

TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS:  
VERIFICATIONISM OR PARASITISM?

Douglas Ehring

Recent discussions on the nature of "transcendental" arguments have raised the question of whether these arguments are in any way distinct or unique. Though commentators in general agree that transcendental arguments are supposed to refute scepticism, no general agreement has been reached as to their distinctiveness. Barry Stroud, in his "Transcendental Arguments," argues that transcendental arguments rely ultimately on some version of the verification principle, and that ". . . there is nothing special or unique, and nothing new, about this way of attacking scepticism."<sup>1</sup> Several rejoinders to Stroud's attack on the uniqueness of the transcendental argument have been forthcoming.<sup>2</sup> The most promising of these defenses of the integrity of the transcendental argument has been Rorty's "Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments." Rorty argues that the so-called transcendental arguments which Stroud examines are not "good" examples of this sort of argument. Rorty contends "that the only good 'transcendental' argument is a 'parasitism' argument."<sup>3</sup> A "parasitism" argument is supposed to escape the Stroudian attack. According to Rorty, Stroud's appraisal is effective against those versions of the transcendental argument which seek to "prove necessary existence." The "parasitism" argument refutes the sceptic not by trying to prove that material objects must exist, but by demonstrating that the sceptic's new way of describing the world in terms of "experiences," say, is not possible without the use of "material object" concepts. In other words, the "parasitism" argument seeks to show that the sceptic's alternative conceptual scheme is incapable of providing descriptions of "everything we now describe in terms of e.g. persons and material objects . . . in terms of experiences."<sup>4</sup>

The thesis of this paper is that even the "parasitism" argument against the sceptic, when correctly understood, is subject to the Stroudian attack. In order to prove this thesis it is necessary to show that Rorty misunderstands the strategy of the sceptic and, consequently, that of the transcendental argument considered as a "parasitism" argument. I will show how

the "parasitism" argument must ultimately rely on an application of the verification principle, in some form, to complete its argument against the sceptic.

Before examining Rorty's defense in detail we must look at the particulars of Stroud's attack. According to Stroud, a transcendental argument is supposed to demonstrate the "impossibility or illegitimacy of the sceptical challenge by proving that certain concepts are necessary for thought or experience."<sup>5</sup> The sceptic challenges our belief in the existence of an external world; the sceptic maintains "that there is . . . a world of material objects at all is a contingent fact, and . . . challenges us to show how we know it."<sup>6</sup> The transcendental argument is said to prove that "material object" concepts are necessary to any experience or thought at all. By such a demonstration, the sceptic's challenge, which must rely on some experience or thought, is shown to be illegitimate. With this general formula in mind, Stroud examines two different ways in which this notion of a transcendental argument might be given sense.

For the sake of this paper I will call these two renderings of the transcendental argument the Meaning Approach and the Speech-Act Approach.<sup>7</sup> Both of these interpretations agree on the fact that a transcendental argument argues for the proposition doubted by the sceptic by trying to demonstrate that this proposition is a necessary condition of the sceptic's making sense, and that, therefore, the sceptic's doubt is illegitimate. The Meaning Approach holds that a transcendental argument is supposed to prove that the conclusion of the argument, doubted by the sceptic, is a necessary condition of our conceptual scheme which, in some sense, forms the premises of the argument. The sceptic's doubt is shown to make no sense since it would involve doubting a necessary condition of the only conceptual scheme in which that doubt could make sense. The Speech-Act Approach contends that a transcendental argument is intended to demonstrate that the proposition doubted by the sceptic is a necessary condition of the sceptic's act of assertion or supposal. Consequently the sceptic doubt is shown to make no sense if asserted or supposed. In other words, the sceptic's is shown to make no sense by proving that the speech-act through which he formulates his doubt entails the proposition that is the object of his doubt. Stroud argues that both of these types of arguments rely on the verification principle and are, therefore, not distinct argument forms.

### Meaning Approach

A transcendental argument according to the Meaning Approach, as we have seen, is supposed to demonstrate that the truth of the proposition doubted by the sceptic is a necessary condition of our conceptual scheme, of our making sense, and that, therefore, the sceptic's doubt is simple nonsense. The argument is thus meant to be a proof that the sceptic's doubt somehow involves an incoherency and, therefore, is illegitimate. Stroud analyzes an argument of this form from the first half of Strawson's Individuals and shows it to involve an application of some version of the verification principle.

