Thesis for the degree of PhD

PHILOSOPHICAL SCEPTICISM AND THE CONDITIONS OF THOUGHT

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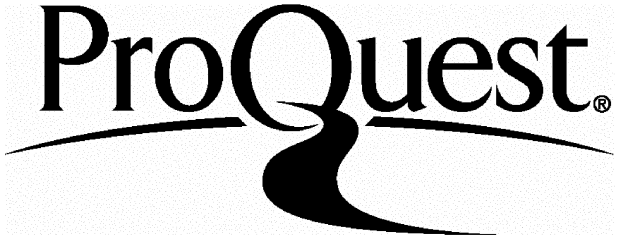

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ABSTRACT

Scepticism of the External World is a persistent philosophical problem. One characteristic response to scepticism is to argue that such a stance cannot be consistently maintained insofar that a sceptical position involves doubting or denying a necessary condition of thought and/or experience, and hence doubting or denying something which framing the very problem of scepticism itself tacitly takes for granted. Such a line of argument, following Immanuel Kant, is often termed transcendental. This thesis examines the viability of such a response.

Transcendental arguments are defended against the charges that they fail to successfully answer the sceptic because (a) they embody a commitment to verificationism, and/or (b) because they attempt to establish the impossible in showing our conceptual scheme to be unique. It is argued, rather, that the essential problem with transcendental arguments is that they fail to grapple with the kinds of reflection which motivate scepticism in the first place. A transcendental argument may show that scepticism involves doubting or denying a condition of thought and/or experience, but if it is just the conclusion of a sceptical argument that is called into

question, and not the premises, then this merely sets up a conflict between two ways of arguing, and does not provide an answer to scepticism. That this is a characteristic problem is illustrated by considering various transcendental-style responses to scepticism, drawing on the work of Kant, Strawson, Wittgenstein, and Davidson. It is finally suggested that much of the force of scepticism lies with its being tied to a certain conception of the mind, which sees perceptual experiences and propositonal attitudes as states or events which come within the realms of causal explanation -- a picture which is both alluring and perhaps inescapable.

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Chapter 1

SCEPTICISM AND TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS

1.1 The Problem of Scepticism and Transcendental Arguments

At any one time, we have countless beliefs about the world around us -- the so-called external world. At the most basic level, these beliefs are concerned with the existence of external objects, and their properties and relations, in our immediate environment -- the objects that we now believe that we see, touch, hear, smell, and so on. These beliefs are held to be basic in the sense that unless there is reason to suppose that such beliefs are generally true, then there is no reason to suppose that we are right about anything else to do with the external world. It would seem, for example, that unless we can grant that I know such things as, there is a book on the desk in front of me right now, that to its left is a cup of coffee, and to its right a computer screen, then it is difficult to make sense of the idea of my knowing anything else about the world around me. If I cannot know (when I am conscious) anything about the objects and events right in front of my face, then how can I have knowledge of other facts about the world around me? We can allow that I might be mistaken about certain specific details. We can even allow, perhaps, temporary radical misconception about the world, e.g. I might suffer an

hallucination. But we cannot allow that I am generally mistaken without the whole idea of my knowing anything about the external world collapsing. Such beliefs are foundational, we might say, to our whole world-view.

Because of this, philosophers have subjected such beliefs to a great deal of epistemological analysis. On what basis do we hold such beliefs? Is this basis sufficient to secure true knowledge of the external world? Or are we mistaken in thinking that we have knowledge of such a world; our beliefs being little more than unjustified opinions?

In this thesis I shall be concerned with the idea that knowledge of the world around us is impossible; a position commonly known as scepticism of the external world (henceforth simply 'scepticism').

It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that scepticism has been the central problem of modern epistemology. Scepticism is perceived by philosophers as a problem, I think, rather than just an interesting fact about the human condition, because the idea that we lack knowledge of the world around us is clearly at odds with our everyday epistemic attitudes. We take it for granted in our everyday lives that our most basic beliefs about the world around us have a more or less solid epistemic status. Indeed, it is difficult to see how we could even live our lives if we didn't assume such beliefs to be largely steadfast and correct.

For many philosophers, the idea that there should be such a tension between philosophy and everyday life in this respect is deeply unattractive, and hence they have devoted much time to resolving (or dissolving) this tension by attempting to undermine the philosophical basis of sceptical claims. This thesis is a study of a certain approach in philosophy whose principle aim is to resolve or dissolve scepticism in this way. The kind of approach I shall be concerned with attempts to show that sceptical claims are in some sense self-defeating, and the means by which this is shown is through a consideration of the very conditions under which thought and/or experience is made possible. The attempt is, then, to undermine sceptical claims by showing that such claims are self-defeating insofar as the sceptic embraces the possibility of thought and/or experience (he has to!) whilst at the same time calling into question a condition of thought and/or experience. As P.F. Strawson characterizes the sceptic's position:

> He (the sceptic) pretends to accept a conceptual scheme, but at the same time quietly rejects one of the conditions of its employment. Thus his doubts are unreal, not simply because they are logically irresoluble doubts, but because they amount to the rejection of the whole conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense.[1]

This kind of response to scepticism owes much to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, and hence following Kant is commonly labelled 'transcendental'. So-called transcendental arguments gained considerable popularity

in the 1960s, but since then have fallen into disrepute largely due to criticisms put forward by Barry Stroud and Stephen Korner, amongst others, which suggested that there were certain formal problems involved in answering scepticism this way.[2] Despite this, however, I think transcendental aspects can still be found in many recent responses to scepticism, even if the term 'transcendental' is rarely employed, and any direct influence from Kant's work is slight. In particular, Wittgenstein's On Certainty has influenced many recent responses to scepticism, and contains reflections of a distinctly transcendental nature.[3] The same can be said of Donald Davidson's recent work.[4]

I agree with Stroud and Korner that transcendental arguments fail to satisfactorily answer the sceptic, but disagree on the reasons why. This thesis explores why such arguments fail to convincingly answer scepticism, but hopefully achieves much more besides. Arguments concerned with the conditions of thought/experience etc. are of obvious philosophical interest in themselves, apart from any anti-sceptical value they might offer, providing significant insight into the nature of the mind and its relation to the 'outside' world. For this reason exploring the details of such arguments I take to be a worthy philosophical endeavour in itself. Furthermore, by studying whether transcendental arguments satisfactorily answer the sceptic I also believe we get a clearer

picture of the nature of sceptical arguments, and in particular the wider context from which such arguments derive their force. Whilst the conclusion of this thesis, therefore, is essentially a negative one -- scepticism remains unanswered -- the means by which that conclusion is reached, I believe, throws up numerous insights of positive philosophical value.

1.2 Sceptical Reasoning

Before looking in closer detail at the particular form a transcendental response to scepticism takes, we need to be clearer about the line of argumentation which leads to a sceptical position in the first place. Why should anyone be tempted to the view that we lack knowledge of the world around us?

Let us take as an example my current belief that there is a book on the desk in front of me, and let us suppose, for the moment at least, that my belief is true. What, then, is the basis of this belief? What reason could I cite for my believing there's a book on the desk in front of me which could serve as a justification for my belief? If I truly know that there's a book on the desk, as opposed to my merely believing it, then my belief, it would seem, must have some justificatory basis. But what could constitute a justification here, and is it truly

sufficient to secure knowledge?

One might naturally say that the basis of this belief is, quite simply, the fact that there is a book on the desk, and that I can see that there is. If asked in everyday life why I had such a belief, surely I would just point at the book and say 'Look! There it is', and be somewhat puzzled as to why the question was asked. I might wonder about the questioner's sanity or conceptual competence in asking such a question. Rather than take his question seriously, I might think to myself 'He doesn't even know what a book is, poor fellow'. However, assuming that I take the questioner seriously enough to warrant answering him, I think my answer, quite naturally, would consist in my simply giving a demonstration of the book itself ('Look! There it is').

Now, of course, to answer this way is not to cite any piece of information which does not, to a large extent, already presuppose the belief in question. I believe that there is a book on the desk because I believe that that is a book, and it is on that, which is a desk. We would not convince someone who had seriously considered the matter, and still was not sure that there was a book on the desk, by pointing it out to them. (Their doubt, assuming that we can make sense of it, presumably would amount to a denial that such a demonstration was ever possible). But, then, we might wonder, what else are we supposed to do in this context? What could we possibly

cite that was more certain than the presence of the book itself? For this reason we are naturally led to suppose that there must be something wrong, in the ways already suggested, with the person who fails to believe in such a context.

However, let us now suppose that I believe falsely that there is a book on the desk. Suppose, for example, that I am dreaming or hallucinating that there is a book there.

In this second scenario, then, I hold the same belief as I hold in the first (that there is a book on the desk), but we cannot cite as the ground of my belief the presence of the book in the world and my seeing it, for there is no book there for me to see. I no doubt believe there is a book on the desk because I have beliefs of the form that <u>that</u> is a book, and that <u>that</u> is a desk etc. But the truth is that <u>that</u> is not a book, and <u>that</u> is not a desk. Whatever the demonstratives pick out or refer to here (if they refer to anything!) they do not pick out books and desks. For no books or desks are present in the world to serve as their referents.[5]

Now, it certainly seems true to say that there is nothing incoherent about this second scenario. I could believe there's a book on a desk (believe that <u>that</u> is a book etc.) when there is no book there in the world. We <u>do</u> sometimes believe such things when dreaming or hallucinating. But in admitting the coherence of such a

scenario we are well on the way, it seems, to embracing a sceptical conclusion. For the question might now be asked, 'How do I know which scenario correctly describes my current situation?'. It might seem to be a condition of my knowing that there's a book on the desk that I know that I am not now dreaming or hallucinating, as in the second scenario.[6] But how do I know that I am not now dreaming or hallucinating, and that therefore that that is a book etc., as I actually believe it to be? Of course, there might be an answer to this question which could avoid the move to scepticism at this stage. But the point is that by raising the question 'How do I now know that I am not dreaming etc.?' a more careful analysis of what grounds my belief seems required. It is no good my giving a simple demonstration of the book on the desk as before (Look, there it is!). The dream or hallucination possibility, once brought to mind, would seem to force us to look for some independent non-question-begging ground to my belief: something which doesn't presuppose the fact that that is a book, and so on.

How might I come to know, then, that I am not now dreaming or hallucinating? Well, it may seem initially plausible to suppose that I might come to know this by attending to the nature of my experiences themselves. Dream experiences or hallucinatory experiences, it might be claimed, characteristically lack the vividness of veridical experiences, and present things in such a way

which does not generally 'fit' with many of our most deeply held beliefs (There are no pink elephants, for example!). Thus we can often detect that we are dreaming or hallucinating, not merely after the event, but also whilst undergoing such delusory experiences, if only we pay enough attention. We do not always believe even our current experiences to be veridical. So by attending to the nature of my experiences (Are they vivid? Do they present things in a way which generally 'fits' with my most basic beliefs? etc.), it might be claimed, I can give a perfectly adequate reply to the question 'Am I now dreaming or hallucinating?'.

Now this suggestion would seem to have some force. Indeed, as J.L. Austin has pointed out, unless dream or hallucinatory experiences were generally detectable in this way it becomes mysterious how we even have a grip of the contrast between dreaming/hallucinating and normal waking life: 'There are recognized ways of distinguishing between dreaming and waking (how otherwise should we know how to use the words?)'.[7] If dream/hallucinatory experiences were indistinguishable from normal waking life experiences, then wouldn't the meanings of the words by which we draw the contrast just collapse into one?

However, it is surely just a fact of nature (something which we <u>all</u> accept) that delusory experiences <u>can</u> be qualitatively indistinguishable from what we take to be veridical experiences. To give such a suggestion some

empirical backing (to show that we haven't gone completely off the rails here), surely this could be the case in circumstances where, to take my current visual experiences of a book etc., everything in my brain were identical to what it is now, though there was no book on the desk in the world causally responsible for my current brain states. But then, the sceptic might ask, couldn't some mad scientist or evil genius (to use the most popular examples) artificially manipulate my brain such that I have exactly the same brain states that I have now, causing the relevant experiences, when there is no book on a desk in my environment at all? Indeed, how do I know that I am not just a brain in a vat in some mad scientist's laboratory, whose sole intent is to deceive me about the nature of my environment?

