

Objectivity

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ABSTRACT: Judgement, perception, and other mental states and events have a minimal objectivity in this sense: making the judgement or being in the mental state does not in general thereby make the judgement correct or make the perception veridical. I offer an explanation of this minimal objectivity by developing a form of constitutive transcendental argument. The argument appeals to the proper individuation of the content of judgements and perceptions. In the case of the conceptual content of judgements, concepts are individuated by their fundamental reference rules. Properly developed, this resource can be used against various forms of idealism, and to defend a conception of transcendental arguments that presupposes neither verificationism nor transcendental idealism. The paper contrasts its approach with other recent transcendental treatments. It also addresses the relation between its argument and Principles of Significance. I close with a discussion of the right way of handling the extreme generality necessarily involved in transcendental reasoning.

1. Minimal Objectivity

Some of our most important mental states and events have a minimal objectivity, in this intuitive sense: a thinker's being in the state, or enjoying the event, does not in general make the content of the state or event correct. In general, making a judgement is one thing, the correctness of what is judged is another. Having a perceptual experience as of something's being the case does not in general make it the case. Valuing things that have a certain property does not in general make possession of that property something of value. What explains this minimal objectivity? How is it possible?

I am going to argue that this objectivity is explained by the existence of certain sound transcendental arguments. My aim is to articulate these arguments, to consider their general form, and to discuss their philosophical significance.

It is important to stress just how minimal our target notion of minimal objectivity is. Minimal objectivity does not, for example, imply mind-independence. Some judgements display minimal objectivity and have contents whose truth is mind-independent; but other minimally objective judgements have contents whose truth is mind-dependent. On some classical views of

secondary qualities, the truth of a judgement “That apple is red” consists in facts about certain possible perceptual experiences of the apple as red. Provided the experiences are distinct from a thinker’s making a particular judgement “That apple is red” – as they are – the condition for minimal objectivity of the judgement is met.

Various kinds of objectivity beyond the minimal kind can be formulated. It may be held that the correctness of any particular judgement is independent not only of the making of that judgement, but also of some wider range of judgements; or perhaps of all judgements; and so forth. A corresponding range of various kinds of idealism disputes the respective forms of objectivity. Linguistic idealism, found in some of the more radical readings of the later Wittgenstein, contests some forms of objectivity of the correctness of judgements. Various forms of phenomenalism dispute corresponding accounts of the objectivity of the correctness of perceptual content. Various attempts to reduce value to desire contest some of the stronger varieties of objectivity for the content of a thinker’s valuing. I will be arguing that reflection on the transcendental arguments I will be endorsing can give us some deeper understanding of the difficulties of these several variants of idealism.

Minimal objectivity needs a more precise characterization. It is not quite accurate to describe the minimal objectivity of judgement as the possibility that the judgement be made and its content be false. Judgements of some contents do not meet this specific modal condition. Examples are judgements of such contents as “I am engaged in mental activity”, “I hereby judge that Smith is innocent”, “This attempt at thinking is occurring now”. It seems clear that the deep issues about the objectivity of judgement and other mental states and actions with content do not turn on such trivial examples. We need a better characterization of objectivity that respects this point.

A better formulation of the notion - at least for the case of judgement - proceeds by considering the conditions in general for an arbitrary judgement to be true. The judgement will have a conceptual content, built up from concepts of objects, properties and relations, of whatever order. For each of these concepts, there is a condition for something to be, in the context of the judgement, the reference of the concept. The truth-value of the complete content judged will depend on the relations of these various contextually determined references (when the concepts have references). In the simple case of a monadic predicative concept combined with a singular concept of an individual object, the judgement is true if the reference of the

singular concept has the property that is the reference of the predicative concept (or is mapped to the True by the reference, if you prefer the classical Fregean account). The various cases in which, if a judgement is made, it is thereby guaranteed to be true, are very special cases in which the references of the concepts of the judgements are picked out in such a way that, when the judgement is made, the resulting content is guaranteed to be true.

The believer in minimal objectivity has no reason or need to deny that these special cases exist. His claim should rather be that in the general account of what makes things the references of the constituent concepts of an arbitrary judgement, there is nothing that ensures that the content judged is true. I take that to be the thesis of minimal objectivity of judgement.

Self-referential and closely related cases aside, minimal objectivity holds with extraordinary generality, independently of the subject matter of the judgement. We should try to explain why such a generalization holds. Because of the generality with which minimal objectivity holds, one would suspect in advance that the explanation of the phenomenon has something to do with the nature of judgement, the nature of content, and the nature of truth. But what feature or features of these natures explain the phenomenon?

Here is the structure of the rest of this paper. I will outline the general form of a certain kind of constitutive transcendental argument. In the central part of this material, I propose instances of that form for the cases of judgement and perceptual experience respectively, in an attempt to explain the source of minimal objectivity. In a final section I consider the relations of these proposed constitutive transcendental arguments to several large-scale issues in philosophy, including: the role of a Principle of Significance; the possibility of various other kinds of transcendental arguments; and, briefly, the relation of this position to radical scepticism. I will also consider some of the issues raised by theorizing at this high level of generality.

2. Constitutive Transcendental Arguments

The transcendental arguments I want to consider have a common form. They each consist of three steps.

Step (1) identifies a feature that the mental state, event or action of the kind in question has to have if it is to be a state, event or action of that kind.

Step (2) gives a philosophical theory of what it is to have the feature identified at Step (1). (It is partly because Step (2) gives a constitutive theory of the feature that the transcendental arguments with which I am concerned can properly be called constitutive transcendental arguments.)

Step (3) uses the theory of the preceding step to explain minimal objectivity and other properties of mental states, events or actions of the kind in question.

The feature at Step (1) for each of our cases is, broadly, the possession of a particular content by the mental state, event or action in question. For judgement, it is the possession of a particular conceptual content by the judgement, a content assessable as true or false. For perceptual experience, it is the experience's possession of a total representational content, the way the world seems thereby to be to a subject who enjoys the experience. While it is arguable that there are some experiences that lack representational content (experiences with only sensational properties, in the terminology of Peacocke 1983), any experience assessable as veridical or as non-veridical necessarily has such a representational content. For valuing, the feature at Step (1) is the property specified by what Anscombe called the 'desirability characterization' that must be present in any genuine valuing, where the property may be anything from being enjoyable, being the fulfillment of a particular appetite, being fair, or making others happy (Anscombe 1963, Sections 37-38). I will be concentrating in this paper on the cases of judgement and experience. After seeing how such arguments can operate, we will be in a better position to discuss the rationale for classifying them as 'transcendental' (Section 5 (ii), below).

3. Judgement

I consider judgements and their contents first.

I take it that the contents of judgements are structured, truth-evaluable entities built up from concepts. Concepts are distinguished by considerations of cognitive significance, as in Frege's treatment of senses. Possessing such a structured, conceptual content is a property something must have if it is to be a judgement at all. So this, as noted, is the instantiation for judgement of Step (1) of the form of constitutive transcendental arguments identified in the preceding section.