Stroud's analysis of Strawson's argument can be paraphrased in these terms: Strawson posits that to talk meaningfully requires that we talk within the bounds of our conceptual scheme. Strawson argues that the proposition ("objects continue to exist unperceived") doubted by the sceptic is entailed by our conceptual scheme. If the proposition is so implied then the sceptic's doubts "amount to a rejection of the . . . conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense."<sup>8</sup> Consequently his doubt cannot make sense. Stroud finds this argument to rest on an application of the verification principle. With the aid of this principle, the move from our conceptual scheme to the proposition about the world is made possible. However, by using this principle, the need for a "transcendental" argument, as something more than or distinct from an application of the principle, is superseded. In other words, if the sceptic's claim that we cannot know if the proposition is true or false is meaningful then his claim must be false by the principle invoked that:

. . . if the notion of objective particulars makes sense to us, we can sometimes know certain conditions to be fulfilled, the fulfillment of which logically implies either that objects continue to exist unperceived or they do not.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently the "transcendental" argument can no longer be considered distinctive.

Let us look at Stroud's critique in more detail. Strawson's argument is meant to show that the sceptic makes no sense. He begins by premising the following as true of our conceptual scheme:

(1) We think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system.<sup>10</sup>

The truth of the proposition doubted by the sceptic will be shown to be a necessary condition of our conceptual scheme, which includes (1), and thus the sceptic's doubt will be shown to make no sense because it will involve, as we have said, a rejection of the necessary conditions of the existence of the conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense.

The sceptic is taken as doubting or denying:  
 "(6) Objects continue to exist unperceived." Strawson must show that (6) is a necessary condition of our conceptual scheme which includes (1). Strawson admits two more "necessary truths" of our conceptual scheme, according to Stroud:

- (2) If we think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system, then we are able to identify and reidentify particulars;
- (3) If we can reidentify particulars, then we must have a satisfiable criteria on the basis of which we can make reidentifications.<sup>11</sup>

Strawson's argument is said to stop here. But Strawson has shown at most that "if the sceptic's statements make 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 . . . ." <sup>12</sup> The sceptic can still claim that it may be possible that all our reidentifications asserted on such a basis are false.

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

- (4) If we know that the best criteria for re-identification have been satisfied, then we know that objects continue to exist unperceived.<sup>13</sup>

However, as Stroud points out, the conjunction (1 to 4) is a verification principle:

. . . if the notion of objective particulars makes sense to me then we can sometimes know certain conditions to be fulfilled, the fulfillment of which logically implies either that objects continue to exist unperceived or they do not.<sup>14</sup>

Though this principle is necessary to derive (6), it is not sufficient. However, this principle in and of itself is sufficient to refute the sceptic who claims that it is not possible to know if objective particulars continue to exist unperceived. "If the sceptic's claim makes sense it must be false, since if the

proposition could not be known to be true or false it would make no sense."<sup>15</sup>

However, in order to fulfill the original plan of deriving (6) one further premise is required: "We sometimes know that the best criteria we have for re-identification of particulars have been satisfied."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, though (6) can now be deduced, Strawson's objective of defeating the sceptic by showing that he made no sense simply on the basis of our conceptual scheme cannot be accomplished. The game is lost because (5) is a factual premise not about the way we think or our conceptual scheme. If (6) were a consequence of statements only about our conceptual scheme, without recourse to other factual premises, then the sceptic would be shown to be doubting a necessary condition of the fundamentals of our conceptual scheme. Since the doubt or denial of (6) does not involve the rejection of our conceptual scheme alone, the sceptic may be making sense after all.

Stroud argues that the move to (5) is not only self-defeating but made unnecessary by the addition of (4). The move to step (5) was to be the final stage of the "transcendental" argument. With the conjunction of (1 to 4) the sceptic is refuted directly by a verification principle, if the principle is to be accepted as valid. Consequently, since (4) is necessary to the success of the argument, the "transcendental" argument must ultimately rely on a verification principle. Furthermore, with the addition of (4) the fifth premise becomes superfluous. Without the introduction of the verification principle Strawson's argument would have no bite, and with it the rest of Strawson's argument, i.e., the step (5) necessary to complete the argument as "transcendental," becomes needless.