It is at this point, of course, that a sceptical conclusion seemingly forces itself upon us. I can only know that there is a book on the desk infront of me, it would seem, if I can know that I am not now dreaming/hallucinating etc. or undergoing some other kind of delusory experience. But it turns out that our normal methods for distinguishing delusory experiences from veridical ones (their vividness etc.) fail to rule out the possibility that we are undergoing some such delusory experience. There is a possible world (quite a number in fact) where the relevant brain states causing my current visual experiences of a book on a desk are not the result

of there actually being a book on a desk in my environment, but where they have some other cause. But how do I know that I do not in fact inhabit some such possible world? It would seem that I have no way of telling. And that fact seems to rule out the idea of my knowing that there's a book on the desk etc., or any other fact about my external environment.

1.3 Responding to Scepticism

So much, then, for the kinds of consideration which underpin the sceptic's claim that we lack knowledge of the world around us. But can we really make coherent the idea that we lack such knowledge? Is scepticism really intelligible?

As stated at the outset, the kind of response to scepticism that I want to discuss in this thesis attempts to show that scepticism cannot really be consistently stated, since scepticism involves denying or doubting what amounts to a necessary condition of thought and/or experience. Such a response to scepticism, as mentioned earlier, is commonly termed transcendental.

The term 'transcendental' here derives from Kant. For Kant:

> In transcendental knowledge...our guide is the possibility of experience. Such a (transcendental) proof does not show that a given concept leads directly to another concept...The proof proceeds by showing that experience itself, and therefore the object of experience, would be impossible without a connection of this kind.[8]

Now, this may not seem very illuminating. But the basic idea is that a transcendental 'proof' or argument shows that certain concepts or classes of concept have, what Kant termed, 'objective validity', i.e. are instantiated in the world, insofar as their being so instantiated constitutes a necessary condition of experience and/or thought.

It is easy to see, then, how an argument of this form might be employed to convict the sceptic of incoherence, or at least inconsistency. The sceptic does not question that we have experiences or thoughts. Insofar, then, as the sceptic takes on board the fact that we have experiences and thoughts, the transcendental arguer attempts to show that the sceptic cannot consistently doubt a proposition such as <u>there are external objects</u> because one could not have experiences or thoughts at all if such a proposition were not true. Thus the basic schema of transcendental arguments (where 'p' is some proposition typically doubted or denied by the sceptic) is as follows:

1. We have thought and/or experience
2. A necessary condition for thought and/or experience is p

Therefore, 3. p is true

In this thesis, however, I do not want to restrict our understanding of what is meant by a transcendental argument to only arguments which connect the truth of propositions such as there are external objects to the possibility of thought and experience in general. I shall be liberal in my understanding of the term 'transcendental', and allow certain other allied forms of argumentation to that given in the above schema to fall under the extension of the term. Indeed, I think that such a schema is probably too restrictive if we are to have anything like a truly satisfying transcendental refutation of scepticism.

Firstly, I shall allow that an argument be transcendental, on my liberal understanding of the term, if the scope of the first premise is restricted to thoughts and experiences of particular kinds -- say, where the contents of such thoughts and experiences refer to external objects. Of course, no transcendental argument could restrict the scope of the first premise too narrowly if it is to offer the hope of a satisfactory response to the sceptic. It is essential that the first premise should include thoughts and experiences of the kind that the sceptic must assume if the formulation of his scepticism can get off the ground. If the first premise does not include thoughts and experiences of this kind, then the sceptic may just grant the point that we do not really have such thoughts and experiences, but

only seem to. The sceptic is not necessarily committed to the idea that we have first person indubitable knowledge of the contents of our thoughts and experiences. He can, it would seem, consistently deny that we have thoughts and experiences of any kind save those necessary for the formulation of his sceptical doubts in the first place. So it is important for the transcendental arguer, if his argument does not spell out conditions of thought and experience in general, to circumscribe those kinds of thoughts and experiences necessary for the formulation of sceptical doubts and include them in the first premise of his argument.

Secondly, the second premise may not just aim to establish the truth of a certain proposition (or range of propositions) as a condition of thought and experience (or certain kinds of thoughts and experiences), but may aim to establish knowledge of its (their) truth as such a condition. A transcendental argument, for example, may not just aim to show that the existence of external objects is a necessary condition of thought and experience, but that knowledge of external objects is such a condition. We may very loosely distinguish, then, between truth-directed and knowledge-directed transcendental arguments.[9] This distinction is, however, only loose insofar that, quite clearly, a successful transcendental argument for the truth of a certain proposition (or range of propositions) would put one in a

position to know that such a proposition was true. But the difference between a knowledge-directed and truth-directed transcendental argument might be expressed as follows. A knowledge-directed argument shows that the sceptic's claim that we lack knowledge is false all along. We do know, and have always known, what the sceptic claims that we do not know. The role of the transcendental argument is to show why this must be the case. A truth-directed argument doesn't show this, however. Such an argument itself, it might be said, establishes the kind of justification required for knowledge. But it doesn't show that we've known what the sceptic doubts all along (though, of course, it might still be the case, contrary to what the sceptic claims, that we have known all along). A stubborn kind of sceptic, however, even if accepting the conclusions of a truth-directed transcendental argument, might claim that, in the absence of some further argument, the majority of human kind lacks knowledge of the world around us, save a few privileged philosophers. In this sense, then, it seems to me that knowledge-directed transcendental arguments are of greater philosophical value. The idea that the possibility of knowledge of the objective world should require some specialist appreciation of philosophical argumentation clearly lacks intuitive appeal. A full and adequate transcendental response to the sceptic, I suggest, should not allow for the retort

that knowledge is limited to a philosophical elite, but demonstrate the basicality for knowledge of an objective world to all beings capable of intentional thought and experience.[10]

NOTES

1. P.F. Strawson, Individuals (London, 1959), p.35

2. See chapter 2

3. See chapter 5.

4. See chapter 6.

5. Of course, it is possible that I might hallucinate and have the belief that that is a book when, quite fortuitously, there actually is a book there in my external environment. However, it would be quite implausible to suggest that in such a case my belief was about the book in the world, and hence a true belief, given that I do not actually perceive the book. The reference of demonstrative beliefs of this kind seem intertwined with whatever objects and events are present within (are the objects of) one's experiences. And if I hallucinate the presence of a book, even if there is a book there in the world, the book itself is not the object of my experience.

6. This would seem to be the case insofar that knowledge is, as many philosophers have put it, closed under known logical consequence. To put it in standard epistemic logic:

$$[Kap\&Ka(p \rightarrow q)] \rightarrow Kaq$$

(If a knows that p, and a knows that if p then q, then a knows that q)

It has become increasingly popular for philosophers to respond to scepticism by denying that knowledge is in fact closed under known logical consequence in this way. Epistemic closure, however, will not be questioned in the course of this thesis.

7. J.L. Austin, 'Other Minds', in his Philosophical Papers (Oxford, 1961), p.55.

8. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A738/B811.

9. The distinction between truth-directed and knowledge-directed transcendental arguments is drawn by Christopher Peacocke in his Transcendental Arguments in the Theory of Content (Oxford, 1989), pp.4-5.

10. The position might be slightly more complex if we agree with Wittgenstein that the kinds of proposition the sceptic attempts to question cannot be known for the very reason that they cannot be truly doubted either. On Wittgenstein's account, the fundamental role that such propositions play with regard to the possibility of thought (and hence the possibility of doubt) prevents it from being appropriate to charaterize our attitude towards such propositions as one of knowledge. See chapter 5.

Chapter 2

TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS: IDEALISM, VERIFICATIONISM, AND NECESSITY

2.1 Introduction

At the end of the last chapter we looked, in a very general way, at the form a transcendental refutation of scepticism might take. In this chapter, before looking at specific transcendental-style attempts to answer the sceptic, I want to look in a little more detail at the structure of transcendental arguments. In particular, I want to look at some of the structural difficulties that some contemporary philosophers have thought stand in the way of any transcendental refutation of scepticism being successful.

I shall argue that these supposed structural difficulties need not worry the transcendental arguer. What I consider to be the real problem with transcendental arguments will emerge when we look more closely at specific responses to scepticism in later chapters.

2.2 Kant, Idealism, and Verificationism

Kant's paradigmatic use of transcendental arguments were self-consciously set within the framework of an idealist metaphysics; a framework which Kant saw as indispensable to any attempt to establish necessary conditions of thought and experience. Our knowledge of particular

objects and their relations within the field of experience Kant thought was incontestably a posteriori. But knowledge of the general structure of reality as we experience it -- its form -- could be established a priori, even though the propositions describing that formal structure were synthetic, not analytic. Synthetic a priori knowledge of the structure of experienced reality was possible, according to Kant, insofar that '...our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself'.[1] Because it is our own faculty of knowledge which supplies the general form to our experience, this formal structure, Kant thought, could be anticipated a priori. We do not, therefore, on Kant's account, experience things as they are in themselves -- noumena -- for then only a posteriori knowledge would be possible. Insofar as it is we who supply the form to our experience, the world as we experience it -- the phenomenal world -- is (at least with respect to its form) a subjective construction. And it is because it is we who have constituted the formal structure of the phenomenal world that synthetic a priori knowledge of that formal structure is possible.

Few contemporary philosophers, even those sympathetic to Kant, are willing to embrace such an idealist metaphysics. Thus P.F. Strawson typifies the attitude of

many recent philosophers when he comments:

> The doctrines of transcendental idealism, and the associated picture of the receiving and ordering apparatus of the mind producing Nature as we know it out of the unknowable reality of things as they are in themselves, are undoubtedly the chief obstacles to a sympathetic understanding of the Critique.[2]

Thus, even modern exponents of transcendental arguments generally reject transcendental idealism.[3]

However, this rejection of an idealist framework within which to set such arguments has itself brought about a number of problems, and in the past twenty or so years the whole methodology of a transcendental refutation of scepticism has been seriously questioned.

Some critics have pointed out that since many transcendental arguments have tended to limit their conclusions to claims about how we must think about the world, or how we must conceptualize our experience, then they fail to alleviate sceptical doubt, since one cannot infer from such claims -- which, after all, are claims about us -- substantive claims about what actually exists, about how the world really is in itself. Whilst such arguments, it has been claimed, might show that our experience must be amenable to conceptualization in terms of concepts of independently existing objects, it is not a necessary condition for such conceptualization that our experiences are ever of such objects. It is sufficient that our experiences should merely seem to be so, which the sceptic, of course, would not deny. As Rorty puts it,

'...the most that this sort of argument can show is that it must seem as if there are X's -- not that there actually exist X's'.[4]

Such thinking has led a number of philosophers, following Barry Stroud, to claim that if transcendental arguments are to show any pretence of undermining sceptical claims, then they must include a rather dubious verificationist-style premise, i.e. a premise linking the possibility of our possessing concepts of objects with our being able to determine (to know) the conditions under which they have true application. But, Stroud argues, if transcendental arguments must include such a premise, then scepticism can be answered directly <u>via</u> this premise, leaving the rest of the transcendental argument idle. For by means of such a premise alone it can be shown that the sceptic is committed to the possibility of the very knowledge he is calling into question. Thus Stroud concludes, '...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.'[5]

Now, of course, the claim that transcendental arguments <u>must</u> involve the use of a verificationist premise to undermine scepticism presupposes that the most that any transcendental argument could show, in the absence of such a premise, is how we must <u>think</u> about the

world, or how we must conceptualize our experience. But it is not integral to the very idea of a transcendental argument (as defined in the last chapter) that they should only achieve so limited a conclusion. Why couldn't such an argument directly show, for example, without the aid of a verificationist premise, that it was a necessary condition of thought and/or experience that external objects exist, or that we have knowledge of the world around us? Why should the scope of the conclusion of a transcendental argument, without any hint of verificationism creeping in, be limited to claims about what we must believe or how we must think? Thus Quassim Cassam rightly replies to Stroud's claim that:

> ...the sceptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language possible if we believe that S is true, or if it looks all the world as if it is, but that S need not actually be true...[6]

by pointing out that:

> He (the transcendental arguer) might insist, for example that it is the existence of physical objects and not merely belief in their existence which constitutes a necessary condition of the possibility of experience, and if this is true, there will simply be no gap to be bridged, by the verification principle or otherwise. Stroud's claim that the sceptical suggestion will always be legitimate might, indeed, be read as suggesting that no such strong claim about conditions of the possibility of experience is likely to be defensible. If this is what Stroud had in mind, however, his grounds for thinking it remain unclear.[7]

However, even supposing that the best that any transcendental argument could reasonably be expected to directly establish is a demonstration of what we must think or believe, it is not clear to me that any

verificationist premise need even then be invoked to provide the link between our necessarily thinking that so-and-so is the case and its actually being the case that so-and-so. To illustrate this, let us suppose that a transcendental argument did successfully establish that we must in general believe that we are confronted by independently existing objects in experience (or, to use the jargon, that the use of concepts of objects is basic to any possible conceptual scheme). Can the argument then be viewed as giving credence to the stronger claim that independently existing objects actually exist without invoking a verificationist premise?

