or metaphysical, rather than semantic. This worry is unfounded, however. The truth-talk employed here can be read as merely serving what Quine calls "semantic ascent". Ignoring Quine's misgivings about propositions, the following well-known sentence from "Philosophy of Logic" – with un-Quinean insertions in square brackets – makes the relevant point: "Here the truth predicate serves, as it were, to point through the sentence [proposition] to the reality; it serves as a reminder that though sentences [propositions] are mentioned, reality is still the whole point" (Quine 1986, p. 11).

One begins to see how an interpretation in terms of an 'if-then' statement might be achieved. The truth of the proposition that we have free will is a necessary condition for the possibility of x iff what is the case if that proposition is true is a necessary condition for the possibility of x. What is the case if the proposition that we have free will is true is that we have free will. We can therefore take the statement that we have free will as the consequent of the 'if-then' statement that we are looking for. What about the antecedent? To answer this question I have to revert to the distinction between reading (i) and reading (ii) of (TC) outlined above.

According to reading (i), (Instance) is to be read as:

> The truth of the proposition that we have free will [is a necessary condition for] the possibility of the truth of the proposition that we are agents.

This suggests an interpretation (Instance) in terms of the following 'if-then' statement:

> (Instance[i]) If it is possible that we are agents, then we have free will.

Generalising from (Instance[i]), we obtain this schematic 'if-then' statement as a reading of (TC):

> (TC2) If it is possible that p, then q.

(TA$_{schematic}$) would then seem to be construable in terms of the following argument schema, in which 'p' and 'q' occupy sentence positions throughout:

(TA$_{schematic}^{i}$)

1	(1)	p	premise
2	(2)	If it is possible that p, then q	premise (transcendental conditional according to reading (i))
3	(3)	If p, then it is possible that p	premise (modal principle)
1, 3	(4)	It is possible that p	(1), (3), Modus ponens
1, 2, 3	(5)	q	(2), (4), Modus ponens

Many authors writing on TAs seem to interpret transcendental conditionals along the lines of (TC2), and TAs along the lines of (TA$_{schematic}^{i}$) (see, for instance, Pihlström 2004, pp. 291-292, Giladi 2016, p. 213, fn. 2). However, there is a problem with (TC2) and its instances. Consequently, there is a problem with the schematic premise at line (2) of (TA$_{schematic}^{i}$). The problem is, quite simply, that regardless of whether we read the modal expression 'it is possible that' in the antecedent of (TC2) in terms of logical, logico-conceptual, or metaphysical possibility, instances of (TC2) would seem to be uniformly false. Arguably, logical, logico-conceptual and metaphysical possibility are the best candidates for interpreting the modality involved in the antecedents of transcendental conditionals. So this is bad news for (TC2). Recall

> (Instance[i]) If it is possible that we are agents, then we have free will.

According to a standard construal of logical possibility, it is logically possible that we are agents iff the statement that we are agents does not entail a contradiction, i.e., iff that statement is logically consistent. But the actual truth of <we have free will> is clearly not a necessary condition for the logical consistency of <we are agents>. What can maybe be said is that the logical possibility of the truth of <we have free will> is a necessary condition for the logical possibility of the truth of <we are agents>. That, however, is not the thesis expressed by (Instance[i]). What can, perhaps, also be said is that the actual truth of <we have free will> is a necessary condition for the actual truth of <we are agents>. But again, this thesis is different

from the one expressed by (Instance^i). On the logical-possibility reading, therefore, (Instance^i) seems to be false.

It is logico-conceptually possible (lc-possibile) that we are agents iff <we are agents> is logically consistent and there is no conceptual truth *t* such that <we are agents & *t*> is logically inconsistent. But the actual truth of <we have free will> is clearly not a necessary condition for the lc-possibility of the truth of <we are agents>. What can maybe be said is that the lc-possibility of the truth of <we have free will> is a necessary condition for its being lc-possible that we are agents. Moreover, it is not implausible to claim that the actual truth of <we have free will> is a necessary condition for the actual truth of <we are agents>. But these theses are both different from the one stated by (Instance^i). On the logico-conceptual-possibility reading, therefore, (Instance^i) seems to be false too.