The sceptic is thus directly refuted by the verification principle invoked, and "there is no need to go through an indirect or transcendental argument to expose his mistakes."<sup>17</sup> Stroud, later on in his article, goes back on this claim "that the sceptic is directly refuted by anyone who accepts [the principle], because it would be open to the sceptic to deny that we understand the notion of objective particulars."<sup>18</sup> The sceptic may just concede the legitimacy of the verification principle, and, thus, that (P) "Objects continue to exist unperceived" makes no sense:

. . . the sceptic might accept this with equanimity. Of course statements about objective particulars are hypotheses which 'transcend all possible experience,' How could such an

hypothesis be backed by meaning?<sup>19</sup>

The sceptic himself could be said to make no sense if and only if he asserted both "P is meaningful" and "P cannot be known to be true or false." By the verification principle this combined assertion is nonsensical. But the sceptic is not forced to say that "P is meaningful." He can say only that "P cannot be known to be true or false." A refutation by the verification principle of this proposition would require that saying this would imply "P is meaningful." But, as we have said, the sceptic need not commit himself to this implication. An example of the same sort of statement being made by a non-sceptical upholder of the principle might be that (X) "'Angels exist' cannot be known to be true or false." Certainly by the verification principle it might be maintained that while "Angels exist" is meaningless, (X) is not nonsense. The verification principle does not jeopardize the sceptic's doubt if his doubt has the same form as the above. In other words, in order to insure his position the sceptic need admit only that the proposition (P) is meaningless:

. . . it is always open to the sceptic to accept the argument and conclude that talk about, say, the continued existence of unperceived objects really doesn't make sense to us . . . . Far from refuting scepticism 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.<sup>19</sup>

As Stine says, this "possibility is what led Stroud to formulate his less restricted version of a transcendental argument."<sup>20</sup> This less restricted version interprets the "transcendental" argument in terms of the conditions of anything being asserted or supposed, that is of being able to talk about anything at all.

### Speech-Act Approach

The use of the term Speech-Act in connection with transcendental arguments was initiated by Grice in his "Transcendental Arguments."<sup>21</sup> A Speech-Act account holds that:

A transcendental argument would establish that certain propositions are true just because the assertion or supposal of the negations of such propositions contradict a necessary condition of certain types of speech-acts.<sup>22</sup>

A transcendental argument would prove that a proposition P is true just because the assertion or supposal of its negation contradicts a necessary condition of the kind of speech-act that is required to assert or suppose not-P.

An example of this sort of argument might assume that the existence of persons is a necessary condition for such speech-acts as asserting or supposing. It might assume further that the proposition that there are no persons implies the non-existence of these speech-acts. "If propositions like the foregoing are supposed or asserted to be true, it follows that they are false."<sup>23</sup>

Stroud's less restricted version of the transcendental argument may be understood in terms of the Speech-Act approach. Stroud defines a transcendental argument as an argument which "proves that the truth of its conclusion is a necessary condition of there being any experience or thought at all."<sup>23</sup> Stroud specifies this statement in terms of the notion of a proof that S is a necessary condition of there being some language. With this specification it is possible to formulate the argument in Speech-Act terms:

If we had such a proof we would know that S cannot be denied truly, that there is some language. The existence of language is a necessary condition of anyone's even asserting or denying anything at all.<sup>24</sup>

The propositions proved by transcendental arguments would be those "which must be true in order for there to be any language, and which consequently cannot be denied by anyone."<sup>25</sup> The speech-act of denying or asserting S would entail the existence of language and, therefore, the truth of S: ". . . the truth of S follows from the fact that someone asserted or denied it, or said anything at all."<sup>26</sup> These sorts of propositions are said to belong to the "Privileged class."