If it is truly a condition of experience or thought that we believe or think that there are external objects, then how can we even make intelligible the claim that it might merely seem to us as though there are such objects? How are we to give the distinction between what we must believe exists and what must actually exist any content? There is no conceptual scheme within which to even formulate a general distinction of this nature -- at least if the transcendental argument is successful -- for all conceptual schemes rely on taking the existence of external objects as primitive. The gap, then, that the objector attempts to place between how we must think about the world and how the world actually is in itself assumes the possibility (at least whilst doing philosophy) of our adopting some kind of perspective

outside of our everyday conceptual scheme where we can successfully draw a contrast across the board between how things seem to us and how the world is in itself, which a transcendental argument (if successful) would rule out as impossible (even whilst doing philosophy, presumably). So if a transcendental argument does truly prevent such a gap being drawn, then there is no need for such an argument to involve some kind of verificationist premise to bridge it.

2.3 Necessity and Uniqueness

A response along these lines can also be urged, I think, against Stephen Korner's so-called 'uniqueness' objection to transcendental arguments in his famous paper 'The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions'.[8]

Korner defines a transcendental argument as '...a logically sound demonstration of the reasons why a particular categorial schema (conceptual scheme) is not only in fact, but also necessarily employed in differentiating a region of experience'.[9]

To be successful, Korner argues, such an argument must satisfy two conditions. Firstly, the conceptual scheme in question must be established, i.e. shown to have application in differentiating experience. This, Korner thinks, is relatively unproblematic. It involves, fundamentally, showing that, for a given 'region of experience' the scheme provides the means by which to

individuate objects and their properties and relations. However, in addition to establishing a scheme in this way, Korner argues, to show that the scheme is not just employed as a matter of fact, but as a matter of necessity, a transcendental argument must demonstrate the scheme's uniqueness. One must show, in other words, that all possible ways of conceptualizing or differentiating our experience presuppose the particular method in question and thus belong to the scheme. Korner believes that establishing the uniqueness of a scheme in this way is impossible.

He outlines three methods by which a transcendental arguer might attempt to establish the uniqueness of a scheme.

Firstly, the transcendental arguer might attempt to compare the scheme with undifferentiated experience -- the thought here being that by having access to experience as it is prior to the application of any method of differentiation we could compare experience and our method of differentiation and establish some kind of necessary 'fit' between the two. But, Korner points out, such a comparison is impossible, for '...the statements by which the comparison would have to be made cannot be formulated without employing some prior differentiation of experience; and even if there were undifferentiated experience, one could at best show that a certain scheme "reflects" it, and not that some other scheme could not

also reflect it'.[10] In other words, we cannot get at experience 'neat', prior to any conceptualization or differentiation, to make the comparison in question; and even if we could, the only 'fit' that could be established would be a contingent one, not necessary.

Secondly, Korner suggests, the transcendental arguer might attempt to establish the uniqueness of a scheme by comparing it with its possible competitors. But, Korner says, '...this presupposes that they all can be exhibited, and is self-contradictory in attempting a "demonstration" of the scheme's uniqueness, by conceding that the scheme was not unique'.[11] In other words, we are never in a position to know whether we have considered all possible competitors to the scheme. But, then, of course, to establish any competitors at all only goes to show that the scheme is not unique, and thus the consideration of competitors for the transcendental arguer is a self-defeating exercise.

And thirdly, Korner suggests, the transcendental arguer might attempt to establish the uniqueness of a scheme from within the scheme itself. But, Korner argues, such an internal examination can only show <u>how</u> the scheme operates in differentiating experience, not that it is the only way of doing so. We cannot, according to Korner, determine the uniqueness of a scheme from within, for there may be alternatives to the scheme which are not statable or conceivable from such an internal perspective

given the presuppositions of the scheme or the limitations on our thinking that the scheme imposes.

What, then, are we to make of Korner's claims here? Let us begin by considering the second of Korner's suggested methods by which the transcendental arguer might try to establish the uniqueness of a conceptual scheme, i.e. through the consideration of competing conceptual schemes.

To begin with we might note that Korner's claim that to establish competitors to a scheme at all is a self-defeating exercise in establishing its uniqueness, whilst obviously true, does rest on a misleading description of how the transcendental arguer might attempt to establish uniqueness through the consideration of competitors. For, as Eva Schaper has pointed out, while the comparison of a scheme with its possible competitors, if the competitors in question are genuine methods of differentiating experience, implies the non-uniqueness of the scheme, suppose the competitors in question are conceived as merely seeming alternative methods of differentiation.[12] A transcendental argument might then consist in the demonstration that such seeming competitors cannot in fact be employed in the differentiation of experience. As Schaper puts it: 'The problem is not one of ruling out possible competitors, but 'possibly possible' competitors, yet it is in terms of the first formulation that Korner's criticism is made'.[13]

In fact this does seem to be the way that at least some transcendental arguments actually work. Strawson, for example, in the Bounds of Sense considers the alternative seeming possibility to the conceptualization of experience in terms of concepts of objects that we employ just 'sensory quality concepts', i.e. concepts of sense-data. He rules out such a possibility on the grounds that any conceptualization of experience at all presupposes the possibility of self-consciousness which can only be provided for on the grounds that we recognize objects whose esse is not their percipi, i.e. independently existing objects. Thus the supposed alternative method of conceptualizing experience in terms of concepts of sense-data is found not to be a real alternative at all -- the application of sensory quality concepts presupposing the application of concepts of objects. Or, to put it in Korner's terms, the method of differentiating experience in terms of concepts of sense-data is shown to belong to the categorial schema (conceptual scheme) in which concepts of objects are applied. There can be no scheme in which experience is conceptualized purely in terms of sense-data; and Strawson's argument consists in ruling out the possibility of such a competitor by means of a kind of reductio ad absurdum argument.[14]

This, of course, still leaves unanswered the objection that even if some possible competitors are ruled out by

such arguments, they still fail to establish the uniqueness of a scheme insofar as '...there is no reason for assuming that the competing frameworks, which someone can conceive at any particular time, exhaust all possible competitors'.[15] Thus Rorty, commenting on Strawson's argument considered above, says that all that it does is '...rule out one alternative -- the sceptical, Humean 'sense-datum experience' alternative. We do not have the slightest idea what the other alternatives might be'.[16]

This objection is clearly linked to the third suggested method which Korner considers the transcendental arguer might attempt to establish the uniqueness of a scheme, i.e. from inside the scheme itself. The link is provided by the idea that any 'possibly possible' alternatives to the scheme which can be conceived at any one time is constrained by what is conceivable from within our own scheme. But we have no reason to believe that what is conceivable from within our own scheme is exhaustive of all 'possibly possible' competitors.

Now, it is at this point I think that we might reiterate, on the transcendental arguer's behalf, the kind of point that we urged against Stroud's verificationist objection. If we are truly locked inside a conceptual scheme which binds what we can conceive of, or make intelligible, then this would seem to leave no place where the whole question of the consideration of

alternative schemes not conceivable from within our own scheme can itself be intelligibly stated. Korner's objection, therefore, might be regarded as self-defeating.

Rudiger Bubner makes a similar point. According to Bubner, transcendental arguments have the characteristic feature of being self-referential; that is they somehow embody in their structure their own conclusions, the truths they show to be necessary. This must be the case, of course, if they establish necessary conditions of thought and experience in general. Such truths must be presupposed for any argumentation to get off the ground. According to Bubner, it is the fact of a transcendental argument's self-referentiality which determines the legitimacy of our 'form of knowledge' in establishing its uniqueness by ruling out the possibility of alternatives. He says:

> Now the argument of the transcendental type makes a decisive advance over the merely factual demonstration. The advance depends upon the logical moment of self-referentiality...Not only does it so happen that there are no alternatives, one cannot in principle conceive of such a thing as an alternative. Our way of thinking about it on a meta-level confirms the general structure of our knowledge since it cannot help applying the same structure...the transcendental argument derives its force from a fact, that is the irrevocable givenness that every consideration of the possibility of understanding has to satisfy the general structure of knowledge.[17]

In other words, when thinking at a meta-level (philosophically) about the structure of our conceptual scheme must assume that general structure, as is revealed

by the essential self-referentiality of transcendental argumentation, then the possibility of alternatives to our scheme cannot be intelligibly considered. Thus, far from the idea of our being locked inside our conceptual scheme being a problem for the transcendental arguer -- what we might call the problem of categoriocentricity -- it is, in a sense, through a demonstration of categoriocentricity at all levels of thought that the transcendental arguer achieves his aims.

It is not clear to me that the workings of all transcendental arguments depend upon what Bubner calls a 'logical moment of self-referentiality', but the general point that Bubner is making here seems to me essentially sound. The objection that because we are locked within our own conceptual scheme, our limited perspective prevents us from ruling out alternative schemes whose consideration lay beyond our conceptual reach, misses the mark because it fails to take account of the perspective from which the objection itself is being stated. The objection assumes that we can make intelligible the existence of schemes which we cannot make intelligible to ourselves. But there is clearly something self-defeating in this. Doesn't the objection really amount to the absurd claim that we <u>can</u> make intelligible the existence of that whose existence we <u>cannot</u> make intelligible?

Quassim Cassam has responded to Bubner by arguing that, at best, all that is ruled out by transcendental

arguments is the possibility of our recognizing alternative schemes, not the possibility of the existence of alternatives.[18] From the fact that one cannot recognize alternative schemes to our own, Cassam argues, it does not follow that alternatives could not exist. And, of course, if the transcendental arguer is to establish the uniqueness of our scheme then it is the possibility of the existence of alternatives which must be ruled out. Cassam goes onto argue that the transcendental arguer might connect the question of the recognition of alternative schemes with the question of their existence by invoking a verificationist principle, making the whole intelligibility of the question of the existence of alternatives dependent upon the question of the possibility of their recognition. But this, on Cassam's account, simply reinstates Stroud's objection that such a dubious principle can be invoked directly to undermine scepticism, leaving the rest of the transcendental argument idle.

There is, however, I think, a kind of emptiness to Cassam's response here. If it is true that we cannot recognize alternative schemes to our own, then what sense can we attach to the idea that there could exist such alternative schemes? Remember, the sense in which we cannot recognize alternative schemes here is not a perceptual limitation, but a intellectual one -- it is the sense in which we cannot conceive of or make

intelligible alternative schemes. But if this is the sense in which we cannot recognize alternative schemes, we can now surely ask Cassam, 'what does it mean to say that something could exist the likes of which we cannot even make intelligible to ourselves?'

We can perhaps invoke Donald Davidson's famous argument against conceptual relativism here. Davidson argued that the idea that there could be languages so radically different to our own that there was no possibility of intertranslation was incoherent, for '...nothing, it may be said, could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted in our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity was not speech behaviour'.[19] For Davidson the interpretation of speakers of a completely alien language involves the assignment of truth conditions to their sentences such that we take them to have largely true beliefs about the world -- true that is 'by our own lights'.[20] But whilst interpretation, translation and the like, hinge on the notion of truth, so our whole grasp of truth itself is intimately bound up with interpretability and translation. '"Snow is white" is true iff snow is white' is recognized to be trivially true. But the totality of such English sentences, Davidson argues, uniquely determines the extension of the concept of truth for English. Tarski recognized this, and made it a test of any theory of truth that for any

language L, a satisfactory theory of truth must entail that for every sentence s of L, a theorem of the form 's is true iff p', where 's' is replaced by a description of s and 'p' by s itself if L is English, and by a translation of s into English if L is not English. Since this best captures our intuition as to how the concept of truth is used, involving as it does the notion of translatability, the idea that alternative schemes to our own could 'fit', 'cope with', 'face' etc. the tribunal of experience (be largely true, metaphor aside), but not be translatable into our own language, according to Davidson, just doesn't make sense.

Davidson's argument, of course, was intended not to establish the uniqueness of our conceptual scheme, but to undermine the whole idea of a conceptual scheme <u>per se</u>. I think there maybe something to the idea that if we cannot make sense of there being languages radically incommensurable with our own, then the whole idea of viewing our own language as constituting something like a rule-governed system or scheme makes no sense either. From what perspective are we supposed to view our language as such?[21] To view the rules governing the use of a language as rules, we surely must be able to at least conceive of the rules being different to what they actually are. Rules cannot only be broken, but changed (for reasons of economy, utility, or whatever). Yet it is precisely such change with respect to the most

fundamental aspects of our language use which Davidson's argument appears to rule out as unintelligible.