Finally, consider metaphysical possibility. The reasoning is analogous. It is metaphysically possible that we are agents iff it is not excluded by every way things might have been that we are agents. But our actually having free will is not a necessary condition for there being a way things *might* have been that does not exclude our being agents. What can here be said, at most, is that the metaphysical possibility of our having free will is a necessary condition for the metaphysical possibility of our being agents. Perhaps it is also correct to say that our actually having free will is a necessary condition for the actual truth of the statement that we are agents. But again, these plausible theses are both different from the one expressed by (Instance^i). On the metaphysical-possibility reading, therefore, (Instance^i) seems to be false too.

Analogous lines of reasoning can be formulated with regard to any instance of (TC2). The problem is structural. It is quite generally not a good idea to claim that the truth of a nonmodal statement is a necessary condition for the truth of some logical, logico-conceptual or metaphysical possibility statement. These considerations would have to be made more precise. But even in their present form they provide strong reasons for the claim that it is a mistake to read (TC) along the lines of (i) and (TC2). The mistake is explainable by the surface grammar and the wording of (TC), which suggests (TC2) as the apparently most straightforward interpretation of (TC). Of course, it might be objected that the preceding considerations have no weight against (TC2) since the intended modality in the antecedents of transcendental conditionals is neither logical nor logico-conceptual or metaphysical. However, this objection would have to be backed up by an account of what the intended sense of 'it is possible that...' in the antecedents of transcendental conditionals is then supposed to be – and such an account does not seem to be forthcoming.

The rationale for using a transcendental conditional instead of a regular necessary-condition statement as a premise in an argument would seem to be the thought that transcendental conditionals are logically stronger than regular necessary-condition statements. (TC2) takes its lead from the wording and the grammar of (TC) and construes the envisaged additional strength of '*y* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *x*' over '*y* is a necessary condition of *x*' in terms of a modal weakening of the antecedent, i.e., of *x*. The underlying thought would seem to be this: If *y* is a necessary condition for the mere *possibility* of *x*, then *y* is *a fortiori* a necessary condition of *x*. As the above considerations show, however, it is very unclear how to understand the resulting 'if-then' statements. Consider reading (ii) of (Instance), then:

> The truth of the proposition that we have free will [is a necessary condition for the possibility of] the truth of the proposition that we are agents.

As already mentioned, the idea is to ignore surface grammar and treat the word group 'the possibility of' as qualifying the necessary-condition relation that is stated to obtain between the truth of <we are agents> and the truth of <we have free will> – rather than to treat it as expressing the modal status of the hypothesised truth of <we are agents>. This suggests the thought that instead of construing the envisaged additional strength of transcendental conditionals over regular necessary-condition statements in terms of a modal weakening of x we can construe it in terms of a modal strengthening of the necessary-condition relation that is stated to obtain between y and x. The most obvious way to substantiate this idea is to think of the envisaged additional strength of transcendental conditionals in terms of a necessitation of ordinary necessary-condition statements. This would give us the following reading of (Instance):

(Instance[ii]) Necessarily, if we are agents, then we have free will.

Generalising from (Instance[ii]) we can interpret (TC) in terms of the following necessitated 'if-then' schema:

(TC3) Necessarily, if p, then q.

Relying on (TC3), (TA$_{schematic}$) can be reconstrued as follows:

(TA$_{schematic}$[ii])

1	(1)	p	premise
2	(2)	It is necessary that if p, then q.	premise (transcendental conditional)
3	(3)	If it is necessary that if p, then q, then if p, then q.	premise (modal principle)
2, 3	(4)	If p, then q.	(2), (3), Modus ponens
1, 2, 3	(5)	q	(1), (4), Modus ponens

(TA$_{schematic}$[ii]) seems to get closer to adequately representing what someone who argues for <q> by means of a transcendental conditional rather than by means of an ordinary necessary-condition statement would seem to want to get at. Consider the instantiation of (TA$_{schematic}$[ii]) with the example from above.[10] Line (1) introduces the premise that we are agents. Line (2) introduces the premise that necessarily, if we are agents, then we have free will. This expresses (at least a central part of) what the transcendental conditional '*freedom of will* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *agency*' comes to – if the proposed account is correct. Line (3) is an instance of the uncontentious modal principle that necessity implies actuality: If it is necessary that if we are agents, then we have free will, then if we are agents, we have free will. At line (4), the statement that if we are agents, then we have free will, is inferred by Modus ponens from premises (2) and (3). At line (5) the conclusion that we have free will is inferred, again by Modus ponens, from lines (1) and (4). The conclusion is reached by means of an argument that purports to partly ground the claim that we have free will in a necessary-condition relation that, or so it is claimed at line (2), is not contingent but holds of necessity.