Obviously, on this model, the significant issue is whether or not a proposition S might be shown to be a member of the "privileged class." Stroud argues that any such attempted demonstration, which appealed to "language in general" or "the possibility of making sense," could not show conclusively that S was a member. The reason that such a proof is impossible is that the sceptic could always insist that for any candidate S, proposed as a member, "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."<sup>26</sup> It is enough that we have this belief for 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."<sup>27</sup>

This "additional justification" must be, according to Stroud, the verification principle that it is not possible for anything to make sense unless it is possible for us to establish whether S is true. "In other words, the meaning of a statement would have to be determined by what we know."<sup>28</sup> However, with such a principle, the sceptic can be directly refuted. The sceptic's counter that it is enough that we believe S to be true to make language possible is directly refuted by this principle which disallows the possibility that 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."<sup>29</sup> The second stage of the "transcendental" argument, in which assertion of not-S was to prove that S was true because it is a necessary condition of any assertion, becomes unnecessary. The sceptic's claim is essentially that it is impossible to know if a certain proposition S is true or false. The sceptic's claim is directly refuted by the principle. Consequently,

. . . 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 scepticism 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 there is nothing special or unique, and certainly nothing new, about this way of attacking scepticism.<sup>30</sup>

Stroud's analysis shows that the "transcendental" argument of the Speech-Act type is not a distinct argument form.

### Rejoinder to Stroud

The move to a "parasitism" theory of transcendental arguments is motivated by several failings that seem to be evident in Stroud's picture of the transcendental argument and the sceptic. Hacker, in his "Are Transcendental Arguments a Version of Verificationism," takes up this two pronged rejoinder to Stroud.<sup>31</sup> The "parasitism" approach will be seen to develop out of these criticisms and reach a fuller form in Rorty's



"Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments."32

Hacker first establishes that Stroud misunderstood the nature of the sceptical challenge. Stroud contends that the sceptic doubts or denies our knowledge of an independent, external world. This statement of the sceptic's position fails by omission. Stroud forgets to note that the sceptic, to whom the transcendental argument is meant to speak, also admits that we have knowledge of our mind's contents--thoughts. The Cartesian sceptic will allow that certain claims to know our own beliefs, etc., are incorrigible. Stroud's treatment of the transcendental argument makes no mention of this tenet of the scepticism under attack. The sceptic of the Meaning approach, for instance, doubts or denies that "objects continue to exist unperceived," but makes no claims to know his own inner states.

The significance of this omission will become visible only when the second prong of the rejoinder is clarified. Hacker argues that the strategy of the transcendental argument is neither to show that the sceptic's doubt is nonsensical because it rejects our conceptual scheme nor because it involves the denial of a necessary condition of language. Rather the transcendental argument is supposed to show that the sceptic cannot legitimately in one statement claim inner knowledge and in the next deny outer knowledge: inner knowledge is not possible without outer knowledge. The basic strategy of this argument will be to show that one set of concepts (inner) is "parasitic" on another set (outer). We will return to the details of this sort of argument in our treatment of Rorty.

For now we can see that the verificationist argument is different from the transcendental argument according to this model. The verificationist argues that:

The falsity of the sceptic's claim that it is impossible in principle to know whether or not statements about objective particulars are true or false is a necessary condition of the meaningfulness of such statements, and hence a necessary condition of the claim making sense.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, the falsity of the sceptic's claim is a necessary condition of its meaningfulness. Whether or not this sort of argument really touches the sceptic is not presently at issue. In a transcendental argument a different strategy is adopted:

. . . if the sceptic's claim is true, then his

other claims, namely to know how things seem to him to be, are thereby made meaningless. The sceptic . . . cannot both affirm and deny that he knows the nature of his own inner experiences and simultaneously deny . . . his knowledge of his inner experiences is ever sufficiently good evidence to enable him to know how things actually are.<sup>34</sup>

The drift of this version of the transcendental argument is that the sceptic cannot legitimately maintain both his sceptical stance on external objects and his claim to know his own inner states. The difference between this sort of argument and the other two is that the meaningfulness of the sceptic's doubt is judged in relation to his other knowledge claims. In the previous two theories the sceptic's doubt was supposed to be shown to be meaningless in relation to our conceptual scheme or language in general. This latest version argues that the sceptic's doubt is not meaningless simply with respect to certain general conditions, but that it involves him in incoherency with respect to his other claims.