Carrying out Step (2) for the case of judgement must involve the development of a philosophical theory of such structured conceptual contents. As a substantive thesis about the nature of concepts, I suggest that each concept is individuated by a nontrivial, fundamental reference rule. A nontrivial fundamental reference rule specifies the relation between a concept, its occasion of use and an entity of the appropriate category in virtue of which the concept refers, on that occasion of use, to that entity. In the case of indexicals and demonstratives and the like, the fundamental reference rule for a concept is relativized at least to a thinker, to a time and possibly to a thinking. In such cases, the fundamental reference rule for a concept specifies the relation between a thinker, a time, and a thinking, and some entity, in virtue of which the concept, as used by the thinker then in that thinking, refers to that entity.

Here are some examples of nontrivial fundamental reference rules. As the concepts in question become more interesting, these formulations become correspondingly more substantive and controversial:

What makes something the reference of the concept *now* in a thinking is that it is the time at which the thinking occurs.

What makes someone the reference of the first-person concept *I* in a thinking is that the subject is the author of the thinking.

What makes something fall under the observational concept *round* is that it is of the same shape as things are presented as being in perception when they are perceived as round.

What makes something the reference of the perceptual-demonstrative *that F* associated with a given perception in which an object is perceived in way W is that it is the F that is perceived in way W in that perception.

What makes an event fall under the concept *pain* is that it is an event of the same subjective kind, in some subject or other, as the pain-events for which the thinker has a recognitional capacity in her own case.

None of these fundamental reference rules is of the trivial, disquotational form exemplified in the claim that what makes something fall under the concept *round* is that it is round.

Throughout, these fundamental reference rules concern concepts, not the properties picked out by concepts. As always, two concepts may pick out the same property. The fundamental reference rule for the concept *round* formulated above individuates the observational concept of a certain shape. The same shape can be thought of, using a different and non-observational concept, as the shape described by the equation $x^2+y^2=r^2$. So it is not written into the very nature of a monadic concept that its fundamental reference rule mentions experience. Any claim that its nature involves perception in some way or other needs to be earned by argument (as attempted in, for example, Section 5 (i) below on Principles of Significance). It is also not precluded that the formulation of a fundamental reference rule may contain vague predicates.

To clarify, in the cases of genuinely observational concepts, the formulation of the fundamental reference rule for *round* does not imply that anyone who has the observational concept *round* must have already experienced things as round. It suffices that the thinker knows what it would be like to perceive something as round - in the sense in which Frank Jackson's Mary does not know what it would be like to experience something as red (Jackson 1986). The same applies to experiences of pain in the fundamental reference rule for the concept *pain*.

To individuate a concept by a nontrivial fundamental reference rule is not to individuate it by its evidential relations or by its role in the consequences of some complete contents in which it features. It is to individuate it, substantively, by the contributions it makes to the truth-conditions of complete contents in which it features.

Different concepts of the same object, or different concepts of the same property, are distinguished by the different conditions that feature in their respective fundamental reference rules. Two concepts pick out a given object or property in different ways if they are individuated by two different conditions for something to be their respective references. It is a substantial commitment, not defended here, that the features that are distinctive of a given concept, and can be traced to its nature, are in fact traceable to its fundamental reference rule. (This claim is defended in the early chapters of Peacocke 2008.)

Because a fundamental reference rule individuates a concept, it is metaphysically necessary. By contrast, a fundamental reference rule for a word that expresses the concept is contingent, since the word could have expressed something else, on a plausible conception of words. But the fact the fundamental reference rule for a concept is necessary does not mean that it is easy to discover. It is sometimes a highly non-trivial task to formulate the correct fundamental reference rule (“FRR”) for a concept, and to show its adequacy to explain the cognitive properties distinctive of a concept. While the FRR for the concept *now* would be agreed on by almost everyone, there is much less agreement that the FRR for the first person I offered is really adequate to the task. All of the other FRRs on this list are controversial in one or another respect. In the case of even more problematic concepts, it is arguable that we do not know even a plausible first draft of their nontrivial reference rules. (The general concept of consciousness may be one such example.)

Under this approach, for something to be a genuine concept, there must be a nontrivial, substantive reference rule for it. No such fundamental reference rule, no concept.

To grasp a concept is to have tacit knowledge of its fundamental reference rule. Partial grasp of a concept is partial knowledge of the concept’s FRR. Tacit knowledge of a concept’s FRR can contribute, in the presence of other information possessed by a thinker, to the thinker’s appreciation of what are good reasons for judging a given content containing the concept. If the concept *round* has the FRR given above, then circumstances in which a thinker is entitled to take his perceptual experience of an object as round will also be circumstances in which the thinker is entitled to judge that that object falls under the concept *round*. Circumstances in which he has, in the presence of additional information, reason to think that some unperceived object has the same shape as things are presented as being when he perceives them as round will be

circumstances in which he has reason to think that the unperceived object is round. What those circumstances are is an empirical matter.

In such examples, the thinker's tacit knowledge of an FRR contributes to the explanation of his appreciation of reasons. Attributions of tacit knowledge of FRRs are justified insofar as they contribute, in the presence of auxiliary hypotheses, to the explanation of the thinker's appreciation of reasons for making judgements involving concepts. The content of the thinker's tacit knowledge need not be something he can articulate, any more than a subject who understands a natural language can be expected to be able to articulate the tacit knowledge that contributes to his perception of an uttered sentence as having a particular syntactic structure. Tacit knowledge of syntactic rules can explain features of the conscious perception of language. Tacit knowledge of FRRs can explain conscious appreciation that certain states and auxiliary information give reason for accepting a certain content containing a given concept.

I now turn to the instantiation, for the case of judgements, of Step (3) of the transcendental argument. The approach to concepts and understanding I have been outlining provides the resources for a philosophical explanation of the minimal objectivity of judgement. Suppose a thinker applies a concept in making a particular judgement. The thinker goes on in a particular way in applying the concept. Then two questions arise: is the judgement true? And, is the judgement made rationally?

The question of the relation between the truth of the judgement, if it is true, and the thinker's making it, is the issue we have to address when our interest is in the issue of minimal objectivity. Under the present treatment of concepts, if the judgement is true, there must be a specification of what the correct way of going on is, where this way is not merely a matter of its striking the thinker as going on the same way, or merely a matter of the thinker's being disposed to make the judgement in certain circumstances. (If there were no such specification, there would be no correctness condition on the world, and so no content, and no judgement either.) This specification of the correct way of going on will be implied, together with surrounding information, by the fundamental reference rule for the concept. In a predication of the concept *round* of an object, the correct way of going on accords with the condition given in the fundamental reference rule for the concept *round*. That correctness condition, having to do with sameness of shape, has nothing to do with inclinations to judge. For every concept, there is equally a substantive correctness condition for contents containing it, determined by the FRRs

for the concepts in the content, and their mode of combination. So the account of concepts in terms of FRRs ensures minimal objectivity.