I think that the preceding considerations provide at least a partial answer to the question concerning the difference between y's being a necessary condition for the possibility of x and y's being a necessary condition of x. One difference is that y is a necessary condition for the

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[10] Again, what follows is meant to be an example of a TA. I do not claim that it is an example of a sound TA.

possibility of x only if it is necessarily the case that y is a necessary condition for x. By contrast, some y can be a necessary condition of some x and fail to be necessarily a necessary condition of x.

The preceding considerations also suggest that it is a necessary condition for a given conditional's being of the transcendental variety that it be equivalent to, or at least entail, a statement the effect that some y is necessarily a necessary condition for some x. This feature distinguishes transcendental from *some* non-transcendental conditionals, but by no means from all. Whatever else can be said to set transcendental conditionals apart from non-transcendental conditionals (and thus TAs from non-transcendental arguments), it will have to follow the more substantial approaches that have usually been taken in the literature. That is, it will have to address questions concerning adequate subject matters of the antecedent x (x should presumably be about some basic and non-optional feature of our human practices), the epistemic and dialectical status of x (ideally, x should be in some sense epistemically evident, uncontentious or not rationally deniable), the kind of modality involved (presumably, it should be logical, logico-conceptual or metaphysical) and not least the precise nature of the consequence relation that each transcendental conditional states to hold of necessity between some antecedent x and some consequent y (presumably, transcendental conditionals should not be interpreted in terms of necessary material implication).[11]

3. Ambitious and modest transcendental arguments to moral conclusions

Much philosophical work that has either been carried out under the express title of 'transcendental reasoning/argumentation' or can reasonably be taken to fall under that description is driven by variations on two closely related but nonetheless distinct lines of thought. The first line of thought reflects our performative self-understanding as agents and participants in purposeful (collaborative) practices:

> Some of the practices we engage in put us in epistemic contact with the world and enable us to achieve knowledge of, or at least justified belief concerning, some of its aspects. Other practices put us in instrumental contact with the world, enabling us to operate on some of its aspects so as to shape them according to how we want or desire (those aspects of) the world to be. Some put us in communicative contact with each other, facilitating coordinated and collaborative action, the sharing of arguments, knowledge and information, the communication of emotions etc. By reflection we can come to know that, necessarily, if we engage in those practices and attain those achievements, then it is true that q. Given that we do engage in those practices and attain those achievements, it is (must be) true that q.

The second line of thought expresses a more cautious or modest take on what we are, do and achieve. It can be stated as an epistemologically reflected and attenuated version of the first one:

> We engage in practices that, we take it, enable us to achieve various goals. By reflection we can come to know that we cannot make rational sense of our taking ourselves to engage in those practices, and of our taking them to enable those achievements, unless we take it to be true that q. In other words: We cannot develop and/or maintain a rational self-

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[11] Reading transcendental conditionals in terms of strict (or necessary material) implication would commit one to the claim that every necessary truth is a condition for the possibility of the truth of any proposition whatsoever.

understanding as participants in those practices unless we take it to be true that *q*. At the same time, engaging in those practices seems non-optional, inevitable, indispensable for us – or, as Habermas (1993, p. 163) puts it, without "functional equivalent in our form of life". Therefore, we have no choice but to take it to be true that *q*.

The distinction between ambitious and modest TAs developed in the course of the debates provoked by Barry Stroud's 1968 paper "Transcendental Arguments"[12] is, roughly, the distinction between TAs that instantiate the first, and TAs that instantiate the second of these two lines of thought. It is best illustrated by way of an example. Imagine a philosopher who wants to provide a TA in support of the statement that every event has a cause. An ambitious TA with regard to that statement would be a TA that has <every event has a cause> as its conclusion. A modest TA, by contrast, would here be a TA to the conclusion that it is in some sense inevitable, indispensable or unavoidable for us to believe <every event has a cause>.