This raises some large issues which are beyond the scope of my current project. Nevertheless, it is perhaps worth noting that the true upshot of a successful transcendental argument might well involve dispensing with, what Davidson calls, the scheme-content distinction. Dialetically we can suppose the scheme-content distinction be presupposed in the premises of such an argument, especially where that argument considers so-called 'possibly possible' alternatives to our own 'scheme'. So such an argument might initially contrast a scheme involving the use of concepts of physical objects, say, with one involving just concepts of sense-data, and then seek to show that the latter idea involves somekind of incoherence. It might then be claimed that this establishes the uniqueness of our conceptual scheme involving concepts of physical objects as basic. But then, if Davidson is right, this uniqueness claim will need qualifying. For the transcendental arguer just cannot '...announce the glorious news that all mankind -- all speakers of a language, at least -- share a common scheme and ontology'.[21] For, as Davidson puts it, '...if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.'[23] That is, the upshot of the argument will involve

dispensing with the idea of a conceptual scheme altogether.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have defended transcendental arguments against the claims that to successfully answer the sceptic transcendental arguments would have to (a) involve somekind of commitment to verificationism, or (b) establish the impossible by demonstrating the uniqueness of our conceptual scheme. I have argued that both objections seem to involve adopting a stance whereby the very beliefs which a transcendental argument attempts to show are basic to the possibility of thought/experience are in some way suspended. Given a transcendental argument that does succesfully demonstrate the basicality of such beliefs, therefore, it becomes clear that the adoption of such a stance is impossible, rendering objections to transcendental arguments along these lines vacuous.[25]

NOTES

1. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B1.

2. P.F. Strawson, The Bounds of Sense (London, 1966), p.22.

3. Amongst certain recent commentators there has been a reaction against this dismissal of Kant's transcendental idealism. Such writers reject an 'ontological' interpretation of Kant's idealism in favour of a 'criteriological' or 'methodological' interpretation. Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, according to such commentators, was a distinction between a conception of objects as they conform to the conditions under which knowledge of them is possible (the phenomenal), and those same objects considered apart from those conditions (the noumenal). Thus there is, according to this interpretation, no ontological distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, just a perspectival or methodological one, rendering Kant's idealism metaphysically innocuous. (See in particular Henry Allison's masterly Kant's Transcendental Idealism (Yale, 1983)).

   There is clearly a good deal of textual support for such an interpretation. Kant, for example, explicitly claims that the concept of a noumenon is merely negative, signifying '...only the thought of something in general, which I abstract from everything that belongs to the form of sensible intuition' (Critique of Pure Reason, A252, my emphasis). However, it is not clear that Kant is consistent here. As Paul Guyer points out, Kant does not just say that there is a conception of objects which abstracts from the form under which knowledge of them is made possible (e.g. their spatiality and temporality), but that things in themselves lack that form (e.g. are not spatial or temporal). Kant's position seems to not only be that there is a conception of objects of which one abstracts from applying spatial and temporal predicates, but that objects as they are in themselves lack spatial and temporal properties, rendering an ontological distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal.

   For a more detailed of this issue see Paul Guyer's

'The Rehabilitation of Transcendental Idealism' in Eva Schaper and Wilhelm Vossenkuhl (eds.), Reading Kant (Oxford, 1989), pp.140-67; and Guyer's Kant And The Claims Of Knowledge (Cambridge, 1987), chapter.15.

4. R. Rorty, 'Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments', Nous 5 (1981), p.4.

5. B. Stroud, 'Transcendental Arguments', Journal of Philosophy 65 (1968), p.255.

6. Ibid., p.255

7. Q. Cassam, 'Transcendental Arguments, Transcendental Synthesis and Transcendental Idealism', Philosophical Quarterly 37 (1987), p.356.

8. S. Korner, 'The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions', Monist 51 (1967), pp.317-31.

9. Ibid., pp.318-19.

10. Ibid., pp.320-21.

11. Ibid., p.321.

12. E. Schaper, 'Arguing Transcendentally', Kant-Studien 63 (1972), see p.102

13. Ibid., p.102.

14. See Strawson op cit, pp.97-112.

15. S. Korner, Fundamental Questions in Philosophy (1971), p.215.

16. R. Rorty, 'Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference, and Pragmatism', in Transcendental Arguments and Science (Reidel, 1979), p.83.

17. R. Bubner, 'Kant, Transcendental Arguments and the Problem of Deduction', Review of Metaphysics 28 (1974-75), pp.464-65.

18. Q. Cassam, Transcendental Arguments and Necessity (1985), Oxford D.Phil thesis, unpublished, see especially p.196 onwards.

19. D. Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' in his Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford, 1984), p.185.

20. Davidson's theory of radical interpretation is spelled out in more detail in chapter 6.

21. For an interesting characterization of necessity in terms of rules see J.J. Valberg, 'Necessity, Inconceivability, and the A Priori', Aristotelian Society, Supp. Vol. LVI (1982), pp.135-55. Valberg's particular concern is with characterizing the status of the principle of contradiction (PC) as a rule in a game which is 'outermost for us' insofar as it forms '...the context of all our ordinary games, of all our ordinary rule-governed forms of activity' (p.147). Yet Valberg is acutely aware of the problem of characterizing the PC as such. Thus he says, in a long footnote which I think is worth quoting in full:

> But now, having given an answer to our question, I ought to confess there is something which makes me uneasy...The answer depends on the idea that the PC is for us an outermost rule, a rule of the game which is outermost for us. But the PC does not, from within this game, present itself to us as 'outermost for us'. From within the game it is just: necessary. 'Things could not have been otherwise'. This is the way to express how the PC presents itself to us from within the game in which it holds. When we call the PC 'outermost', when we say it is a 'rule' in a game which is 'outermost for us', and so on, we are trying to get behind the way it presents itself to us, to give some sort of account or explanation of why it has the absolute authority it has. Has where? Once again, as we keep saying, within the game which is 'outermost for us'. But that game is the game within which, perforce, I am now engaged in trying to give this 'account' of the absolute authority of the PC. The act of writing this paper, of philosophizing, does not place me in a context

wider than that which by hypothesis is the widest we have; and from within this context (which is where I am now--where else should I be?) the PC is not 'outermost for us' but, to repeat, just 'necessary'. Thus it strikes me that the project I am engaged in involves a kind of dishonesty or double-mindedness...Philosophically, I want to describe the PC as 'outermost for us', because this seems to cast some light on the status of the principle. (Is that an illusion?). but another part of me (my 'heart of hearts') rejects the whole notion of what the principle is 'for us'. Is says simply: the principle is 'necessary'. I believe it is moved to say this precisely by the fact that the PC is outermost for us. So there is a predicament here...: of a rule, or context, which is outermost for us, it is not clear how we can honestly regard it as such. I would like to say that the PC is 'outermost for us' -- just to get the point in -- and then quickly retract it, or act as if I had not said it.

22. D. Davidson, op cit, p.198.

23. Ibid., p.198.

24. It might be suggested, I think, that the kind of defense of transcendental arguments I have offered in the last two sections against Stroud's verificationist objection and Korner's uniqueness objection has really only served to demonstrate that the transcendental arguer is committed to some form of metaphysical idealism after all. For the kind of defense I have offered emphasizes that a successful transcendental argument would show that one cannot intelligibly draw a gap across the board between how things must seem to us, or what we must believe to be the case, and how things are in themselves. But this, it might be thought, implies a kind of idealism. That is, if we can know facts about the world simply through a consideration of how we must think about it, then doesn't this epistemological fact point towards somekind of ontological or metaphysical dependency on the nature of the world as to how we think about it? For the epistemological fact to hold, it might be argued, the nature of the world must in some deep sense be mind-dependent. (This may be partly the motivation for regarding philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Davidson as being idealists: see especially T. Nagel, The View From Nowhere (Oxford, 1986), Ch.VI, and B. Williams 'Wittgenstein and

Idealism', in Understanding Wittgenstein, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, Vol.7 (1972-3).)

However, it is not clear to me why the dependency between mind and world should be characterized in such a way as to imply idealism. Would we not, for example, be in a position to read off substantive claims about the nature of the world from the way we must think about it if the contents of those thoughts were world-dependent, rather than the world being mind-dependent? In this sense, transcendental arguments may be thought to imply an externalist view of the mind, rather than an idealist view of the world. By embracing externalism the transcendental arguer can perhaps retain something like a realist metaphysics whilst allowing for him to make claims about the nature of the world from claims about the way we must think about it. For more on externalism see chapter 6.

25. Defending transcendental arguments this way does, however, hint at another possible problem with such arguments. It certainly does seem as though we can draw the kind of distinction which a transcendental argument is designed to rule out, i.e. a distinction between our having to believe that external objects exist and the question of there actually existing. Furthermore, as we saw in the last chapter, there appear to be pretty good arguments by means of which such a distinction can be seen to be not only possible, but in many ways compelling. Given such arguments, it might seem as though whatever we have to believe is the case regarding the external world, might not actually be the case.

This line of objection will considered in more detail when considering specific transcendental arguments in later chapters. In fact, the demand for a response to such an objection will be a recurring theme of the rest of this thesis. If a transcendental argument is to successfully answer the sceptic it will have to make explicit the error in drawing the aforementioned supposed distinction, and fully expose flaws in the kind of sceptical arguments which appear to give such a distinction content.

Chapter 3

CONCEPTUAL PRELIMINARIES: OBJECTS AND SPACE

3.1. Introduction

In the last chapter we looked at some of the structural difficulties that some philosophers have thought stand in the way of any transcendental response to scepticism being successful. I defended transcendental arguments against the charge that they must embody some kind of dubious verificationist premise, and also the charge that their success depends upon their establishing the uniqueness of our conceptual scheme, which is impossible.

I now want to turn away from such concerns, and begin to look at some specific transcendental-style responses to scepticism. My starting point here will, quite naturally, be Kant. In the next two chapters, then, I want to look at whether some of the material in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason might point the way towards a satisfactory answer to the sceptic. What is presented in these chapters, however, it should be warned, is not intended as a work of detailed Kantian exegesis. My aim is to examine what I take to be issues of philosophical substance found in the Critique, rather than examine the precise textual interpretations to be placed on the presentation of these issues in the broad context of Kant's theoretical philosophy. In largely ignoring exegetical issues, however, I hope not to stray too far

from Kant's own intentions (though that is not defended here).

My starting point will be to examine a purely conceptual issue, before examining Kantian issues with a more direct epistemological bearing. That is, I want to start by examining the question as to what is involved in our believing that the 'objects' that confront us in experience are independent existents. What framework of beliefs must be in play in order for us to have a belief of the form 'that is something distinct from me and my various states etc.'? I shall then, in the next chapter, examine the Kantian claim that such a framework of beliefs is necessarily intertwinned with our having a conception of ourselves-qua-persisting/thinking subjects of experience, and ask whether this claim has any bearing on the issue of scepticism of the external world.

3.2 Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic

In the section of the the Critique of Pure Reason entitled the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant notes that objects are represented '...as outside us and all without exception in space'.[1] Very quickly, however, Kant makes the transition from this non-modal universal generalization about objective experience as spatial to make a number of modal claims along these lines. Here is a representative sample:

> Space is a necessary a priori representation, which underlies all outer intuitions (A24/B38).
>
> ...outer experience is itself possible at all only through this representation (i.e. of space) (A23/B38).
>
> It (space) must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances (A24/B39).

In this chapter I shall tentatively defend a doctrine which I think these statements point towards: that if we are to have beliefs that the objects that confront us in experience are independent existents then we must employ a conceptual framework where spatial notions play a central role.

We should distinguish this doctrine from a number of other possible readings of Kant. Kant's use of modal notions throughout the Critique of Pure Reason is very sloppy; and in such an environment ambiguities breed, i.e. scope ambiguities. In particular, Kant seems to confuse the following:

(1) It is necessary that all knowable objects are spatial.

(2) All knowable objects are necessarily spatial.[2]

The doctrine I want to defend is distinct from both of these. It is distinct from (1) and (2) insofar as I am concerned with the general framework of beliefs within

which our beliefs about independently existing objects hold. My concerns in this chapter are epistemologically modest. I do not want to claim here that the application of that framework yields knowledge of the real nature of what confronts us in experience. It is also distinct from (2) insofar as the doctrine I want to defend is a is a doctrine about the necessary structure of that framework. I want to claim that if we have beliefs about independently existing objects then we must believe those objects to be spatial. This, of course, should be distinguished from the claim, implied perhaps by (2), that we must believe those objects to be necessarily spatial. I want to divorce any claims made here from a commitment to metaphysical essentialism. For apart from the inherent problems with such a view, it is sometimes claimed that it is by committing himself to such a view, engendered by confusions of the scope of modal notions, that Kant is led to transcendental idealism (given the validity of Hume's famous criticism of the idea that knowledge of metaphysical necessities could be derived from experience, how could we know objects to be necessarily spatial unless it was ourselves -- our minds -- which constructed them that way?).[3] Transcendental idealism, however, where this is understood in the ontological sense[4], is a doctrine that I shall try to avoid.