In the special cases in which the content of the judgement is actually about the judgement itself, or in other ways concerns judgements, it may be that the judgement could not be made and be false. But this is entirely what is to be expected when the part of the world the judgement concerns is the judgement itself. In the more general case in which the content concerns the rest of the world, the correctness or incorrectness of the content judged is independent of the thinker's making the judgement.

I said that the constitutive transcendental argument explains minimal objectivity. Minimal objectivity is not merely a feature of the particular concepts we happen to employ. It is something projectible to new concepts. It is in the nature of judgements that they have contents; it is in the nature of contents that their constituent concepts have fundamental reference rules. The constitutive transcendental argument implies that minimal objectivity holds not only for judgements involving the concepts we actually have, but for the contents of any possible judgement, whatever its content.

Whether stronger species of objectivity, beyond minimal objectivity, also hold, or hold for particular kinds of content, is not settled by this reasoning. It would require further argument, usually about some particular species of content and subject matter. Only minimal objectivity, as specified, is secured by this argument on its own.

In some radical neo-Wittgensteinian treatments of rule-following, there is a rejection of the intuitive idea that a rational judgement of a content is the upshot of the operation of two factors: the meaning of an expression, and the apparent facts of a particular situation in which the expression is applied. Some of Crispin Wright's expositions of the rule-following considerations involve the radical rejection of this intuitive conception (Wright 1978). Under such a treatment - whether or not it is Wittgenstein's, and whether or not it is Wright's own view of the matter - a crucial element in rationality and correctness is missing. The missing element is the specification of a correctness condition, given in the present approach by the fundamental reference rules, where that correctness condition is not a merely a matter of dispositions or inclinations to judge, or of striking the thinker as correct. The absence of this element constitutes a central objection to linguistic or conceptual idealism.

The rationality of making a judgement depends on the background information available to the thinker; it depends upon the circumstances as they are presented to him; and it depends upon the thinker's tacit knowledge of the FRRs for the concepts that occur in the content judged. If the truth of the content judged follows immediately from those FRRs, the background information, and the circumstances as presented, then the judgement can be made rationally. The judgement can of course be true without being rational, and conversely. The conditions for something falling under the FRR for a concept can be met without its being rational to take them as met; and conversely. When it is obviously rational for a thinker to apply the concept, there will be a way of going on that strikes the thinker as correct if he has the concept. But there will also be an independent specification of what that way is.

This is why minimal objectivity and the possibility of rational judgement go hand-in-hand. The philosophical explanation of both of them draws on the same resources, and presupposes the fulfillment of the same preconditions. When rational judgement of a content is possible, there must be conditions to which the correctness of the judgement is answerable, and this implies minimal objectivity for such judgements. Conversely, where there is minimal objectivity, there must be correctness conditions which contribute to the possibility of distinguishing between rational and non-rational judgement.

Why do we need the fundamental reference rules? What do they gain over the undeniable position that holds merely that someone who grasps the concept *round* tacitly knows that it is true of all and only the round things? I say that two things are lost if we have only the more modest, disquotational position for concepts and language.

First, there is a completely open-ended threefold classification of circumstances and background information into three cases: those that make it rational to judge a given content; those that make it rational to judge its negation; and those that make it rational to remain neutral on the issue. What determines the boundaries of this classification? The theory of fundamental reference rules has an answer to this question. The circumstances in which it is rational to judge a given content are those in which its probable correctness follows from its substantive correctness condition, as determined from the fundamental reference rules of its constituents and their mode of composition, together with the circumstances and the thinker's background information. That it *is* rational to judge that something is round in given circumstances is not in dispute. What is in question is whether we can give some unifying explanation of why it is

rational. So the first thing that is lost if we consider only disquotational reference rules is a unifying explanation of where the boundaries of the rational lie. These boundaries concern concepts, rather than the properties they pick out. Circumstances that make it rational to judge that some object falls under the observational concept *round* are distinct from circumstances that make it rational to judge that the same object has the shape property given by a particular equation using Cartesian coordinates.

Thinkers also possess a capacity to recognize that a given content can be rationally judged, or rationally rejected, in an open-ended, indefinite range of circumstances and background information. Under the present approach, the natural proposal is that this open-ended capacity is explained by (i) their tacit knowledge of the correctness condition for the content jointly determined by the FRRs for the content's constituent concepts (and mode of combination) together with (ii) their ability subpersonally to work out whether any given circumstances and background information make it likely that this condition is fulfilled. An explanation of this open-ended capacity is the second thing that is apparently missing on the purely disquotational view.

Such open-ended capacities must have a finite basis. They must, more specifically, have a finite subpersonal cognitive basis. It is not enough to explain the open-ended capacity to say that since the capacity is realized in a finite brain, we need no further explanation of the capacity. It would hardly have been a satisfactory reply to Chomsky's point about the significance of our open-ended capacity to understand newly encountered sentences to say: since our brains are finite, no further psychological theory is needed to explain our linguistic capacities. We need an explanation of those capacities under their content-involving descriptions. The ability to perceive the structure and meaning of a newly encountered sentence has an explanation under its syntactic and semantic characterization. The explanation involves subpersonal tacit knowledge of syntactic and semantic principles. Simply noting that our brains are finite gives no such explanation. It entails nothing about the way we will parse and understand new sentences. Only a computational explanation, in particular a content-involving computational explanation, will offer the required sort of explanation.

The same is true of the appreciation of rationality. We need an explanation of the thinker's appreciation of the rationality of judging a given content, and we need one that explains the rationality under the content-involving description of the judgement.

I offer the account in terms of tacit knowledge of fundamental reference rules in the spirit of an explanatory hypothesis. Open-ended capacities might in principle be explained by other finite cognitive means, perhaps by closeness relations in a finitely specified similarity space. But I do not know how such other approaches would square with what we already know about content and understanding.

Having nontrivial, substantive FRRs also adds to the position of someone who rejects linguistic idealism simply by making such remarks as “The correctness of $7+5 = 12$ is independent of anyone’s judging it to be so”. Simply making such remarks and saying no more is an intermediate position between linguistic idealism and the position for which I have been arguing. Such an intermediate position needs to have a response to the linguistic idealist who takes this as evidence for his idealism: that there are circumstances in which it is guaranteed that someone who possesses the relevant arithmetical concepts, has a properly functioning memory, and the like, and operates in accordance with his understanding, will as a result get the right answer to the question “What is $7+5$?”. The linguistic idealist may fairly say against this intermediate position that it has not explained why someone who understands must judge in a particular way. It is certainly true that one needs some positive theory of understanding, of whatever stripe, to answer that point. The linguistic idealist may also add that that it is not dialectically a good answer to his idealism simply to repeat that the correctness of $7+5=12$ is independent of what anyone judges, without some further account of what this correctness and independence involves. Otherwise, he, the linguistic idealist, may say this seeming-independence is just some kind of projection, an illusion resulting from the phenomenon of not being able to judge otherwise, when one understands and memory and the like are all functioning. (Some passages in Wittgenstein on the logical ‘must’ read like such a charge.)