It should be uncontentious that there is a significant difference between an argument A to the conclusion that *q*, and an argument A* to the conclusion that it is inevitable (indispensable, unavoidable) for us to believe <*q*>, quite independently of whether A and A* are TAs or not. A and A*'s conclusions differ, and that suffices for them to be distinct arguments. The more interesting point is that Stroud (1968, 1994, 1999) claims to establish that transcendental reasoning is viable, if at all, only insofar as it contents itself with modest TAs. All that one can reasonably hope to reach by means of TAs, according to Stroud, are conclusions to the effect that if we cannot but believe <*p*>, then it is inevitable for us to believe <*q*>. Of course, given a premise to the effect that we cannot but believe <*p*>, we can then infer that it is inevitable for us to believe <*q*>. But the inference from conclusions of the latter kind to <*q*> itself is blocked by the "simple logical observation that something's being so does not follow from its being thought or believed to be so" (Stroud 1994, p. 241) – not even from its being inevitably thought or believed to be so.

Stroud develops the distinction between ambitiousness and modesty, as well as his thesis that only modest TAs are viable, in the context of a discussion of epistemological scepticism. Leaving their merits in that context to one side, later on in this section I will sketch a line of thought that suggests that both the thesis and – in a sense – the distinction may be resisted when what is at issue are moral TAs from performative inconsistency. Before doing so, however, a closer look at the distinction between modesty and ambitiousness with regard to moral TAs is in order.

Does the distinction between ambitiousness and modesty sort *moral* TAs into two types? At first glance, this question would seem to have a straightforward affirmative answer. Consider the statement that humanity is morally valuable. A moral TA of the ambitious variety would here be a TA to the conclusion that humanity is morally valuable. A moral TA of the modest variety, by contrast, would here seem to be a TA to the conclusion that the belief that humanity is morally valuable is in some sense inevitable, indispensable or unavoidable for us.

However, the second part of this answer, which concerns modesty, is problematic. The problem generalises in that it casts doubt not just on the feasibility of modest moral TAs, i.e., of modest TAs to moral conclusions, but much more generally on the idea of TAs whose conclusions do more than just state that we are constrained to believe this or that proposition. With regard to the idea of modest moral TAs the problem is this: No statement expressed by an instance of 'it is

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[12] Some important contributions to the discussion of ambitiousness and modesty are Brueckner 1996, Hookway 1999, Stern 2007, Stroud 1994, Stroud 1999.

inevitable for us to believe that p', is a moral statement – regardless of whether the sentences substituted for 'p' express moral propositions or not.[13] To argue for the statement that humanity is morally valuable is to argue for a moral statement. To argue for the proposition that we are constrained to believe that humanity is morally valuable, by contrast, is to argue for a proposition that concerns our doxastic options – or rather, our lack of doxastic options – *with regard to* a moral proposition. If no statement expressed by an instance of 'it is inevitable for us to believe that p' is a moral statement, however, the distinction between ambitiousness and modesty does not divide the domain of moral TAs into two groups at all. It rather forces us to say that *if* any good TAs to moral conclusions are to be had, they are of the ambitious variety. And someone who follows Stroud in claiming that, generally, only modest TAs are viable will have to deny that there are any good moral TAs to be had.

It is perhaps helpful to redescribe the situation in the following way. We set out to construct a TA in support of the proposition that q, expressed by the sentence 'q', but – if Stroud's thesis is correct – we end up with an argument whose conclusion firmly embeds 'q' within the scope of the doxastic-predicament operator 'it is inevitable for us to believe that...'. It is apt to use the expression 'doxastic predicament' here because for all that a modest TA tells us it might be inevitable or indispensable for us to believe that q even if $<q>$ is false. As long as we do not find a means to evacuate 'q' from the scope of the doxastic-predicament operator, we are stuck with a result that concerns the proposition we set out to argue for only insofar as it states that we have no choice but to treat it as true. Stroud (1994, p. 234) thinks that the prospects for finding such an argumentative evacuation measure look dim at best. However, independently of whether Stroud is right in the case of statements of the form 'it is inevitable for us to believe that p' or similar doxastic-predicament statements, there might be a way out of this putative impasse with regard to statements of the form 'it is performatively inconsistent to try to deny that p', at least where 'p' expresses a moral proposition. In the remainder of this section I try to indicate the way out.