3.3 The Re-identification of Objects: Time and Space

Let us consider, then, what must be involved if we are to believe our experiences (rightly or wrongly) to be experiences of independently existing objects.

To have the idea of an independently existing object is to have the idea of an entity logically distinct from one's self and any experiences one might have of it, which is to say that one must be able to make sense of it existing continuously when not experienced (even if, in actual fact, it only exists at the time of its being experienced).

Now, let us consider that we (or counterparts of ourselves) inhabit a possible world where independently existing objects do (as a matter of fact) only exist whilst being experienced. Could we then have an idea that such objects were independent from us? Well, it seems that we could provided that we could make sense of the idea that the objects that we do experience should in principle be re-identifiable across discrete temporally discontinuous experiences. That is, we should be able to make sense that at a given future time t_3, an object now experienced at t_1, could be re-identified as the same object, even though at an intermediate time t_2, that object was not experienced. Unless we could make sense of such an idea it is difficult to see how we could have any grasp of the idea that what we experienced had an existence independently from ourselves. Let us call this

the re-identification condition.

What, then, are the necessary conditions of re-identification? What notions must an experiencer assume if he is to make sense of the idea that what confronts him in experience now could be re-identified at some future time in the above sense?

Our description has already made mention of one necessary aspect. We have said that what is experienced must be conceived as having a possible continuous existence between distinct experiences of it. This means, I think, that an experiencer must have an implicit conception of time as a one-directional, continuous, unified dimension.

What has not been made explicit, however, is the role that spatial notions must play here. To think of an object as being re-identifiable at t_3, and thus as having a continuous history between t_1 and t_3, we must think of that object as being at a place at t_2 other than those places within, what we might call, our 'experiential field'. We must think that were we appropriately positioned at t_2 we could have experienced it there. But because at t_2 either we or the object had moved from where we were at t_1 we could not experience it. At t_3, however, assuming that it was we, and not the object, which moved at t_2, we can re-identify it as numerically the same object as that experienced at t_1 because we have moved back to where we were at t1 and can identify it as

the object occupying that spatial position. Of course, it is often the case that both ourselves and the objects we re-identify move around. What seems important to the notion of re-identification here, though, is that such motion should be seemingly continuous through a single unified space in order that we can track and predict the position of objects relative to our own.

3.4 Strawson's Auditory Objects

All this should be familiar to readers of P.F. Strawson's book Individuals.

In chapter 2 of Individuals Strawson asked whether there could be a conceptual scheme which allowed for the re-identification of objects which did not involve spatial notions. To go about answering this question, Strawson attempted to construct a no-space world. Thus he imagined a being whose experience was purely auditory. Such an experience, Strawson argued, would be completely devoid of space. He says:

> Sounds seems to come from the left or the right, from above or below, to come nearer and recede. If sounds, the proper objects of hearing, possess in their own right these direction and distance characteristics, does it not follow that we shall have failed to eliminate spatial characteristics and concepts even if we adopt the radical hypothesis of a purely auditory experience? This conclusion, however, would be a mistake, and a fairly obvious one. The fact is that where sense experience is not only auditory in character, but also at least tactual and kinesthetic as well -- or, as it is in most cases, tactual and kinesthetic and visual as well -- we can then sometimes assign spatial predicates on the basis of hearing alone. But from this fact it does not follow that where experience is supposed to be exclusively

> auditory in character, there would be any place for spatial concepts at all. I think it is obvious that there would be no such place.[5]

Strawson asks whether there could be "...in a purely auditory world a distinction between qualitative and numerical identity".[6] Only if such a distinction could be drawn could an experiencer in principle re-identify objects over distinct discontinuous experiences, and hence possess a notion of that what confronts him are independent existents.

Let us, then, imagine two hearings of a sound universal, x, such that both hearings of x are qualitatively indistinguishable. If our experience were purely auditory in character, could there be a basis for distinguishing whether we had heard the same (numerically identical) instance of x twice, or two distinct instances (assuming a temporal gap between our hearings when no instance of x was heard)? If we cannot draw such a distinction, then a conceptual scheme operating with purely auditory notions could not make room for the application of concepts of independently existing objects. The idea of a sound particular existing unperceived could not get a grip.

Strawson argues that to make possible the re-identification of auditory particulars one has to introduce an analogue of space.[7] What, then, is required of such an analogue? He says:

> Roughly, we want it to provide for something like the idea of absence and presence -- but not just of

> absence and presence in the most utterly general sense these words could bear, but absence or presence in a sense which would allow us to speak of something being to a greater or lesser degree removed from, or separated from, the point at which we are. In other words, we want an analogy of distance -- of nearer to and further way from -- for only, at least, under this condition would we have anything like the idea of a dimension other than the temporal in which unperceived particulars could be thought of as simultaneously existing in some kind of systematic relation to each other, and to perceived particulars.[6]

To introduce such an analogue of space, Strawson introduces a master-sound; that is, "...a sound of a certain distinctive timbre...at a constant loudness, though with varying pitch" which is constantly heard. We have a notion of ourselves 'moving' continuously through a unified dimension by invariably smooth and continuous changes in the pitch level of the master-sound. These variations in the pitch of the master-sound correlate with variations in other heard sounds in such a way that we can supply criteria for the re-identification of sound particulars. Thus suppose an instance of x is heard at t_1 at pitch level L of the master-sound. Then the master-sound changes to pitch L' at t_2, and nothing is heard apart from the master-sound. Then at t_3 an instance of x is heard again with the pitch level of the master-sound again at L. Then we can form a notion of the instance of x at t_1 and at t_3 as being the same sound particular experienced twice. If an instance of x is heard at any other pitch level of the master-sound, then it is to be taken as another, numerically distinct, instance, and

again it is to be re-identified in terms of it occurring at that same pitch level. A hearer, then, is said to have a notion of sound particulars existing while not perceived because the master-sound enables the formulation of counterfactuals such as 'If at t_2 I had have been at pitch level L then I would have heard numerically the same instance of x that I heard at t_1' etc. At a time at which L is heard, and no instance of x is heard, then it must be taken that that particular instance (i.e. the one heard at t_1) has ceased to exist.

Strawson's illustration has been taken by some philosophers as a model to isolate those features of our own space necessary to fulfil what I have called the re-identification condition. Onora O'Neill, for example, takes Strawson's illustration to show that a "...perceiver who re-identifies must have at least a linear perceptual world in the sense of having a perceptual line of ordered, discernible contexts. Given a context on the line, such a perceiver can indicate the direction in which any other context lies and the order of any intervening contexts".[9] Sets of discernible contexts on such a line, O'Neill argues, should display relations of asymmetry, transitivity, and connectivity.[10]

I do not disagree with this. However, it seems to me that Strawson's master-sound embodies one obvious disanalogy with our own space which is essential to re-identification. This is perhaps masked because Strawson's

illustration leads us, I think, to assume the very question at issue -- the question of an objective world.

This essential feature of our own space was rightly identified by Kant, i.e. that spatial positions in themselves, as opposed to the occupants of those positions, are 'unperceivable'; space has no independent phenomenological character (B207). Our grasp of space, therefore, is bound up with our experiencing spatial objects. There is, then, a kind of conceptual interdependence here. Our only grip on the notion of space is <u>via</u> the identification of independently existing objects exhibiting spatial characteristics, though it is only by grasping a notion of space that any sense can be supplied to the idea that what confronts us in experience are independent existents. The two notions, therefore, come together. Neither one has logical priority.

Strawson's master-sound, however, is itself something experiencable. There is no dependence for the co-ordinization of position on the master-sound on the position of the objects heard 'in' it. A hearer can, by hypothesis, have the notion of his 'moving' through the dimension without his experiencing objects (sound particulars) at all. So there is no interdependence between the notions of 'analogue-space' and sound particulars as independent existents.

Since, then, the objective nature of the sound particulars is not a 'given' feature in experience in

Strawson's illustration, we must take it that the notion of 'analogue-space' has logical priority. So the master-sound is supposed to supply a means by which an experiencer can get hold of the idea of sound particulars existing unperceived. But in order to do this, it seems, an experiencer must already have the notion of each master-sound pitch continuing in the absence of its being heard. So the master-sound, in order to provide the necessary dimensionality to experience to account for sound particulars existing while not perceived, must it seems, already be seen by an experiencer to embody the aspect of objectivity it is supposed to enable an experiencer to grasp. Thus the master-sound, it seems to me, presupposes the very notion it is intended to supply.

3.5 Strawson: Sounds and Scepticism

Strawson's appealing to the idea of an independently experiencable master-sound is somewhat surprising given the anti-sceptical strategy that he adopts in chapter 1 of Individuals.

In that chapter Strawson put forward a kind of transcendental argument to show why the sceptic could not consistently deny or question the claim that we possess logically adequate criteria for the re-identification of objective particulars (independent existents). A sceptic might want to question the idea that we possess adequate

criteria of re-identification on the grounds that the fulfilment of our normal criteria of re-identification is perfectly consistent with what confronts us in experience being merely qualitatively similar over temporally discrete experiences as opposed to numerically identical. And if this is the case, the sceptic might argue, we are never in a position to know that the items which confront us in experience are objective particulars, as opposed to merely fleeting subjectively based 'objects', given the connection between the notions of objective independence and the possibility of re-identification.

Strawson's argument against the sceptic in chapter 1, as I understand it, precisely trades on the idea that space and time are not independently experiencable so that possession of the idea of a unified space-time network requires that we should be able to identify and re-identify objects in space and time. I shall not consider his argument in any detail, but I think that even a cursory look will reveal how Strawson's introduction of the master-sound idea in chapter 2 appears to conflict with the findings of that argument.

Strawson argues in chapter 1 that to have a grip on the distinction between qualitative and numerical identity one must have a grip on the idea that where entities are qualitatively alike, but where they fail to share a continuous spatio-temporal history, they are to be regarded as numerically distinct. Numerical identity,

therefore, implies the existence of an entity continuous in space and time. Thus, one must possess the idea of a unified space-time network in order to possess the distinction between qualitative and numerical identity. But given that space and time are not experiencable in themselves, according to Strawson, to have a grip on the idea of a unified space-time network requires having the idea that experiencable items occupy positions in that network by which spatio-temporal positions can be coordinatized and related. That is, possession of the idea of unified and continuous space-time network requires that one should be able to identify and re-identify particulars. But that requires that one possess logically adequate criteria for their identification and re-identification. Thus, it is a condition for the possession of a conceptual scheme where one can draw a contrast between numerical and qualitative identity that one possess logically adequate criteria for the re-identification of particulars. In this sense, then, the sceptic wants to have his cake and eat it. That is, he formulates his scepticism by invoking a contrast between numerical and qualitative identity, yet questions whether our criteria for re-identification are adequate. Thus the sceptic, Strawson says, '...pretends to accept a conceptual scheme, but at the same time quietly rejects one of the conditions of its employment'.[11]

Now, it is clearly a crucial premise of this argument

that a tight connection be made between the notion of an object's numerical identity over time with its exhibiting a continuous passage through space. But with the introduction of the idea of a master-sound in chapter 2 of Individuals this connection is loosened somewhat. In Strawson's auditory world we are supposed to possess a distinction between numerical and qualitative identity, but where the numerical identity of a particular over time is not tied to its having a continuous passage through space, but through its position on the master-sound. True, the master-sound is intended to provide an analogue of space. But is the analogy close enough to allow Strawson's anti-sceptical argument to go through? It seems to me that it is not. For it is the fact that space is not independently experiencable which makes the re-identification of particulars necessary to serve as reference points by which to coordinatize and relate positions in space and time. That is, it is the fact that space has no independent phenomenological character that provides for the idea that the possession of logically adequate criteria for the re-identification of particulars is a condition for the possession of the idea of unified space-time network. But, as we have already noted, Strawson's master-sound is independently experiencable. Thus there is no dependency for the coordinization of positions on the master-sound on the identification and re-identification of sound

particulars, making the need for logically adequate criteria for re-identification inessential for a grasp of the master-sound/time network. Thus, if Strawson's master-sound truly does provide a framework where one can draw a distinction between qualitative and numerical identity, then it seems that one can after all possess such a distinction without possession of logically adequate criteria of re-identification.[12]

Now, I have of course argued that Strawson's master-sound cannot successfully provide for a distinction between qualitative and numerical identity. Does this then reinstate Strawson's anti-sceptical argument as a success? Only, I think, at best in a very limited sense. One can perhaps become convinced by Strawson's argument. But all that argument attacks is a sceptical conclusion. One is liable to forget when considering Strawson's argument that the sceptic does not just state that we lack logically adequate criteria for the re-identification of particulars, but he has an argument to show why our criteria are not adequate to the task. How do I know, for example, that the computer in front of me right now is numerically the same computer as the computer that was in front of me yesterday? Well, it looks the same. It's the same colour, shape, size etc. But these facts about it are perfectly compatible with its being merely qualitatively identical to the computer in front of me yesterday. Indeed, couldn't I have a

qualitatively identical experience to the one I have now where there is no external object there at all? It is no good, of course, my pointing to the fact that the computer occupies the same position as it did yesterday, and thus invoke spatio-temporal continuity to secure its identity. Since my whole grip on this fact rests on my being able to re-identify objects such as the computer, and that's what is in question here.