Consider the case in which a thinker finds it compelling that $5+2=7$. Suppose his grasp of addition consists in his tacit knowledge of the recursion equations for addition. Suppose that he is making no memory or perceptual mistakes. If all is functioning properly, he may, we can suppose, find it compelling that $5+2=7$ because he finds it compelling that $5+1=6$ and that $6+1=7$. These judgements are reached in accordance with his tacit knowledge of the recursion equations for addition. His judgement that $5+2=7$, when made in this way, is rational. It is a means of coming to know that $5+2=7$. But its rationality does not *consist in* his finding it compelling. He finds it compelling because he reached it in this way. On the present account of

understanding, we can explain why someone finds something compelling when all is functioning properly, consistently with the existence of fundamental reference rules and, consequently, minimally objective correctness conditions.

So there is no irresolvable standoff between someone who recognizes the phenomenon of compulsion and someone who believes in objective correctness conditions. When the objective correctness conditions result from an account of understanding that positively explains the phenomenology of rational compulsion, then that phenomenology is neutralized as a putative consideration in favour of linguistic idealism.

Why else should anyone ever have been tempted to endorse linguistic idealism? One source of temptation may be a particular understanding of family-resemblance concepts, and possibly Wittgenstein's discussion of what makes something a game.¹ I would not regard this as a good reason for the idealism. Suppose that what makes something a game is that it is similar in certain respects, salient to us, to some paradigms. What it is for something to be similar in that way to the paradigms is not a case of our judging something making it so.

Very likely the other sources of temptation trace back to a fear that we fall into unacceptable theories unless we are linguistic idealists. Those tempted to it think that linguistic idealism is required to avoid mischaracterizations of rule-following; or to avoid bad accounts of grasp of meaning; or to avoid making meaning inaccessible. In my judgement all these undesirable things can be avoided while still endorsing the objectivity of judgement and concept-application. This is not the place for an extended discussion of rule-following, but I will briefly state a position to indicate what region of logical space is occupiable by someone who endorses the minimal objectivity of judgement, and offers the explanation I have given in terms of fundamental reference rules.

Consider a case in which someone applies a concept, with good reasons, on the basis of his grasp of the concept. It is quite right to say that this will not generally involve interpreting an uninterpreted sign or representation. Nothing in the account in terms of FRRs implies that it does. The account in terms of FRRs implies that the thinker's tacit knowledge of them explains his appreciation that certain states and propositions give good reasons for judging the content containing the concept in question. Judging for reasons does not involve imposing interpretations on uninterpreted symbols that can be interpreted arbitrarily many ways. The content of the FRR

¹ Michael Lynch mentioned this to me as one possible source.

for the concept also contributes to the explanation of correctness conditions all the way along the rails to infinity - that is, in arbitrary new cases. Far from making meaning inaccessible to the ordinary understander and rule-follower, this account makes a state with a content that contributes to correctness-conditions actually explanatory of the thinker's rational judgements involving the concept.

I close this section with three observations on this treatment of the minimal objectivity of judgement.

(a) This explanation of minimal objectivity has been developed within a realistic approach to content. I do not say that evidence-oriented, or equally consequence-oriented (pragmatist) theories of content could not equally explain minimal objectivity by adapting the resources I have enlisted – for they can. But I regard the objections to purely evidential, consequential, or mixed evidential-and-consequential treatments of meaning and concepts as very strong.² So I wanted to offer a solution available to more plausible, realistic, truth-conditional approaches to content and understanding.

(b) I have formulated the argument in terms of understanding or grasp as tacit knowledge of fundamental reference rules. On an earlier conception I once held, understanding consists in satisfaction of a possession condition that does not explicitly use the notion of reference, although the general notion of reference constrains the range of legitimate possession conditions (Peacocke 1992). The reasons for preferring the conception of grasp as tacit knowledge of fundamental reference rules have to do partly with various different kinds of case in which grasp seems to outrun such conceptual role as is capturable in a possession condition (Peacocke 2008, Chapter 1 sections 3-5, and Chapter 4). But for those who still prefer the older version of grasp as satisfaction of a possession condition, the argument above can be adapted, under their preferences, to reach the same conclusion. Under the older conception, the possession condition for a concept, together with the way the world is, jointly determine a semantic value for the concept. An object will have to have a certain property, for example, to fall within the extension of a monadic concept. This property will, in the general case, have nothing to do with anyone's dispositions to judgement. In the case of a shape concept, for example, it will have to do with the spatial properties of the object. The argument for the minimal objectivity of judgement can proceed as before from that point onwards.

² See Peacocke 2008, Chapter 1.

(c) There will be a natural extension of the explanation in this section of the minimal objectivity of judgement to the case of language, an extension that equally explains the corresponding minimal objectivity of assertions in language.

4. Perception

I now turn to the instance of the general form of transcendental argument explaining minimal objectivity for the case of perceptual experience. As before, Step (1) of the argument for the case of perception identifies the content of the perception as the feature of experience that an event or state must have if it is to be a perception that informs the subject about the world. At Step (2), like several other philosophers, I offer the theory that there is a core class of contents of experience with this property: for experiences to have these contents involves those experiences being caused by what they are as of, when the subject's perceptual systems are working properly, and when those systems are embedded in the world in the proper way. This core class of contents plausibly contains basic contents concerning such spatial matters as size, shape, distance, texture and orientation, such temporal matters as temporal order, temporal intervals, and consequently certain rates of change with respect to time, and various observational properties. (My own view is that these representational contents of perception are all nonconceptual.) This claim requires a lot of elaboration, clarification and explanation.³

The claim does not concern the actual normal causes of experiences in the class enjoyed by a particular subject. The experiences of the subject who has the misfortune to be a brain in a vat are not caused by what they are as of (except per accidens). This subject's experiences may be subjectively the same as yours or mine, at least for a certain range of contents, but they are caused by whatever the vat-managers choose or permit to stimulate the brain's neurons. This subject's experiences do not concern those actual causes, but states of affairs of a kind of which the subject would enjoy genuine perceptions were his perceptual systems properly functioning and properly embedded in the world.

³ The claim is found in Burge 2003 and in Peacocke 2004, in the discussion of what I there called 'instance individuation'.

These claims should not be taken as committed to some natural selection or evolutionary theory of the content of experiences. It can sometimes be adaptive for the perceptual system to misrepresent certain states of affairs. False positives in perception that get the subject away from predators faster than accurate perceptions may be adaptive.

So the question is pressing: what does 'properly functioning' mean in the claim? It cannot simply be construed as meaning 'operating in such a way that the perceptual contents it delivers are correct'. That would be simply to use the notion of correctness conditions for perceptual experience that we were hoping partially to determine by appeal to proper functioning. In entirely normal circumstances and normal embedding, the human perceptual system generates an experience of the Muller-Lyer illusion. If we were to say that the human visual system is not then functioning properly, we would be using the incorrectness of a content of experience to settle what is proper functioning, rather than the reverse.