To try to deny $<p>$ is to try to assert the contradictory of $<p>$, and to deny $<p>$ is to assert the contradictory of $<p>$. Denials are assertions, and attempts at denying are attempts at asserting. What, then, does it mean to say of an assertion attempt that it is performatively inconsistent? The standard response appeals to speech-act theory. Roughly, assertion attempts consist of an illocutionary component, expressible by the performative verb 'assert' in the first person singular present indicative, and a declarative sentence that expresses a proposition. The illocutionary component indicates the communicative mode in which the speaker intends the propositional content of her speech-act attempt to be understood and, accordingly, the kind of speech act that she (provided she is being sincere) intends her utterance to be – in our case she intends it to be an assertion. To say of an assertion attempt v, made by a speaker S, that it is performatively inconsistent is to say that the propositional content of v is – in a sense to be specified below – inconsistent with the illocutionary component of v. The idea is that if v is performatively inconsistent, then S's communicative intention in performing v remains unfulfilled. To say the same thing from the point of view of the addressees of v: If v is performatively inconsistent, then it is a mistake to take v in the way in which S intends it to be taken, to wit as an assertion.

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[13] Moral statements may here be thought of as propositions to the effect that some person (or all persons) morally ought to (or not to) act in some specified way; or as statements to the effect that it is morally permissible to act in some specified way; or as statements to the effect that some action or person or character trait is morally good or bad, valuable or valueless, right or wrong, virtuous or vicious.

Performatively inconsistent assertion attempts are unsuccessful assertion attempts in the sense that they do not result in assertions. If v is performatively inconsistent, then the statement that v is an assertion is false.[14] Note that, in the intended sense of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful', a successful assertion attempt may have a false propositional content and an unsuccessful assertion attempt may have a true one.

The vague gesture towards an inconsistency between the propositional content and the illocutionary component of v can be made more precise as follows: To say that a given attempt v, made by a speaker S, to assert that p, is performatively inconsistent is to say that the propositional content of v ($<p>$) contradicts – or entails a proposition that contradicts – at least one of the performative presuppositions of v. The performative presuppositions of S's assertion attempt v comprise all, and only, those propositions that are logico-conceptually entailed (lc-entailed) by $<$S asserts that $p>$, i.e., all lc-entailments of $<$S asserts that $p>$.[15] Among the lc-entailments of $<$S asserts that $p>$ a distinction can be drawn between propositions that are lc-entailed by $<$someone asserts something$>$ (thus *a fortiori* by $<$S asserts that $p>$) and propositions that, while not lc-entailed by $<$someone asserts something$>$, are nonetheless lc-entailed by $<$S asserts that $p>$. Call the latter propositions 'local' and the former 'global performative presuppositions' of S's assertion attempt v. We can then distinguish between the following two kinds of performative inconsistency: An attempt to assert $<p>$ results in a *global* performative inconsistency iff $<p>$ is logically inconsistent with at least one lc-entailment of $<$someone asserts something$>$. An attempt to assert $<p>$, made by the speaker S, results in a *local* performative inconsistency iff $<p>$ is logically consistent with all lc-entailments of $<$someone asserts something$>$ but logically inconsistent with at least one lc-entailment of $<$S asserts $<p>>$.[16]

If it is correct to say that an assertion attempt which leads to a local or a global performative inconsistency is unsuccessful in that it fails to result in an assertion, then global performative inconsistencies can be taken to indicate unassertability: $<p>$ is globally unassertable iff any speaker's attempt to assert it would be performatively inconsistent, and $<p>$ is locally unassertable iff some (but not any) speaker's attempt to assert it would be performatively inconsistent. In what follows, local performative inconsistency and unassertability will be irrelevant. Henceforth, I use 'performative inconsistency' and 'unassertablity' as shorthand for 'global performative inconsistency' and 'global unassertablity', respectively.

Assume that the present account of performative inconsistency is on the right track and assume, moreover, that we have been provided with a convincing argument R to the conclusion that a given attempt v, made by the speaker S, to deny $<p>$ is performatively inconsistent. R would then entitle us to claim that the contradictory of $<p>$ is unassertable. But what, if anything, would R entitle us to say with regard to the truth value of $<p>$? Instances of 'it is performatively

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[14] It is therefore better to avoid talk of performatively inconsistent assertions. This explains the cumbersome formulations in terms of assertion attempts.