Thus Hacker's general reply to both approaches is that they misconstrue the strategy of the transcendental argument. On these models one would have to establish that the truth of S is a necessary condition of "making any sense at all" or "saying anything at all." In other words it would not be enough to show that the truth of S was necessary to some subset of concepts or language, but that S was necessary to language in general, for instance. Furthermore, as we have seen, the task of showing that the truth of S is necessary to any language, in the case of the Speech-Act approach, cannot be accomplished without some version of the verification principle. Without this principle, the most we could show is that the belief that S is true is necessary to any language. Hacker's point is that the transcendental argument does not pretend to succeed at that task.

According to the "parasitism" approach, a transcendental argument is supposed to show that if we are to use certain concepts we must use certain other ones. In other words, if we are to make sense in one way we must make sense in another. In terms of our example, the use of "inner" concepts is said to require the use of "outer" concepts. Since the sceptic claims one set of concepts to be "objectively valid," a "parasitism" argument might show that if this is the case then another set of concepts must also have a use. To refute the sceptic we have to show that his use of inner concepts is not possible without outer concepts. The task of showing the

above is not the same as showing that the sceptic's denial or doubt of the external world is self-defeating because the use of any concept or language presupposes, in some sense, the existence of the external world. On the "parasitism" model, the point of the transcendental argument is that the use of certain particular concepts is a necessary condition of the use of certain other particular concepts. The verification principle is called into service, in Stroud's article, only when it becomes necessary to show that the truth of S is necessary to the existence of any language, for instance. Since no such task confronts the transcendental argument Stroud's claims seem to be surpassed.

### Rorty's Defense: "Parasitism"

Rorty makes the point, in his "Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments," that what the above line of interpretation comes down to is that the only good "transcendental" argument is a "parasitism" argument. According to Rorty the "parasitism" argument says to the sceptic:

If you merely say that all the reasons we have for thinking such-and-such's to exist or to be impossible might be insufficient, you cannot be refuted. All that you have done then is to say that, in metaphysics as in physics, it is always possible for a better idea to come along which will give a better way of describing the world than in terms of what we thought must necessarily exist or which we previously thought impossible. We can only catch you out if you purport to actually advance such a better idea. Then we may be able to show that your new way of describing the world would not be intelligible to someone who was not familiar with the old way.<sup>35</sup>

According to this interpretation, the sceptic who claims that there is the possibility that our presently held reasons for believing in the existence of the external world, say, might not be adequate cannot be refuted. However, the sceptic of the transcendental argument claims more. He says, for instance in the case of the Cartesian sceptic, that everything we describe in terms of physical objects can be described in terms of inner experience. A conceptual alternative is presented. The force of a transcendental will be in showing that the alternative concepts are "parasitic" on the old scheme which, in this case, includes physical object concepts.

From the above it is obvious that the structure

of the argument is such that it could only work if the sceptic claims to have an alternative way of describing the world. Rorty's familiar example is the sceptic who says that the alternative conceptual scheme would include only "pure-experience" concepts. According to Rorty, the "parasitism" argument against such a sceptic does not depend, as the previous two have, on whether or not the "old way" is true or just believed to be true.

Thus a "parasitism" argument demonstrates that one set of concepts is "parasitic" on another set. An example of this sort of argument can be found in Rorty's "Strawson's Objectivity Argument."<sup>36</sup> Rorty's argument is couched in terms of an interpretation of what Strawson calls Kant's argument for the "objectivity thesis," found in the "Transcendental Deduction" of the Critique of Pure Reason. The sceptic of the argument claims that "sense-datum" experience is possible. "Sense-datum" experience is defined as the experience of a subject who does not have "physical-object" concepts in his repertoire. The "objects" of such experiences "might be the sort which the early sense-datum theorist spoke of—red, round patches, oblongs . . . ."<sup>37</sup> A "table" in this alternative conceptual scheme would be better described in terms of various collections of "sense-data" such as "hard" and "smooth," etc. Thus the possibility of an alternative conceptual scheme in which only sensory quality concepts are used is posited. Rorty's "parasitism" argument, in this case, is that these sorts of concepts are "parasitic" on "physical-object" concepts, i.e., the use of only sensory quality concepts is impossible.