A more promising line of development is to say that for each subject, there is some physical realization of the subject, in a brain or control device. There will be circumstances in which this brain or device has evolved or been designed to operate. Proper perceptual functioning involves functioning in the way it does in the circumstances in which it has evolved or been designed to operate. The same applies *pari passu* for proper embedding. On this understanding, it is not immediately written in that proper functioning never delivers false contents, not even for simple spatial and temporal contents. Perceptual states which are not, even in these circumstances, caused by what they are as of get their content from their relations to those which are caused by what they are as of. It is a substantive philosophical thesis that there will be a core class of contents of experiences that are caused by what they are as of, when the subject is perceiving properly and is properly embedded in the world.

If this thesis is true, it is a question of why it holds. I suggest that it holds because of the constitutive role of perception, in basic cases, in contributing to the subject's conception of the world in circumstances in which all is functioning properly. Perception when the systems are functioning properly contributes to an explanation of the subject's formation of a conception of the spatial and temporal layout of the world around himself. The conception may be correct in part and incorrect in part.

Such a conception of a layout can be something, in my view, not at the level of conceptual content, but at a level of scenario content and its temporal analogue. A conception of

the layout of the world is specified by how space and time around the subject's spatiotemporal location have to be filled out for the conception to be correct.⁴ The idea is that, at the most basic level of representations, a thinker's representations concern the world that he is interacting with, when he is perceiving and functioning properly.

Note that I have not specified a constitutive role for perception in terms of successful concurrent action in relation to perceived directions, objects and properties. The experimental results discussed by Milner and Goodale 1995 and Goodale and Milner 2004 show that action concurrent with conscious perception in relation to objects in the environment is explained not by conscious perception, but by the informational states of the older and faster dorsal route for processing information from the environment. A conception of the layout of the world around the subject must play some role in the explanation of the subject's actions in relation to that environment, and this fact must have links with constitutive accounts of perception. But the links need not be as tight as the explanation of concurrent action by conscious perceptual experience.

Now we can return to minimal objectivity. For those nonconceptual contents an experience has because when all is working properly, they are caused by what they are as of, these considerations imply minimal objectivity. The correctness of these contents concerns objective states of affairs that cause the experiences in the conditions of proper operation. What causes an experience must exist independently of the experience. A denial of minimal objectivity for perceptual experiences would imply that the occurrence of the experience makes the representational content correct. But that cannot be true if the experience is caused by what it is as of. The holding of the condition the experience represents as correct is temporally and causally prior to the occurrence of the experience itself. For spatial and temporal contents, it is also constitutively prior.

Experiences with a given kind of content also have the same sort of correctness conditions whether they occur in conditions of proper operation or not. The correctness conditions concern the non-mental world, rather than anything an idealistic treatment would offer.

Actually the implications against idealism go further. They support not only minimal objectivity, but also stronger versions. A phenomenalist might agree to minimal objectivity for a given particular token experience, but say that the correctness conditions of that perceptual

⁴ See the material on scenario contents in Peacocke 1992, Chapter 3.

experience concern the possible occurrence of other experiences. That position too is undermined by these considerations. For the other possible experiences to which this phenomenalist will have to appeal, if his account is even to seem plausible, will include experiences with these basic spatial, temporal and observational contents whose nature involves their being caused by what they are as of in the circumstances we have specified. The phenomenalist has no account of what it is for the experiences to have this sort of content. Appealing to the occurrence of more experiences with the same kind of content is intrinsically incapable of answering the question of what it is to have contents of that kind.

The argument can be extended to two kinds of content not explained by what it's as of in properly functioning cases. One kind is that of nonconceptual contents not so explained; the other is a range of conceptual contents. For the nonconceptual contents not so explained, the argument could be developed that they inherit their content by virtue of their relations to states that are so explained, in particular their role in best explaining the subject's conception of the layout of the world around him. I believe that a further elaboration of the way in which this works requires these nonconceptual contents to be of the same general character, and have the same kind of correctness conditions, as those that are explained by the holding of what they are as of, in the specified circumstances. In the case of a range of conceptual contents, such as the conceptual observational concept *round*, its fundamental reference rule mentions the nonconceptual content of experience which, by these considerations, must have an objective character.

In both the case of judgement and of perceptual experience, two things are philosophically inter-related for constitutive reasons: what individuates the contents of the mental states and events; and the relations of those states and events to the reality that is the subject-matter of those contents.

We also have a cumulative structure here. The content of experience contributes to the individuation of the content of judgement. The objectivity of the content of some judgements is inherited from the objectivity of the content of perceptual experience, when perceptual experience is mentioned in the fundamental reference rules for the concepts in the content of those judgements. Equally, if we were to extend the argument to valuing, the objectivity of the nature of valuing would rely in part on the objectivity of judging.

5. Relations and Consequences of these Constitutive Transcendental Arguments

The acceptability and interest of Transcendental Arguments of a given form has always turned on their relations to various large-scale issues in philosophy. I now consider the relation of the arguments I have offered to some of these issues.

(i) Relation to a Principle of Significance

The constitutive arguments I have offered do not presuppose any kind of verificationism, falsificationism, evidentialism, consequence-based or pragmatist treatments of meaning and content. It has been a complaint against some transcendental arguments that they rely on some kind of Principle of Significance that is much too strong, and, if correct, would make the transcendental arguments in question entirely otiose. Barry Stroud has made the point forcefully over many years about a variety of transcendental attempts. Barry Stroud discusses Peter Strawson's (1966) appeal to a principle of significance that legitimately applied concepts must be ones related to "empirically ascertainable conditions of their application" (Stroud 2000, p. 161).⁵ Stroud comments, justly in my view, that this is "a so-far unsupported and controversial thesis about meaning in general" (162). So what principles about significance and meaning do the arguments I have offered rest upon?

There are two principles, which in themselves have no particular connection with what is empirically ascertainable. First, there is the very general principle that for any intentional content, there must exist some account of what is involved in judging that content rather than another. This is what - over twenty years ago now - I called 'the Discrimination Principle' (Peacocke 1988). The Discrimination Principle is neutral as between a huge range of substantive theories of content and, where they exist, their associated epistemologies. The Discrimination Principle does not speak about, or imply anything about, a need for empirical ascertainability.

A second commitment in the arguments I have given is to a particular way of respecting the Discrimination Principle. Two judged contents must be distinguished by containing one or more different concepts, or by composing them differently. Different concepts are, on the

⁵ References to subsequent quotations from Stroud's writings are to the pages in Stroud 2000.

approach I have defended, distinguished by their different fundamental reference rules. This is a substantive philosophical claim, to be defended by such explanatory power as it can be shown to have. It too does not speak about, or imply anything about, a need for empirical ascertainability.