[15] $<q>$ is logico-conceptually entailed by $<p>$ iff $<q>$ is either logically entailed by $<p>$ or there is a conceptual truth t such that $<q>$ is logically entailed by $<p\ \&\ t>$. Note that unless $<p>$ is itself a performative presupposition of S's attempt to assert $<p>$, the lc-entailments of $<p>$ are not among the performative presuppositions of S's assertion attempt.

[16] The account of performative inconsistency suggested here is, prima facie at least, very different from the one proposed by the most persistent advocate of arguments from performative inconsistency in ethics (and elsewhere), i.e., by Karl-Otto Apel (cf. Apel 2001). However, I think that the present proposal is what Apel's account comes to when it is made precise enough to assess. For a more detailed discussion of the distinction between global and local performative inconsistencies, and of how the present account differs from Apel's, cf. Rähme 2016 and Rähme forthcoming.

inconsistent to deny that *p*' and of 'the contradictory of <*p*> is unassertable' closely resemble instances of 'it is inevitable to believe that *p*'. The latter express statements to the effect that we are in a doxastic predicament with respect to <*p*> – we cannot not believe <*p*>. The former express statements to the effect that we are in a dialogical or discursive predicament with respect to <*p*> – we cannot deny <*p*>. Unless we are given an additional argument to the conclusion that the truth conditions of <*p*> are among the truth conditions of <<not-*p*> is unassertable> – and thus of <it is performatively inconsistent to deny <*p*>> – R does not entitle us to say anything at all concerning the truth value of <*p*>.

A straightforward way to evacuate '*p*' – and thus <*p*> – from the scope of the dialogical-predicament operator 'it is performatively inconsistent to deny that...' would consist in making a case for the claim that the operator in question is factive (truth-entailing). If the present account of performative inconsistency is correct, instances of 'it is performatively inconsistent to deny that *p*' entail corresponding instances of '<not-*p*> is unassertable'. One way to show that the operator 'it is performatively inconsistent to deny that...' is factive would therefore consist in making a case for the claim that truth is constrained by assertability. Whilst assertability is unacceptable as a general constraint on truth (cf. Rähme 2010, ch. 5), it can, perhaps, be shown to constrain truth in the restricted case of moral statements.

To say that moral truth is constrained by assertability, or that moral truth is assertorically constrained, is to say that, as far as moral statements are concerned, assertability is a necessary condition for truth:

> (AC_{moral}) If *p*, then it is assertable that *p* (where admissible substituents for '*p*' are sentences that express moral propositions).

The notion of assertability employed in (AC_{moral}) is weaker than the notion of *justified* assertability familiar from some epistemic accounts of truth and from assertability-condition semantics. If a statement fails to be assertable, then it fails *a fortiori* to be justifiedly assertable. By contrast, a statement can fail to be justifiedly assertable and nonetheless be assertable. With regard to the question of whether (AC_{moral}) is true, all I can offer here is an appeal to the plausibility of (AC_{moral}), or rather an appeal to the fact that (AC_{moral}) does at least not seem to be a wildly implausible constraint on moral truth. After all, moral statements are intrinsically related to the idea of guiding our own behaviour and assessing the legitimacy of the actions others. Statements that cannot even be asserted (claimed to be true), would seem ill-suited to that task. It is important to keep in mind here that (AC_{moral}) is restricted to moral statements. Accepting it does not commit one to the – some would say provably false – claim that all true propositions are assertable. Accepting (AC_{moral}) only commits one to the claim that there are no true *moral* statements that are unassertable.

Much more would have to be said, but let me venture the claim that the following argument schema, in which the range of admissible substitutents for '*p*' is restricted to sentences that express moral propositions, captures the gist of moral arguments from performative inconsistency:

(Argument)[17]

1	(1)	It is performatively inconsistent to try to assert	premise

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		that not-p.	
2	(2)	If it is performatively inconsistent to try to assert that not-p, then it is not assertable that not-p.	premise
3	(3)	If not-p, then it is assertable that not-p.	premise, (substitution instance of (AC_{moral}))
1, 2	(4)	It is not assertable that not-p.	1, 2, Modus ponens
1, 2, 3	(5)	Not-not-p.	(3), (4), Modus tollens
1, 2, 3	(6)	p	(5), Duplex negation affirmat