Nothing, it seems to me, in Strawson's argument really throws into question the coherence of these claims. So even if we are convinced by Strawson's argument; convinced that the sceptic must be wrong (and weren't we pretty much convinced of that anyway?); we are still left with the philosophical problem that is scepticism. For the premises of the argument which seemingly lead to a sceptical conclusion remain unquestioned. This, we will find, is a persistent problem with many supposed transcendental refutations of scepticism. By just attacking the conclusion of a sceptical argument, and not the premises which lead to it, the problem of scepticism is not solved, but rendered (if anything) all the more puzzling.

3.6 Objects without Space

So much then for Strawson's anti-sceptical argument in chapter 1 of Individuals. Let us now return to the

question of the connection between our believing an experienced object to be an independent existent and our possessing a framework where spatial notions play a central role.

I have suggested that there seems to be a kind of interdependence between our recognizing an object as independent from us and our having a grip on spatial notions. Our whole notion that the things which confront us in experience are independent existents seems to depend on our seeing them as occupants of space, yet our whole grip on the idea of space depends on our recognizing objects in experience as independent from us.

It might be urged, however, that we have not yet considered real alternative ways of coming to understand the notion of objective independence apart from having a notion of space. Even Strawson's auditory world had the master-sound to supposedly provide an analogue of spatial distance. But are there not other ways in which we can explain our not perceiving an object, which could provide an adequate framework where we could make sense of our re-identifying an object over time, but which make no appeal to our being at a distance from that object?

For example, we sometimes understand our not perceiving an object because we lack the necessary receptivity for its perception, e.g. when we are asleep or unconscious. Sticking, then, with the idea of an auditory world, but dispensing with the master-sound,

could the re-identification condition be fulfilled on the basis of an experiencer having a notion of a sound particular's continued existence while not perceived because he has a notion of the distinction between his being perceptually receptive and unreceptive?

Now it seems to me that there is no way that an experiencer could appreciate this distinction except in terms of him having a conception of whether he has either heard or failed to hear the relevant sounds. If he were, then, to attribute the absence of the sounds in his experience to his being perceptually unreceptive he would already have a notion of the sound's objective existence.

This in itself, of course, might not be thought to render an objection to the idea. For doesn't this case parallel the interdependent connection that we have said holds between spatiality and objectivity?

However, it is not clear that the parallel is close enough. For spatial notions have their place in a general framework giving the means for an experiencer to frame countless beliefs about the nature of the world at a given time. The framework is thus complex enough so that an experiencer's being at a place where he cannot experience an object is not simply defined in terms of his not experiencing the object. His being at a place where he cannot experience the object involves <u>his being at that place</u>, where this has some positive characterization based on his experience. He sees himself

as removed from the object because of other continuous changes in his experience, apart from the fact that he can no longer experience the object. So the framework is general enough for an experiencer to answer questions as to why he thinks particular objects continue to exist when he is not perceiving them without the answers having a straight forwardly question begging character. This is not the case if an experiencer relies purely on a notion of perceptual unreceptivity. He can only think that an object continues to exist between distinct perceptions because during the times it is not experienced he is perceptually unreceptive, where his only basis for thinking this is by already his taking the object to continually exist when he does not perceive it.[13]

Two further brief points, I think, are also worth noting here. Firstly, such an experiencer's ontology would have to be severely limited. For he has no basis on which to allow for distinct objects existing simultaneously. Only one object at a time can exist. Secondly, a kind of scepticism can easily be generated here. For what is to rule out the idea that two qualitatively identical yet numerically distinct objects should go out and come into existence following one another during periods of unreceptivity. How is an experiencer to know after a period of unreceptivity that what confronts him is numerically the same object as confronted him earlier, or just a qualitatively identical

but different object? And if he cannot know this, how can he know that what confronts him in experience are independent existents at all?

All in all, then, I do not think the idea of an experiencer having a grasp of the objective in terms of perceptual unreceptivity is worth pursuing. If the re-identification condition can be fulfilled on the basis of unreceptivity without also involving spatial notions, then it seems that the world of such an experiencer would be so impoverished so as to lack real interest.

Is there, however, any other way the re-identification condition could be fulfilled without appealing to spatial notions?

We sometimes attribute our not experiencing an object, not because we are at a distance from the object, nor because some fact about us makes us perceptually unreceptive, but because some fact about the object's surrounding environment makes it imperceptible. For example, we cannot see an object if it is dark, or we cannot hear a certain sound if some other louder sound obscures it. Does this, then, offer a basis for an experiencer to understand an object's continual unperceived existence?

Sticking then with the idea of a purely auditory experience, a sound can certainly be obscured by some louder sound. Thus an experiencer might be thought to be able to come to the idea of the quieter sound existing

while not perceived because of the presence of a louder sound. But for the louder sound to be thought of as an environmental factor prohibiting the quieter sound's perception, that sound too must be thought of as an independent existent. But it can only be thought of this way, it seems, if we can make sense of some other sound louder than it...and so on, ad infinitum. Thus we seem forced to accept a regress whose intelligibility is not evident. Can we always make sense of there being some other louder sound? Is the loudness of sounds truly extendible ad infinitum?

However, it might be claimed that this objection only holds if we make it a condition for an experiencer to have the idea of something preventing the perception of an object that that something be thought of as itself an independent existent. But why should this be made a condition? Couldn't an experiencer just have the bare idea of a blocker, where this is conceived as neither necessarily objective nor subjective? After all, it might be argued, why should there thought to be a necessary tie between the idea of something preventing something else from being perceived, and that something being part of objective reality? Cannot purely subjective factors (e.g. a buzzing 'in the head') prevent the perception of objective reality? Thus with the general idea of a blocker (conceived neither as necessarily subjective or objective) it might be claimed that an experiencer can

come to make sense of objects continuing to exist between discrete perceptions.

However, one problem with this suggestion is that it leaves obscure just how a blocking sound could prevent the perception of the quieter sound. Any framework of explanation here would presumably appeal to causal notions, i.e. concern itself with causally necessary conditions of perception. But it is not clear how an experiencer could possess such an explanatory framework where this did not appeal to facts about external reality, and in particular involve concepts relating to space and the spatial characteristics of objects.

We might invoke Gareth Evans' excellent discussion of Strawson's auditory world illustration at this point. According to Evans, the properties of an object given to sense experience ('sensory properties') are dispositional properties insofar as they are the properties of an object which, under certain causally necessary conditions, suitably positioned and sensibly attuned subjects are affected with certain experiences. So, to take the computer in front of me as an example, under certain causally necessary conditions, I am affected by a certain experience of black, white and grey. But these colour properties are not abiding properties of the computer. The computer is not black, white and grey in a dark room, for example, but only in a well lit room. This is what it means to say that such properties are

dispositional -- properties that it has only under certain causally necessary conditions.

But, then, if we are to make sense of the dispositional nature of such sensory properties within a causal framework, then we must it seems posit a causal ground to those properties. That is, we must appeal to properties of objects whose nature is such that they can be invoked to explain the dispositional nature of sensory properties. This would seem to require that they be non-sensory in the sense that their abidance does not relate to conditions of perception. It is here, Evans argues, that properties relating to space play a central role. Evans says:

> What is important...is that the properties constitutive of the idea of material substance as space-occupying stuff should be acknowledged to be primary. These include properties of bodies immediately consequential upon the idea of space-occupation -- position, shape, size, motion; properties applicable to a body in virtue of the primary properties of its spatial parts; and properties definable when these properties are combined with the idea of force (e.g. mass, weight, hardness). The way these properties relate to experience is quite different from the way sensory properties relate to it. To grasp these primary properties, one must master a set of interconnected principles which make up an elementary theory -- of primitive mechanics -- into which these properties fit, and which alone gives them sense. One must grasp the idea of a unitary spatial framework in which both oneself and the bodies of which one has experience has a place, and through which they move continuously. One must learn of the conservation of matter in different shapes, of the identity of matter perceived from different points of view and through different modalities, and of the persistence of matter through gaps in observation. One must learn how bodies compete for the occupancy of positions in space, and of the resistance one body may afford to the motion of

another. And so on.[14]

Now, I think Evans' point here has some force. Nevertheless, some may find certain aspects of Evans' account here objectionable. In particular, it might be claimed that Evans' distinction between sensory and primary properties means that Evans' argument only works on the condition that we accept a 'representationalist' account of perception, which may itself be problematic. For the idea that sensory properties are dispositional rests on the idea that an object has such properties only on the basis that it causes subjects to have certain experiences, where the qualitative character of that experience does not reflect the inherent qualities of the object itself, but is the upshot of the causal interaction of the primary properties of objects affecting the primary properties of perceivers' sensory apparatus. Thus Strawson in his reply to Evans makes the following comment:

> Fundamentally, the question is whether we are to retain to our hold on a direct realist view of perception, such as can be plausibly ascribed to unreflective common sense, or to embrace an exclusively representative theory. If we do retain our hold on the former, then we are released from the grip of the belief that sensory properties, conceived as objective, must therefore be conceived as merely dispositional, as requiring a categorical base of a different character from themselves.[15]

It seems to me, however, that Evans point can be made without invoking such a view of perception. The need for a framework involving spatial concepts to be brought to

bear can be urged, I think, even if we allow that the qualitative content of a certain experience, under certain conditions, is an experience of the inherent qualities of the object experienced, so long as those qualities are not then deemed abiding properties of the object, but qualities the object itself is disposed to have under those conditions.[15] The essential point to be grasped, I think, is that if an experiencer is to recognize those properties as belonging to an object, a substantial base of those sensory properties has to be 'posited', constituted by other non-sensory properties, the possession of which is not dependent upon perceptual availability. Only properties relating to space, Evans is urging, seem capable of serving this role; properties ascribable in the context of a general explanatory framework.[16]

3.7 Conclusion

The overall picture that emerges from this chapter is that there does seem to be a strong kind of interdependence between the idea that the objects that confront one in experience are independent existents, and the idea that those objects are spatial objects, i.e. have their place in a unified space-time network. Thus we can perhaps echo Kant's claim that '...outer experience is itself possible at all only through this

representation (of space)' (A23/B38).

The question that we must now ask ourselves is whether we can make the further Kantian claim that '(space) must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances' (A24/B39). That is, is it truly a condition of the possibility of experience itself that we should be confronted in experience (or at least believe ourselves to be confronted) by objects in space? And if it is such a condition, can we truly make intelligible a form of scepticism which doubts or denies the existence of such objects? This will be our concern in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A23/B32. All further references to passages of this work will be cited in parentheses in the main text.

2. See Paul Guyer, Kant and the Claims of Knowledge (Cambridge, 1987), pp.

3. Ibid., pp.

4. See note 3 of the last chapter.

5. P.F. Strawson, Individuals (London, 1959), p.65

6. Ibid., p.69.

7. Ibid., p.74.

8. Ibid., p..75.

9. Onora O'Neill, 'Space and Objects', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. LXXIII, No.2 (1976), p.40

10. She defines these notions, where x,y,z, are discernible perceptual contexts, ordered by a relation R, as follows:

$(x)(y)\ (xRy \rightarrow -yRx)$	asymmetry
$(x)(y)(z)\ (xRy \& yRz \rightarrow xRz)$	transitivity
$(x)(y)\ (x \neq y \rightarrow xRy \vee yRx)$	connectivity

11. Strawson, op cit., p.29.

12. Jay F. Rosenberg makes a similar point in his 'Strawson: Sounds, Skepticism, and Necessity', Philosophia (Israel) 8 (1978), pp.405-19.