It is possible within this framework to add a third principle about meaning, a principle that connects concepts with perceptual experience and other conscious states, but which does not at all imply that any genuine content or meaningful sentence must be empirically ascertainable as true or as false. A fundamental reference rule for a concept, whilst not given in terms of empirical confirmation or refutation of its application, may nonetheless make essential reference to perceptual experience. The fundamental reference rule for the observational concept *round* does just that. No one could have tacit knowledge of this rule, and correspondingly no one could fully grasp this concept *round*, without his applications of the concept being answerable to correctness conditions formulated in terms that involve, but are not exhausted by, the content of certain perceptual experiences. The role of the condition of sameness of shape in that fundamental reference rule is also ineliminable if we are to give a correct account of the concept. That condition of sameness of shape concerns relations between things in the objective world. It involves a relation whose applicability depends upon objective-world properties of things (their shape properties), and the condition makes it entirely possible that something should fall under the concept *round* without it being knowable by us that it does so fall. The concept *round* is directly linked to perceptual experience in this particular, restricted, way.

Other concepts may be linked in turn to the concept *round*. As a result, they are indirectly linked to perceptual experience. In earlier writing (2005), I called the principle that all concepts are directly or indirectly linked to perceptual experience or other conscious reason-giving states ‘the Anchoring Principle’. It is natural to suggest the Anchoring Principle as what is correct in the Kantian idea that legitimate concepts have to have a relation to possible experience. The Anchoring Principle gives such a relation without any commitment to the empirical ascertainability of truth, to verificationism, or the like. Such less direct links to perceptual experience are not of course proprietary to the framework of fundamental reference rules. They can be formulated in other substantive theories of concepts too.

So much by way of the relation of the present position to Principles of Significance.

(ii) Recent Critiques and Other Transcendental Strategies

Transcendental arguments have not, by and large, received a favourable press in the past thirty years. I have dissociated the argument I have been endorsing from verificationism; but verificationism is far from the only charge leveled against attempts at transcendental arguments. Transcendental reasoning has been described by some as inseparable from a commitment to transcendental idealism. It has been thought by others to be so general and unspecific as to be irrelevant to issues of epistemology and justification. I will address both these charges; and also consider the bearing of what I have been offering on such replacements or more modest attempts that have been suggested by critics of transcendental arguments.

In his paper ‘The Goal of Transcendental Arguments’, Barry Stroud writes “What I would question are the efforts of those who retain what looks like the generally Kantian transcendental strategy while dropping the transcendental idealism that was supposed to explain how the whole enterprise was possible and could yield positive results” (p. 209). The development of my position so far in this paper is just such an effort. I do agree with Stroud that in Kant the transcendental idealism was meant to make the whole enterprise possible. That is clear from the very Introduction to the First Critique, and continues to be so at several later points through that extraordinary book. Yet if we look at the transcendental argument I have instantiated for the cases of judgement and perception, where is the commitment to some form of idealism? There is none. The argument requires that judgement and perceptual experience bear certain complex relations to the world beyond judgements and experiences. Nothing in the argument requires that world to receive an idealistic treatment. On the contrary: the argument rather sits best with a realistic treatment of that world, for as we noted, we certainly stand in danger of regress if the states of affairs causation by which in favoured circumstances helps to individuate some intentional contents of perception are then to be analyzed in terms of experiences again. (An analogous point can be developed for judgements.)

An obvious response to these points is that I have avoided idealism only by not having the original epistemological ambitions of those who have proposed transcendental arguments. So we need to consider those ambitions, more modest projects, and the proper focus of epistemological concerns.

Some transcendental arguments - arguably including both Kant’s and that in Strawson 1966 - aimed to move from premises apparently purely about mental states and events to

conclusions apparently about the physical, public, objective world that actually exists. The constitutive transcendental arguments I have endorsed are not immediately of this sort. If they can be marshalled into that form, that is something that would need further substantive argument (on which, see below). The constitutive arguments I have offered are transcendental in the sense that they attempt to draw out, by philosophical argument, the constitutive conditions of possibility of certain kinds of mental events and actions. Some of these mental events and actions, in particular perceptual experience and judgement, were also Kant's target mental states and actions. The idea of the constitutive as being explanatory of epistemic and other content-involving distinctions is common both to the Kantian project and to what I have been attempting here.

Many published transcendental arguments that do not rely on either some form of idealism, or on some form of contentious neo-verificationist principle of significance, have in the literature rightly been found to be lacking. It has been argued that the most they can establish are conclusions of such more modest forms as: if we have such-and-such concepts, we must have so-and-so other concepts; or, if perceptual experience has such-and-such character, it must also have so-and-so character; and so forth. These more modest forms were later endorsed in Strawson 1985, as the most that could be hoped for from transcendental reasoning. These less ambitious forms can be grouped under the general umbrella of 'intra-psychological transcendental arguments'.

One of the motives for the move to endorsing merely intra-psychological transcendental arguments has been recognition of the specific failings of such arguments, together with an appreciation that at least something can be retrieved from such attempts, viz. the favoured intra-psychological version. But a more general shadow over all the rejected arguments is cast by the apparent possibility of experience and thought in the permanently envatted brain.

Suppose, as I accept, that it is possible for the subject whose mental states are realized in the permanently envatted brain to have experiences, to make some judgments, and to have a mental life that is in some important sense qualitatively indistinguishable from one of ours. What follows from this? It does follow that any argument moving from the occurrence of such experiences and judgements to conditions which require the objective correctness of those experiences and events is an argument which does not preserve truth in all possible worlds. But that is consistent with the argument's preserving truth in the actual world.

It is one thing for p to be metaphysically possible. It is another for it to be metaphysically possible that it hold in the actual world. We know from two-dimensional semantics that these are different things. As a reminder: we know that ‘The actual F is F’ is not metaphysically necessary. It is metaphysically possible that the thing that is actually F is not F. It does not follow that ‘The actual F is not F’ could be true in the actual world. It could not. In the terminology of Davies and Humberstone 1980, we must always distinguish between what is metaphysically necessary and what is fixedly actually the case – that is, what holds in the actual world whichever is the actual world. Correspondingly, we must distinguish between something’s being possible, and its being possible that it holds in the actual world.

In some specific cases, an argument may be developed from further premisses to link metaphysical possibility with the possibility of holding in the actual world. But the argument would need those extra premisses.

There is an immensely tempting position which holds that it is only because the spatial, temporal and other basic contents of experience are fixed by their causal relations in the actual world to what they are as of that we are able to make sense of the metaphysical possibility that there is a subject whose experiences are wholly illusory. Under such a combination of views, it is metaphysically possible that there is such a subject; but it is not possible that we in the actual world should be in such a position if our perceptual systems are functioning and we are properly embedded in the world. In instances in which the transition from

$\Diamond p$

to

$\Diamond \text{Actually } p$

fails, it will fail because there is some special connection between the content p and what is actually the case. In the present example, the special connection is provided by the fixing of the content of experience by its causes in the actual world in subjects who are perceiving properly, when properly embedded in the world. I will not explore this large topic, and its epistemological ramifications, further here, but simply note the existence of this attractive philosophical position in the space of options. I now return to the topic of the intra-psychological transcendental arguments.