Rorty's argument premises the thesis of the "conceptualizability of experience:" the thesis that all experience involves the recognition of particular items as being of such and such a general nature or kind. This premise means that all experience involves the use of concepts to make a judgment, which in turn involves having a thought expressible in a sentence. The core of the "parasitism" argument, in this case, is that ". . . if all one has are names for sensory qualities, one will not be able to construct sentences."<sup>38</sup> No sentences can be constructed with only adjectives such as "red" and "hard." Substantives, as well as adjectives, are necessary for the construction of sentences. Since any experience requires the use of concepts and since the use of concepts requires the use of substantives, "sense-datum" experience, which has only adjectival concepts, is not possible. Rorty's argument continues further to try to show that the only candidates for these substantive concepts are "physical-object" concepts.

Though a much more detailed examination of this argument would be required to assess its validity, the general strategy of the "parasitism" argument is well illustrated. The sceptic says that a certain set of concepts, sensory quality concepts, can serve the function of describing the world. The argument counters this claim by showing that the use of sensory quality concepts is only possible if there is a use for "physical-object" concepts.

### Rorty's Mistake

Rorty's defense of the transcendental argument from Stroud's attack is based on two misconceptions. The first is Rorty's drastically misleading picture of the sceptic. According to Rorty, the sceptic offers an alternative conceptual scheme for describing the world. The sceptic is not so much interested in putting into question certain knowledge claims, but rather is interested in defending a few of his own. His position, which Rorty finds analogous to that of a scientist or metaphysician proffering a new hypothesis or belief, is that every thing we now describe in material object terms is better described in "pure-experience" terms. The general drift of this program is Phenomenalism. Phenomenalism, in its linguistic form, claims that the concept of "material object" can be defined in terms of private sensa (in this case in "pure-experience" terms). The Phenomenalist seeks to provide translations of statements about material objects into equivalent sets of statements about "pure-experiences." What is really meant by talk about such things as rocks, houses, and hats can be expressed solely in terms of "pure experiences." In other words, statements about "physical objects" and statements about "pure-experiences" are different ways of describing the same state of affairs, which ultimately must be identified with "pure-experiences." The "physical object" is a logical construct based on the patterns and configurations that hold between various "pure-experiences." The sceptic, on Rorty's model, takes up this program of translation. This identification of the sceptic with the Phenomenalist is unfortunate. The sceptic, in fact, follows a different tact. He does not argue that "physical object" statements are translatable into "pure-experience" statements, but that though the latter can provide knowledge the former cannot. The sceptic doubts the legitimacy of our use of "physical object" concepts. His interest is in raising the question of their validity and not in providing the answer.

Rorty's first misconception is thus in mistaking

the sceptic for the Phenomenalist. Indeed the sceptic does claim that certain sorts of concepts have an epistemological primacy, but this is distinct from the descriptive primacy claimed by the Phenomenalist for a phenomenal language. The former thesis is that knowledge claims about my "experiences" are more reliable than knowledge claims about "physical objects." This epistemological primacy of knowledge claims under certain descriptions does not involve the second thesis that these sorts of descriptions describe better what is described in "physical object" terms.

Indeed, Rorty's first misconception runs even deeper than thus far indicated. Rorty argues that the sceptic is either a Phenomenalist or his scepticism is based on the following consideration: the external world's existence is open to doubt because "it is always possible for a better idea to come along which will give a better way of describing the world . . . ." <sup>39</sup> According to Rorty, if the sceptic is arguing from the possibility of future conceptual change then he cannot be refuted. The sceptic must present some alternative way of describing the world or else he remains unrefuted. Rorty's "either-or" picture, however, fails on both counts. First of all, as we have seen, the sceptic is not a Phenomenalist. Secondly, the sceptic does not base his doubt on the above possibility. The sceptic does not claim that belief in the external world's existence is, as it is in Rorty's picture, a belief of the same order as other scientific and meta-physical beliefs that are subject to change. In terms of the analogy with scientific beliefs, the sceptic willingly admits that this belief is not subject to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation. Belief in the external world's existence is, in some sense, the "foundation" upon which rests our other empirical beliefs:

As long as we have a public object 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 sceptic challenges us to show how we know it. <sup>40</sup>

Unlike empirical beliefs the sceptic claims that there is no possible justification for our claim to know that the external world exists. Normally we justify our knowledge claims on the basis of various sorts of empirical evidence and the like. In this case such appeals to matters of fact are illegitimate.