13. Gareth Evans makes a similar point in his 'Things Without the Mind: A Commentary upon Chapter Two of Strawson's Individuals', in Collected Papers, pp.264-67.

14. Ibid., p.269

15. P.F. Strawson, 'Reply to Evans', in Philosophical Subjects: Essays in Honour of P.F. Strawson (1980), p.280.

16. Thus, pace Strawson's remark, we can retain something along the lines of a direct realist view of perception, insofar as we can see sensory properties as inherent properties of objects, though not abiding under conditions other than those in which they are perceivable, while retaining the need for an experiencer to 'posit' a non-sensory base in order for him to recognize those properties as inhering in an object at all. Thus Evans' point about the necessity for a spatial framework to be brought to bear can be made amenable to those philosophers who reject the primary/secondary property distinction as it is normally formulated because of its being set in the framework of a representational view of perception.

17. Again, in his reply to Evans, Strawson argues that properties such as force, mass, impenetrability etc. are no less dispositional than sensory properties, "...though the dispositions in question relate to the operations of objects upon each other rather than, directly, to their operations upon the human sensibility... So if the argument is from dispositional properties conceived as objective to the need for a categorical base, then the categorical base is still to seek" (p.280). However, I do not think Evans is committed to seeking non-dispositional properties as those constitutive of a categorical base. The mere fact that the dispositional nature of non-sensory properties does not relate to the causal conditions of perception enables an experiencer to make sense of such properties abiding when not perceived - this being the relevant issue. Furthermore, the dispositional nature of such properties can be accommodated on Evans' account insofar as he argues that such properties can only be posited within a general framework with the resources to explain and predict

the arrangement of non-sensory properties of objects in the world on the basis of their interaction.

Chapter 4

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

4.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the last chapter, it was suggested that to have the idea of an independently existing object is to have the idea of an entity logically distinct from one's self and any experiences one might have of it. This clearly implies that, minimally, to have the idea that there exist independently existing objects one must have a conception of oneself as a subject of experience: as something distinct from the objects which confront one in experience. The sense of such objects being conceived of as independent is only provided for if one has a conception of that which they are deemed to be independent from, i.e. oneself.

In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant made several other claims of a much stronger nature concerning the relation between first person beliefs (or self-consciouness) and beliefs about objects. Indeed, he argued that it was a condition of thought per se that one should have thoughts about oneself. Thus, a key claim of the famously opaque Transcendental Deduction of the Categories was that 'It must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all my representations' (B131). To have the belief that 'p', according to Kant, implied one's having the capacity to also think 'I think that p', i.e. of being aware that one

was thinking p. Furthermore, on Kant's account, one could only have such first person thoughts if one were confronted in experience by objects in space, i.e. independent existents. Kant claimed, then, that the possibility of thought, the possibility of self-consciousness, and the possibility of objective knowledge were, in a strong sense, interdependent. One could not have any one without the other two.

Not surprisingly, then, many philosophers have seen in Kant's Transcendental Deduction an argument to undermine scepticism of the external world insofar as the sceptic seems to affirm the possibility of thought and self-consciousness whilst at the same time denying the possibility of knowledge of an objective world. If Kant is right, many philosophers have argued, there is clearly something inconsistent in the sceptic's position, and this is sufficient to undermine the validity of sceptical claims.

In this chapter I want to examine whether Kant's claims regarding the connection between thought, self-consciousness, and objective knowledge hold true. Does thought require self-consciousness? Are self-consciousness and objective knowledge truly interdependent in the way that Kant suggests? And even if some kind of interdependency can be established here, should this necessarily worry the sceptic?

4.2 Self-Identity and the Re-identification of Objects

Let us begin by considering some fairly modest claims that bare on Kant's overall strategy. As stated at the outset, it is trivially true that to have the idea that there are such things as independently existing objects requires having beliefs about oneself. We clearly couldn't have the required idea of independence without having some conception of that which such objects are deemed to be independent from, i.e. ourselves. But what do we have to believe about ourselves beyond the presumably minimal condition that we exist?

One plausible suggestion might be that we have to have some conception of our own identity over time. To appreciate this we might consider again, what I termed in the last chapter, the re-identification condition.[1] To say that an object exists independently from oneself implies that one should be able to make sense of its existing continuously when not perceived, and this requires that we should be able to sense of its being re-identified across temporally discrete experiences of it. It is the sense in which independent existents are deemed to be possible objects of re-identification, it might be suggested, that provides the link between our having beliefs regarding such objects and our having a conception of ourselves as persisting over time.

The connection between the re-identification condition

and self-identity here might be thought to be relatively straightforward. Re-identification involves an experiencer linking temporally discontinuous experiences as experiences of the same object. In doing so she thinks, quite simply, '<u>that</u> object was present to <u>me</u> earlier'. However, to set out the connection between re-identification and self-identity in this way is, of course, question begging. It assumes that for someone to be able to seemingly re-identify an object present to them now that <u>that</u> object must be seen by them as being present to them both now and then. But why should this be? Why should someone not be able to think '<u>that</u> object was present earlier' without their ever needing to formulate this in terms of its being present to <u>them</u>?

However, the connection between re-identification and self-identity might be thought to lie in the role that memory plays in re-identification. When I re-identify an object I <u>remember</u> the earlier presence of <u>that</u> object. To put it in the question begging way, I remember the earlier presence of that object <u>to me</u>. Now, since Locke, a connection between memory and personal identity has often been argued for.[2] Some philosophers, following Locke, have held facts about memory and the capacity to remember to be criterial to personal identity. In response to this position it is commonly objected that facts about memory cannot be criterial to personal identity because a person only truly remembers, say, the

presence of an object, if they themselves witnessed that object; personal identity itself being presupposed by remembering and not vice versa. Now in either case, of course, it seems as though a person can only remember the presence of an object if one and the same person previously witnessed that object. And if we reject the Lockean claim that memory is criterial to personal identity on the grounds that the reverse criterial relation holds, then a re-identifier, it seems, must have a notion that she is the same person witnessing an object as before; otherwise she has no basis by which to think that that object is being re-identified, i.e. is an object previously encountered. But is this necessarily true? Could someone not, for example, remember the earlier presence of an object though it was not them who witnessed it, but someone else? I do not mean by this, of course, that they remember someone else witnessing the object. Rather, the suggestion is that they remember the presence of the object in the way they would remember it if they had witnessed it, though it was not them who actually witnessed it, but someone else.

Such 'remembering' Shoemaker calls 'quasi-remembering'.[3] To give the idea 'quasi-remembering' a clearer application, perhaps we could imagine someone having some sort of clairvoyant access to the memory store of someone else's mind. Or perhaps the relevant part of someone else's brain has been transplanted into

their skull. Such thought experiments do not involve any obvious conceptual error. And if they don't, it would seem that any supposed linkage between memory and personal identity will have been severed, and hence it would seem any such link between the notions of re-identification and self-identity.

However, even if a case can be made for the idea of quasi-remembering, I do not think that someone could understand themselves to be re-identifying objects without assuming self-identity in their memories of past experiences. To appreciate this we need to return to our findings in the last chapter. There it was claimed that re-identification required conceiving of objects as located in a continuous and unified space-time network. To re-identify an object requires a notion of its continued temporal existence between distinct experiences of it and its being at a place other than those within the re-identifier's 'experiential field' during that time where it could have been experienced had she been appropriately positioned. An object is re-identified as the same earlier experienced object by its being located at an appropriate position, assuming continuous movement through space on both the re-identifier's part and the object's, relative to its earlier position. Movement through space must be assumed to be continuous so the re-identifier can keep track of an object's position relative to his own. If an experiencer cannot keep track

in this way then he has no way of distinguishing whether an object present to him at a given time is the same object that he experienced earlier or just one qualitatively similar. That is, no basis for distinguishing the qualitative and numerical identity of objects can be supplied. But this all means, I think, that self-identity must be assumed in a re-identifier's memory of past experiences of an object. Otherwise how could he have a notion of his own continuous movement through space and thus be able to locate a presently encountered object as appropriately positioned for its being construed as the same object that he encountered at an earlier time? If no notion of self-identity is assumed in his memory of past experiences then he can have no grip on his position in the space-time network, and thus have no basis by which to re-identify objects.

4.3 Locating the Self: Descartes, Hume, and Kant

Granting, then, the claim that a notion of one's persistent self-identity is required for the re-identification of independently existing objects, how is such a notion itself possible? Just what is this Self whose persistent identity must be assumed if we are to re-identify objects?

According to Descartes, knowledge of the Self or 'I' was peculiarly unproblematic. Whilst I could doubt any belief that I had about the spatio-temporal world,

beliefs about myself-qua-thinking subject of experience were indubitable. Given, then, that my body is as much a part of the spatio-temporal world as anything else, the thinking experiencing 'I', for Descartes, was not to be identified with my body. 'I could suppose I had no body', according to Descartes, 'but not that I was not'; therefore 'this I', he concluded, was not a body.[4] Of course, if the findings of the last section are correct, then in order to re-identify objects the 'I' would have to be embodied to give content to the idea that, in some sense, I occupy a position in space. But, on Descartes account, my body is not mine because it forms an essential part of myself, but because I, as a thinking substance, have a special intimate kind of interaction with that particular chunk of matter over against other bits of matter. Essentially, however, I am a thinking substance, not a material body.

One of the most obvious problems with Descartes' account, given that 'I am not this body', is that of fixing a referrent for the term 'I'. If I attend to my experiences, sensations and thoughts, no 'I' presents itself as their owner. On what basis, then, do I ascribe such experiences, sensations and thoughts to a thing called 'I'? Thus Hume denied that the self was a persisting unified thing at all. The self-qua-subject of experience, according to Hume, was a metaphysical fiction. He says in the following powerful statement:

> There are some philosophers, who imagine we are intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity...Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of self, after the manner it is here explained...For my part,when I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble on some individual perception or other...I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception.[5]

Hume then concluded that the self was '...nothing but a bundle or collection of differing perceptions', lacking any necessary connection which could justify us in positing the self as a single enduring continuant.

Kant in the Parologisms uses this non-encounterability of the subject in experience as the basis of his attack on the illusions of, what he terms, 'rational psychology', i.e. the doctrine that each of us know ourselves to exist as immaterial, persisting Cartesian thinking substances.[6] The main line of attack in the Paralogisms is Kant's view that knowledge requires both concepts and intuitions, the functioning of both sensibility and understanding (a view we shall examine below). Since we have no intuitive (experiential) awareness of a persisting immaterial subject of experience we cannot be said to know ourselves to exist in the Cartesian sense. According to Kant, the concept 'I', and judgements of the form 'I think...' play a merely formal role in anchoring our intuitions and thoughts to a single consciousness and lack determinate

substantial content. Rational psychology, Kant says, is based on '...the simple, and in itself completely empty representation "I"', of which he says, 'We cannot even say that this is a concept, but only that it is a bare consciousness which accompanies all concepts'. Rational psychology 'inflates' this formal notion of the representation 'I' and ascribes to it substantial content. For Kant, therefore, the term 'I' has no determinate empirical referent.

It is not at all clear what this formal notion of 'I' amounts to here apart from a denial that the subject can itself be present in experience. The 'I' we are told plays the role of anchoring our thoughts and experiences to a single subject, but we are not given any positive account of what this amounts to. For Kant, to posit 'representations' (experiences, thoughts) at all presupposes the notion of a unitary subject who is conscious of his own identity as the subject having those 'representations'. He says:

> It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representations would be impossible, or at least nothing to me. (B131)

Furthermore, that 'representations' imply a self-conscious subject to whom they belong was held by Kant to be an analytic truth (B135). But we are not told what this self-consciousness involves beyond our having the

capacity to attach the 'I think' to our 'representations', and the conditions which make this possible. It is not clear, for example, whether the 'I' plays a referential role -- whether in attaching the 'I think' we are ascribing our experiences and thoughts to a thing. If it does play a referential role, the question must arise, to what does it refer? There is nothing perceptually present to me which it refers to -- nothing material. Perhaps it then refers to something immaterial and hence imperceptible. But this, of course, is exactly what Kant wanted to deny in the Paralogisms.