What is the relation between the constitutive transcendental arguments and the intra-psychological arguments? There is one obvious connection. The intra-psychological arguments

discuss circumstances in which it seems to subjects that they are in an objective world, and the preconditions for subjects to have the experiences and concepts required for such impressions and beliefs are given in the elaboration of the constitutive transcendental arguments. But in fact I think there are less obvious connections between the two kinds of argument. I want to argue that the conclusions of some of the intra-psychological arguments hold only under substantial restrictions. These restrictions are the ones that are predicted by the constitutive transcendental arguments.

In the paper I have already mentioned, Barry Stroud discusses the status of certain beliefs or sets of beliefs as 'invulnerable'. The idea is that we can make sense of people's having certain beliefs with certain contents "only because we connect the thinking of the thoughts or holding of the beliefs with the world we take them to be about" (214). "We understand ourselves and others only by placing them in a world we believe in and to some extent understand" (214). This makes possible a "transcendental-like argument" (215) that establishes "only a connection between different ways of thinking" (215). There will be invulnerable beliefs of which it will be true that "We could not consistently find that human beings are simply under the misapprehension or the illusion that those things are true – that they think they are true, but that really they are not" (218). The idea is that we could not find this because our attributions of the beliefs to others are grounded in our broad beliefs about the way the world is. The thought is that once it is given that we have that conception of the world, we can reasonably ascribe the beliefs in question to others on the basis of their apparent relations to the world as we conceive it to be. We would have to give up that conception of the world to give up the correspondingly motivated attributions of beliefs to others. That, according to the argument, is why we could not, whilst having the beliefs about the world that we do, consistently find that others are in certain kinds of massive error about it.

By contrast, I assert that we need to distinguish two radically different ways in which we can knowledgeably ascribe beliefs, experiences and a conception of the world to others. One way is to take it that by and large others are properly perceptually connected to the world as we take it to be. In these circumstances, what Stroud says seems to me to hold, and there will be a large class of their beliefs, to the effect that there is a spatio-temporal world, with other people in it, in which they have a bodily location, and so forth, that are invulnerable in just the respect Stroud elaborates.

This is not, however, the only way in which we can ascribe beliefs and experiences to others. It would be necessary to develop a detailed example here were it not for the existence of the film *The Matrix*, which gives a perfect example for our purposes. The central character, Neo, does come to discover that the beliefs of almost all other human beings – the ones being grown by the machines for their purposes, and who are subject to the illusions of the Matrix – are false. There is no objective world at all of the sort most human beings think there is. Neo learns of their false beliefs by being subject at times to the same sort of illusions as other human beings, but then discovering that they are illusions, and discovering the explanation of why they are. Neo is a counterexample to the unrestricted claim that we cannot discover that others are in massive, radical error about the kind and nature of the world around them.

It follows that we should restrict the claim of invulnerability. It should be restricted to attributions that come to be made in a certain way. That way involves taking certain experiences at face value, considering the world apparently thus revealed, and also taking it that others are perceptually properly related to the world apparently thus revealed. Some beliefs attributed in this standard way will have the invulnerability Stroud describes. Beliefs attributed in the Matrix-like way that Neo would use for attributing beliefs to the farmed humans are certainly not made in this standard way.

That the thesis of invulnerability holds only under this restriction is entirely to be expected under the constitutive transcendental argument I have offered. Only in the case in which other people are properly perceptually connected to the world, and we are too, will their apparent interaction with it give us good reason for attributing to them the experiences, perceptions and concepts individuated by their relations to the world when they are properly connected to it. Invulnerability is an important insight; but the argument just given inclines me to think that the correct formulation of invulnerability derives from considerations that support constitutive transcendental arguments (of the kind I have been developing).

A different critique of the significance of transcendental arguments is given by Quassim Cassam. Cassam (2007) expresses scepticism about the idea that transcendental arguments are relevant to questions about how knowledge is possible. He writes “transcendental arguments aren’t necessary if the object of the exercise is to answer an epistemological how-possible question, and they aren’t sufficient either” (52). Cassam develops a multi-level approach to answering epistemological how-possible question. His Level 1 is “the level of means, the level at

which means of knowing about a certain subject matter are identified” (9). At his Level 2, “obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge by the proposed means are overcome or dissipated” (10). A third level identifies enabling conditions for the proposed means (10). Cassam’s view is that this “multi-levels response makes transcendental arguments superfluous *if* the object of the exercise is to explain how knowledge, or knowledge of some specific kind, is possible” (62). Transcendental arguments are, according to Cassam, “beside the point” in answering epistemological how-possible questions (53). In response to someone who asks how it is possible to travel from London to Paris in less than three hours, one can cite the existence of the Eurostar train. This is citing a means, rather than citing a necessary condition for travelling from London to Paris in less than three hours. Cassam holds that “From the standpoint of the multiple levels response, we should be sceptical about the idea of something as general as necessary conditions for the knowledge as such, as distinct from necessary conditions for knowing or coming to know, by some specific means such as seeing or hearing or feeling” (62). Of the question “How is perceptual knowledge possible?”, Cassam writes that it “is an obstacle-dependent question” and “the key to answering it is to remove the various obstacles that have been alleged to stand in the way of the acquisition of perceptual knowledge. Since this is what happens at Level 2 there is no obvious need to go any further” (49).

In short, Cassam’s objections to the use of transcendental arguments are directed at their over-generality; their failure to address questions about means; and their failure to realize that epistemological how-possible questions are obstacle-dependent. I will argue that, while Cassam’s multi-level treatment is informative and illuminating, it does not support the critique of transcendental arguments. The treatment misses a crucial issue that transcendental arguments can address.

That issue is: what makes something a means of coming to know a given content? It seems clear that whether something is a means of coming to know a given content is sensitive to the identity of the concepts from which the content is composed. This goes beyond a sensitivity to the references of the concepts in the content. A thinker’s experience of pain provides a way of coming to know *I am in pain*. It does not, without further background information, provide a way for her to come to know *I have the property of being in neural state N*, not even if neural state N is for her the state of being in pain. Her being in pain also does not by itself, without further information about her identity, provide a way for her to come to know *Jane Smith is in pain*, not

even if she is Jane Smith. Again, a visual perception of an object as circular can provide a way of coming to know that it is circular. It does not by itself provide a way of coming to know that the object's outline satisfies the equation $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$, for some choice of origin. Gödel's proof establishes that a universally quantified sentence of the form "Every natural number is not the Gödel-number of the proof of such-and-such formula" is not provable in a recursively axiomatized system of arithmetic. His proof provides a way of coming to know what that sentence states. It does not provide a proof of a different species of universal quantification, applied to the same open sentence, if that species of universal quantification holds only for universal quantifications provable in a given system of arithmetic. We could continue in this vein indefinitely.