The second misconception, Rorty's view of the transcendental argument as a "parasitism" argument pure and simple, grows out of his mistaken conception of scepticism. If, indeed, the sceptic did claim that an alternative conceptual scheme was available for describing the world more accurately, then the transcendental argument would be best construed as a "parasitism" argument, an argument to the effect that the alternative is not able to "live on its own" without the "older" system. The argument, in fact, would then be as straightforward as Rorty's argument against "sense-datum" experience. But the sceptic does not present this straw man position. The sceptic's position is such that even if it could be shown that the use of "pure-experience" concepts is not possible without the use of "physical object" concepts, the challenge of the sceptic would go unanswered.

Before examining this claim more closely, a distinction must be made between two senses of the "correct use of an expression." One sense of knowing how to correctly use an expression requires that we know the situations in which it is appropriate and those in which it is inappropriate to apply words of a certain class. The second sense of correctly using an expression requires that we use it truly in those situations which are appropriate. I will call correct in the first sense, correct<sub>1</sub> and in the second sense, correct<sub>2</sub>. Now it can be readily seen that the correct<sub>1</sub> use of an expression does not imply the correct<sub>2</sub>, or true, use of an expression. Consider, for example, a person who is hypnotised so that he will feel no pain when stuck with a pin. In this situation it is surely appropriate for someone who sees the person being stuck, but does not know he is hypnotised, to claim that the person is experiencing pain, and thereby use the expression "pain." His claim in this situation is false though appropriate.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the correct<sub>2</sub> use of "inner experience" concepts requires the use of "physical object" concepts. So far this argument has not specified if the latter usage must also be correct<sub>2</sub>. In fact the "parasitism" argument as far as it goes cannot so specify. The most that can be shown by this sort of argument is that the correct<sub>1</sub> use of a concept requires the correct<sub>1</sub> use of another. The reason for this limitation is based on the limits of the argument: a concept's meaning, though not its legitimacy, is shown to be dependent on the meaning of another concept. In the example above, Rorty tried to demonstrate that the use or meaning of sensory quality concepts required the use or meaning of "physical object" concepts, and not that the correct<sub>2</sub> use of the former required the correct<sub>2</sub> use of the latter. Consequently, it is clear that as far as the "parasitism"

argument goes, in Rorty's model, the sceptic remains unrefuted.

The sceptic's doubt can only be shown to be illegitimate by a "parasitism" argument which could demonstrate that the correct<sub>2</sub> use of certain concepts requires the correct<sub>2</sub> use of other sorts of concepts. In fact the most the "parasitism" argument so far examined can show is that the correct<sub>1</sub> use of certain concepts requires the correct<sub>1</sub> use of others. In order to prove otherwise some version of the verification principle would be necessary: the principle that the meaning of certain concepts requires that it be possible for us to know whether they are truly or falsely applied. The meaning of statements about certain concepts would have to be determined by what we can know. In other words, the correct<sub>2</sub> use of concept A requires the correct<sub>1</sub> use of concept B, which in turn requires that it be possible for us to know if B's exist.

Without some such principle, it is always open to the sceptic to insist that it is enough to make possible the use of the first concept if we believe that the second can be applied correctly<sub>2</sub>, "or if it looks for all the world as if it is, but that it needn't be true."<sup>42</sup> Rorty's "parasitism" argument makes no real use of the fact that the use of inner concepts, say, is accepted as legitimate by the sceptic. The "parasitism" argument simply says that the meaning of these concepts depends on the meaning of "physical object" concepts. In order to show that the latter are legitimate, some version of the verification principle must be invoked: the conditions of these inner concepts making sense have to be "strong enough to include not only our beliefs" about physical objects "but also the possibility of knowing whether these beliefs are true: hence the meaning of a statement would have to be determined by what we know."<sup>43</sup>

Let us call a necessary condition of the use of a concept "A," "P." The "parasitism" argument can establish that the meaning of statements about "A" is dependent on statements about some other concept "O" making sense. In order to establish that the sceptic's doubt of the existence of O's is illegitimate, it must be shown that "P" includes the possibility of knowing if O's exist. But in order to show the latter some further argument is necessary. If, for instance, it were argued that the concept "non-unicorns" was "parasitic" on the concept of "unicorns," that in itself would not show that it is possible to know if unicorns exist, even though we may know that



non-unicorns exist. Thus if "P" is to include a claim which refutes the sceptic's doubt that claim must either be the verification principle or a factual claim derivable only through the use of a verification principle, thus making the claim superfluous. But as Stroud says "to prove this would be to prove some version of the verification principle, and then the sceptic will have been directly and conclusively refuted."<sup>44</sup> Consequently, there would be no reason to attribute any distinctive status to the "transcendental" argument.