What remains to be explained is in what sense (Argument) can be considered a schematic TA. Consider the schematic premise (1). According to the account of performative inconsistency sketched above, an assertion attempt v is (globally) performatively inconsistent iff the propositional content of v contradicts (or entails a statement that contradicts) a proposition lc-entailed by <someone asserts something>. This can be restated as follows: An attempt to deny <p> is (globally) performatively inconsistent iff it is lc-necessary that if someone asserts something, then p. Given the account of transcendental conditionals and TAs sketched in section 2, this *allows for* the claim that (1) entails a transcendental conditional and thus for the claim that (Argument) is a schematic TA. Of course, even accepting both the present account of transcendental conditionals and the present account of performative inconsistency does not yet commit one to claiming that (Argument) is a schematic TA. But it is at least quite plausible to hold that global performative inconsistency and global unassertability occur where speakers attempt to assert the contradictories of statements that express necessary conditions for the possibility of the truth of <someone asserts something>.[18] If this is accepted, then (Argument) can be recast in a way that slightly expands on ($TA_{schematic}^{ii}$):

(Argument*)

1	(1)	Someone asserts something.	premise
2	(2)	It is performatively inconsistent to assert that not-p.	premise
3	(3)	If it is performatively inconsistent to assert that not-p, then [necessarily, if someone asserts something, then p].	premise (account of global performative inconsistency)
2, 3	(4)	Necessarily, if someone asserts something, then p.	(2), (3), Modus ponens
2, 3	(5)	If someone asserts something, then p.	(4), necessity entails actuality
1, 2, 3	(6)	p	(1), (5), Modus ponens

A corollary of the preceding considerations is that if moral truth is assertorically constrained, then the distinction between modesty and ambitiousness becomes uninteresting with regard to moral TAs from performative inconsistency. If moral truth is assertorically constrained, then – where

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[18] This is how arguments from performative inconsistency are interpreted in Apel's transcendental-pragmatic version of discourse ethics (cf. Apel 2001).

<*p*> is a moral statement – any modest TA to the conclusion that it is performatively inconsistent to deny that *p* is convertible into an ambitious TA to the conclusion that *p*.

4. Conclusion

I have not mentioned moral scepticism at all. That may seem odd for a discussion of moral TAs from performative inconsistency. The reason for the omission is this. Substantial philosophical commitments are unavoidable in spelling out the idea of moral (transcendental) arguments from performative inconsistency, and such commitments are not scepticism-resistant. The present account of moral TAs from performative inconsistency is therefore useless for someone who wants to refute – or even just find a justification for ignoring – the moral sceptic. I submit that the same holds for any account of performative inconsistency that is capable of justifying the claim that the inference from <it is performatively inconsistent to deny that *p*> to <*p*> is, under certain conditions at least, legitimate. Any such account will have to involve substantial theoretical commitments.

Of course, the main advocates of arguments from performative inconsistency in ethics, Karl-Otto Apel and those who work out the details of Apel's transcendental-pragmatic version of discourse ethics, often write as if merely pointing to a (putative) performative inconsistency in a given assertion attempt *v* were sufficient for epistemically establishing the contradictory of the propositional content of *v*. But the distinction between modest and ambitious TAs gives good reason to pause. At any rate, the price of denying (or ignoring) that the step from <it is performatively inconsistent to deny that *p*> to <*p*> stands in need of independent justification is high. It amounts to leaving the presumed epistemic relevance of performative inconsistencies unexplained.

What is problematic about moral arguments from performative inconsistency is not so much that it is hard to see how they could be made to work. If global performative inconsistency reliably indicates global unassertability and if, furthermore, assertability is a necessary condition for moral truth, then at least in the domain of moral discourse there is a perfectly legitimate way to get from <it is performatively inconsistent to deny that *p*> to <*p*>. What is problematic about the idea of moral arguments from performative inconsistency is, rather, that it is not clear whether there *are* any moral statements whose denial results in a global performative inconsistency. Put in terms of transcendental conditionals, it is not clear whether there are any necessary moral conditions for the possibility of the practice of assertion. My dummy example was <humanity is morally valuable>. It would be surprising, to say the least, to find out that <humanity is morally valuable> is lc-entailed by <someone asserts something>. I used <humanity is morally valuable> as an example of a moral statement because it is expressible in four words. Ultimately, moral TAs from performative inconsistency stand and fall with the respective theories of assertion on which they rely.

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