Now content is a ubiquitous feature of judgement. We should also aim at a general answer to the question 'What makes something a means of coming to know a given content?'. There is a natural answer to this question about epistemology, an answer that is a byproduct of the resources used in earlier in this paper in developing a constitutive transcendental argument that explains the minimal objectivity of judgement. For each content that is a possible object of knowledge, there is a nontrivial correctness condition for it, determined by the fundamental reference rules of its various constituent concepts and their mode of combination in the content in question. Something is a way of knowing the content only if it gives reason for thinking that its nontrivial correctness condition is fulfilled. A perception of something as circular does give reason for thinking that it has the same shape as things are perceived as having when they are experienced as circular. It does not by itself, without further information, give reason for thinking that the shape perceived satisfies the equation $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$. But the perception together with knowledge of that that perceptually given shape does satisfy the equation does give reason for judging that the perceived object's shape satisfies the equation. Similarly, nonperceptual evidence that something has the same shape as things we perceive to be circular can give reason for judging that the object is circular. This is in fact the condition that makes it evidence that the object is circular. We could continue similarly for the other examples, using the fundamental reference rules for the concepts involved in each example. So a constitutive transcendental argument that explains objectivity also explains what makes something a means of coming to know a given content. Under this approach, a theory of what is constitutive of content can contribute to the explanation of epistemological phenomena.

What then of Cassam's complaint that transcendental arguments are too general to address questions about means of coming to know? On the present approach, the relation of the means to the content known is constant across the various contents and means. The relation is general - as it has to be if it is to be explanatorily satisfactory. Its instances, by contrast, are specific to particular means and contents. So particular means are treated, as Cassam rightly insists they should be.

Theorizing at this level about the relations between means and content undercuts some of Cassam's analogies. A theory that addresses the relation that must hold between means and content for the former to yield knowledge of the latter *is* giving a necessary condition that any means must satisfy if it is to be an answer to the epistemological how-possible question. There are many possible ways of coming to know any given content, but all of them must satisfy the required conditions on the relations between means and content known. No doubt there are many kinds of transcendental argument, and Cassam's points may be well-taken against some that describe themselves as transcendental. But an answer to a how-question is not fully explanatory if it does not explain why the means is a means. In terms of the analogy of how it is possible to travel to Paris in less than three hours: one may specify various means, but anything that is a means must provide a way of travelling over, through or under the water in the English Channel.⁶

(iii) Relation to Radical Scepticism

These constitutive transcendental arguments do not by themselves as formulated so far provide any immediate answer to radical scepticism. They do not, without further argument, provide a bridge from premises apparently solely about the psychological to conclusions apparently about the mind-independent world. Nor, again without further argument, do they declare the radical sceptic's doubts unintelligible. What these constitutive arguments ought rather to do is to change, in two ways, the points on which we focus in addressing the sceptic. In addressing the sceptic, we need first to pursue further the issue noted above about the difference between metaphysical possibility and possibility in the actual world. The sceptic will not even have shown that we are unjustified in the actual world if some of the stronger theses linking individuation of perceptual content to actual states of affairs hold. Second, we need to have a philosophically satisfying

⁶ For further discussion of Cassam's treatment, see Peacocke forthcoming.

answer to the question: why are we entitled to make the class of perceptual judgements that are, for constitutive reasons, largely true if we are properly perceptually related to the world, and our experience is as it actually is? This rather underdiscussed issue ought to be pursued if we are satisfactorily to address classical forms of radical perceptual scepticism. The constitutive transcendental arguments cannot be the whole story in addressing these issues. But if the programme outlined in this paper is legitimate, the constitutive transcendental arguments can still be an essential proper part of the whole story.

(iv) Handling Extreme Generality

One of the persistent, and understandable, sources of doubt about the possibility of sound transcendental reasoning has been the extreme generality of many transcendental claims. Historically, transcendental reasoning has understandably been subject to the suspicion that it will not be able to avoid being self-undermining. It has been feared that it will be self-undermining because it claims conditions of significance, or of possibility, or of reasonableness, that in the nature of the case cannot apply to its own claims, or to the reasoning used in support of its own claims. On one reading of the *Tractatus*, the early Wittgenstein's position is subject to such a defect. His philosophical claims about what makes sense certainly do not look as if they are formed by truth-functional operators on atomic propositions of the favoured kind. Another example of such a structural defect is provided by conventionalist theories of the a priori. Conventionalist theories of the a priori, if they are meant themselves to have the status of a priori theories, do not seem to be put forward as conventions, nor are there any apparent conventions that would underwrite these theories. A third example may be provided by Kant's conception in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of transcendental idealism. His conception invokes psychological mechanisms which, if his own theory of significance is correct, he arguably should not even be able to formulate intelligibly; and so forth.

It seems to me that the admitted failures of these various theories should not be traced not to their extreme generality. It should be traced instead to their adoption of positions which preclude handling extreme generality in the only way that is legitimate, that is, by proposing a theory that is self-applicable.

Here is a list of properties that we will want any theory at all, including a philosophical theory, to possess:

- we will want it to be significant (meaningful);
- we will want it to be true;
- we will want it to be rationally acceptable.

In many cases, including many philosophical theories,

- we will want the theory to be a priori; and
- we will want it to be necessary.

It follows that any credible philosophical theory of significance (meaningfulness); of truth; of rational acceptability; of the a priori; and of necessity – any theory of any one of these must apply to the theory itself. If the theory is not self-applicable, it will not, by its very own standards, have the desirable property about which it is a theory. Self-applicability is the only legitimate way of handling extreme generality because anything other than self-applicability leaves us, unacceptably, with two standards of significance, truth, or whichever property is in question.

The philosophical theory of concepts that I offered does apply to the concepts used in expounding that theory. The central ideas of that theory are that concepts are individuated by their fundamental reference rules; and that grasp of a concept is tacit knowledge of its fundamental reference rule. The theory can apply to its own concepts because, for instance, the concept *x tacitly knows that p* will have a fundamental reference rule itself. Preliminary elucidations of that notion speak precisely to the materials that would be used in a statement of its fundamental reference rule. Similarly, the concept *fundamental reference rule* will itself have a fundamental reference rule. Discussions of what makes something the fundamental reference rule for a concept provide some preliminary insight into what would be in a statement of that second-order fundamental reference rule. In short, the theory of concepts in terms of fundamental reference rules, though in the nature of the case intended to be a theory that applies to arbitrary concepts, does not have a character that makes it inapplicable to its own concepts.

The grounds on which such a philosophical theory of concepts should be held are, in my view, of the same sort that is present for any other reasonably held philosophical theory. The theory should be supported by inference to the best philosophical explanation of the phenomena of thought that possesses the requisite minimal objectivity.

* * * * *

To summarize: I have tried to show that the minimal objectivity of some mental states can be explained by a general style of transcendental argument, a style that should be acceptable to, and requires, a realistic conception of the world and our thought about it. Transcendental investigation need not involve transcendental idealism.⁷

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