At the beginning of this paper it was said that the "parasitism" argument has the advantage of not arguing for necessary existence. We have also seen that this argument works only against the Phenomenalist, or someone who proposes to replace one conceptual scheme with another. The sceptic denies that the use of "physical object" concepts can be justified. This challenge consists in claiming that such objects cannot be proved to exist. The sceptic demands a proof of their "necessary existence." We have seen that the verification principle provides the vital link between meaning and the world necessary to refute the sceptic. Through some version of this principle it is shown that it is impossible for all our criteria to be fulfilled and it still be the case that these objects do not exist. This latter consequence follows from the verification principle under question: it is not possible for one set of concepts to make sense unless it is possible for us to establish whether some statements containing concepts from another set are true. In other words, as we have just said, it is not possible for us to understand statements containing the former concepts if we know only what conditions make it look for all the world as if statements containing the latter were true, but were still compatible with the falsity of these latter statements. However, as Stroud makes clear, though the verification principle would be necessary to complete any argument for "necessary existence," its adoption directly refutes the sceptic and makes unnecessary any move to argue "transcendentally." The sceptic is refuted "directly" in the sense that it is not necessary actually to prove "necessary existence." The fact that the sceptic admits the legitimacy of one set of concepts along with the acceptance of the principle is sufficient to refute the sceptic who claims that it is not possible to know if statements containing concepts of the second set are true.

The whole force of the "parasitism" argument is based on the notion that the meaningful use of certain

concepts is not possible unless these concepts bear some non-trivial "inferential relations" with other concepts. This is the meaning-in-use slogan according to Rorty. However, this notion does not provide an adequate reply to the non-Phenomenalist sceptic. The sceptic will admit that certain uses may require certain others, but demands that these latter uses be justified. Such justification is not possible by the "parasitism" argument alone. Unless some stronger principle is invoked the sceptic remains unanswered. This further principle could only be that statements about "X's," concepts of the second set, make sense only if we are able to state criteria the fulfillment of which logically implies that X's exist.

As Stroud says, if this analysis of the transcendental arguments holds we are not so far as we might think from Vienna in the 1920's. The attempt to defend the integrity of the transcendental argument against this analysis has failed to show this argument to stand without a verification principle. Indeed, we have seen that the "parasitism" version of the transcendental argument must ultimately rely on an application of some such principle. Rorty has thus not shown the "transcendental" argument to have a distinctive form.

Columbia University

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," Journal of Philosophy, 65 (1968), p. 255.

<sup>2</sup>See below: Stine, Hacker, and Rorty.

<sup>3</sup>R. Rorty, "Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments," Nous, 5 (1971), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Stroud, p. 242.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Gram uses "Speech-Act" in "Transcendental Arguments," Nous, 5 (1971), pp. 15-26.

<sup>8</sup>P.F. Strawson, Individuals (New York: Anchor, 1963), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup>Stroud, p. 247.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>18</sup>N. Stine, "Transcendental Arguments," Meta-philosophy, 3 (1972), p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>Stroud, p. 251.

<sup>20</sup>Stine, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup>Gram, pp. 15-26.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>Stroud, p. 252.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>31</sup>p. Hacker, "Are Transcendental Arguments a Version of Verificationism?" American Philosophical Quarterly, 9 (1972), pp. 78-85.

<sup>32</sup>Rorty, pp. 3-14.

<sup>33</sup>Hacker, p. 44.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Rorty, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup>R. Rorty, "Strawson's Objectivity Argument," Review of Metaphysics, 24 (1970), pp. 207-44.

<sup>37</sup>Strawson, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup>Rorty, "Strawson," p. 219.

<sup>39</sup>Rorty, "Verificationism," p. 5.

<sup>40</sup>Stroud, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup>James Cornman, "Strawson's 'Person,'" Theoria (1964), pp. 150-51.

<sup>42</sup>Cornman, p. 255.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.