4.4 The Semantics of 'I': Finding a referent

It might be claimed that we can distinguish at least two uses of the term 'I'. On the one hand, in using the term we sometimes refer to ourselves as an object -- as a thing with certain physical properties which can be present in our own and other's experience. I might say 'I have a broken arm' or 'I have a beard' etc. This use would seem to be unproblematic -- such first person references being akin to other forms of objective reference. On the other hand, the term 'I' is sometimes used in connection with thoughts, experiences and sensations. I might say, 'I have a pain' or 'I see such-and-such' or 'I believe such-and-such'. Syntactically, sentences involving the term in this latter use are the same as those of the former. But there are connected

semantic, epistemic and metaphysical problems surrounding this latter use which do not afflict the former. In particular, if the term 'I' is taken as a referring expression then it must latch onto some-thing which, as we have seen, does not present itself to us in a way appropriate for its identification as the term's referent (it cannot present itself as the subject having thoughts, experiences, sensations etc.). On what basis, then, do we ascribe thoughts, experiences etc. to such a thing?

One response is to deny that the term 'I' in such contexts plays a referring role at all. For example, Wittgenstein in the Blue and Brown Books (and elsewhere) claims that the term 'I' can only be used to refer to myself-qua-physical organism. If I say 'I have grown six inches' or 'I have a broken arm' one can imagine situations in which I might have mistaken myself here for someone else ('The possibility of error has been provided for'). For example, I might in an accident have a pain in my arm, and see a broken arm next to me, and come to think that I have a broken arm though it is in fact my neighbour's arm which is broken. In such cases, according to Wittgenstein, the use of 'I' does play a referential role; it does identify a (physical) thing. But if I say things such as 'I see such-and-such' or 'I hear such-and-such' or 'I have a pain', the 'I' in such statements, according to Wittgenstein, fails to refer. He says:

> ...there is no question of recognizing a person when I say I have toothache. To ask 'are you sure that it's you who have pains?' would be nonsensical...And now this way of stating our idea suggests itself: that it is impossible that in making the statement 'I have a toothache' I should have mistaken another person for myself, as it is to moan with pain by mistake, having mistaken someone else for me. To say 'I have pain' is no more a statement about a particular person than moaning is. 'But surely the word "I" in the mouth of a man refers to the man who says it; it points to himself...' But it was quite superfluous to point to himself.[7]

Now it is possible to interpret Wittgenstein here as holding what Strawson calls the 'no-ownership' view. This is the view that '...it is only a linguistic illusion that one ascribes one's states of consciousness at all, that there is a proper subject of these apparent ascriptions, that states of consciousness belong to, or are states of, anything'.[8] So thoughts, experiences and sensations, on this view, do not strictly belong to anything. They are, it is true, causally dependent on the state of some physical body, and hence contingently related to that body. But it is an illusion to think that they necessarily are owned by some subject.

This no-ownership view, I think, is hinted at in the earlier Wittgenstein of the Tractatus. Thus at 5.631 he says, 'There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas. If I wrote a book called The World as I found it...it alone could not be mentioned in that book.' (Though at 5.632 Wittgenstein does suggest that we can give some sense to the notion of the subject as a 'limit' of the world). G.E. Moore also, in his account of

Wittgenstein's 1930-3 Cambridge lectures, attributes to Wittgenstein what amounts to a no-ownership view: '...he (Wittgenstein) said that 'Just as no (physical) eye is involved in seeing, so no Ego is involved in thinking or having toothache; and he quoted with apparent approval, Lichtenberg's saying, 'Instead of "I think" we ought to say "It thinks"...'[9]

The no-ownership view, it is often pointed out, leads to a radical form of solipsism. If I have a number of sensations of a certain qualitative type then it might be thought that I can form a general concept (say S) to cover that type. So whenever I have a sensation of that type in the future I can think to myself 'I have S' (remember here the 'I' is not referring to the subject) or better 'There is S' or 'It Ss'. But on the no-ownership view the concept S cannot extend to the sensations of others. For S to extend to the sensations of others I would have to possess a notion that there are other subjects like myself who have similar sensations. But on the no-ownership view I do not even have a notion of myself-qua-subject of S, let alone a notion of others like myself as subjects. There is no room on the no-ownership view, therefore, for the notion that concepts extending over types of sensations, experiences etc. pertain to others. It cannot thus make sense of our everyday third person ascriptions of pain, belief etc, (unless, of course, these are construed

behaviouristically, and hence as involving different concepts from the 'first person' case).

Now this is a radical form of solipsism indeed. Traditionally, the solipsist does not claim that we cannot make meaningful third person ascriptions of thoughts, experiences etc., but merely that we are never justified in making such ascriptions. Solipsism, traditionally conceived, assumes something like a Cartesian ego as the subject of thoughts and experiences. Here the problem, then, is not that others cannot have what I mean in my use of S, but that I can never be justified in a third person ascription of S, for I can never know that another person has S; I cannot have access to the states of other Cartesian selves.

There is, however, a plausible semantic analysis of concepts of thoughts, experiences and sensations which militates against both forms of solipsism here. Take the concept of pain, for example. Self-ascriptions ('I am in pain') and other-ascriptions ('He is in pain') are, it might be argued, primitive to an understanding of the concept of pain -- they are basic to the language-game. We ascribe pain to others on the basis of their pain-expressing behaviour (their moaning, crying etc.). However, we do not need to take into account facts about our behaviour to ascribe pain to ourselves. For ourselves, we just feel pain -- this feeling being the basis of our saying, in a way in which we cannot be wrong

about who the subject is, 'I am in pain'. To grasp the concept of pain is to grasp this asymmetry of criteria between the first person and the third person cases. Nothing could count as grasping the concept where this asymmetry wasn't recognized. We might say that the concept 'bestrides' this asymmetry. To understand the concept of pain, then, is partly to understand a contrast of the means of ascription between the first and the third person. Reference to oneself and others in ascriptions of pain is, therefore, fundamental and ineliminable to such understanding.

Now there is much to recommend such an analysis, I think. It makes sense of our ordinary everyday usage of such concepts, and the basis by which we would attribute someone with a grasp of such concepts. If, for example, someone did not recognize the groaning of others as pain-expressing behaviour we would ordinarily say that they had not grasped the concept of pain. If this analysis is right, then, we cannot make sense of either the Cartesian form of solipsism or that associated with the no-ownership view. The Cartesian view would be rendered inadequate on this view because it requires that we be able to identify subjects of experience other than ourselves. The no-ownership view is shown to be inadequate since it requires both first person and third person forms of reference as basic to an understanding of the such concepts. It is for this reason that Strawson

argued that the concept of a person, the concept of an entity to which both states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics are ascribed, is primitive. How else could we identify different subjects? There are not then two uses of the term 'I' -- one which refers to the (physical) human being, and another which refers to the 'pure' subject. 'I' always refers, according to Strawson, to the person.[10]

On this basis, it might be thought that we should take a very short line with the sceptic indeed. For it might be argued that in order to formulate his position consistently, the sceptic must allow for his being able to ascribe thoughts, experiences and sensations to himself without being committed to his having the possession of logically adequate criteria for the ascription of the same to others. But this is exactly what a semantic analysis along the lines of that above shows that the sceptic cannot do. He can only successfully ascribe thoughts, experiences and sensations to himself, on such a view, if he also is able to do this to others. And he can only do this, it would seem, if he has knowledge of an objective, intersubjectively available world.

However, it seems to me that the sceptic might respond in one of two ways here. On the one hand, the sceptic may just reject the semantic points made against him on the grounds that they beg the question against him. The above

analysis assumes a certain methodology in semantics, which we might term 'naturalistic', where the meaning of terms can be adequately assessed on the basis of the conditions under which they are employed in everyday language. We look to how a term such as 'pain' is actually used, and try not to take only certain uses as paradigmatic or fundamental to the concept unless this is reflected in the use of the term itself. As Wittgenstein would say, we 'leave everything as it is'. The sceptic might argue, however, that he is not bound to show such reverence for our everyday language use. Indeed, he is bound to show that such reverence is misplaced given the epistemological facts of the matter. First person employments of sensation, experience and propositional attitude terms must be fundamental and paradigmatic given that we have no real basis for using such terms in third person ascriptions. The naturalistic stance employed in the analysis of such terms, the sceptic may argue, just assumes the very knowledge that he calls into question.

This response by the sceptic, however, strikes me as flawed, for reasons which I shall look at in some detail in the next chapter (when considering Wittgenstein's response to the sceptic in <u>On Certainty</u>). Nevertheless, I think that the sceptic might have a much stronger response at his disposal.

The sceptic can surely grant that our whole grasp of 'mentalistic' concepts requires in part that we should

recognize that they apply not only to ourselves but to what we assume to be others like ourselves, but still maintain that this assumption lacks the required epistemic backing for it to count as knowledge. The sceptic may say that it truly is a condition of our having a grasp of such concepts that we should come to take this assumption on board, and in everyday life we surely do assume others to share the same mental characteristics as ourselves etc. But, he will argue, once that assumption is taken on board it is easy to show why this assumption is just that -- an assumption -- and lacks the kind of support required for knowledge. The argument the sceptic will bring forward here, of course, will be just the familiar kind of sceptical argument outlined in section 1.2 of this thesis (for the sake of brevity I will not rehearse the argument here). Nothing about the conditions for the grasp of mentalistic concepts, it seems to me, can be invoked to undermine the premises of that argument. And that seems to be what is needed to truly undermine the philosophical basis of sceptical claims here.

It should be urged, I think, that the semantic points we have considered do not even have the upshot that necessarily, as conceptually competent adults, we must believe others to share a mental life largely similar to our own etc. It is part and parcel of our coming to a grasp of mentalistic concepts that we take on board this

belief -- that much is necessary. But after coming to a grasp of such concepts, sceptical argumentation might undermine that belief without calling into question the competence of a thinker's grasp of mentalistic concepts. Doubts about the existence of the external world, other minds etc., whilst doing philosophy, as a brute matter of fact, are not treated as signs of linguistic or mental incompetence. Sceptical arguments provide a context where doubt (seemingly at least) becomes quite intelligible, perhaps even natural. Of course, we might doubt the sanity of anyone who carried over such doubts into the course of their everyday lives (if that were even possible). But it is not clear that our judgement here is not just revelatory of a mere contingent truth about our psychological makeup (as Hume claimed, for example), rather than having some deep root in the conditions of thought themselves.

4.5 Kant: Synthesis and Self-Consciousness

We have seen that Kant denied that the self-qua-subject of experience could itself be present in experience. Yet Kant held that, in some sense or other, self-consciousness was a necessary condition of experience and thought. 'It must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all my representations' (B131).

Paul Guyer has argued that there is no argument in the Transcendental Deduction for the claim that experience

implies a self-conscious experiencer.[11] On Guyer's account Kant merely illegitimately conflated the notions of consciousness and self-consciousness. This conflation occurs, Guyer argues, because Kant only considers the notion of consciousness from a first-person perspective. From such a perspective, Guyer argues, it does seem indubitably the case that whatever states I might have which I recognize as states of consciousness involves self-consciousness. For to recognize one's state as a state of consciousness involves the recognition of that state as one's own. But could it not be the case that we have states of consciousness without ever recognizing them as such? Guyer gives the following example:

> ...if we regard dreams as modifications of consciousness, but also regard the occurrence of rapid eye movements (REMs) as good empirical evidence for the simultaneous occurrence of dreaming, then we may regard our own observation of REMs in another as evidence that the other is conscious at a given moment, even though it later turns out that the other person himself has no memory of his dream, and thus cannot ascribe consciousness to himself with respect to the moment in question -- or accompany what we know to have been his consciousness with self-consciousness.[12]

However, I think we must be careful to get clear the exact notion of experience with which Kant was specifically concerned before ascribing to him the fallacy of equating consciousness with self-consciousness. Kant in the Transcendental Deduction is above all concerned with what it is for something to become an <u>intentional object of cognition</u> to someone.

Thus while sensibility is defined by Kant as '...the capacity for receiving representations', understanding is '...the power of grasping an object through those representations' (A50/B74). Sensibility, therefore, is sufficient for consciousness. But mere sensible consciousness of something does not imply that the something is therefore an intentional object of consciousness. To think otherwise is to conflate sensibility with understanding. The point is then that Kant in the Deduction is not concerned with experience as mere sentience, but as intentional awareness. Such experience, according to Kant, requires not merely sensory data, but conceptual thought. The references to self-consciousness, therefore, are linked with this fuller notion of experience.[13]

Now, we have already considered the idea, at the beginning of this chapter, that to recognize (to conceptualize) one's experiences as being of external objects requires a notion of self-identity over time. For to recognize external objects requires that one be able to re-identify them, and this in turn requires a notion of one's identity through discrete experiences of such objects. However, Kant appears to claim that, if thought is to be possible at all, it should be possible to self-ascribe all our thoughts and experiences. Thus Kant says:

> 'It must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the

> representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me' (B131, my emphasis).

How, then, are we to understand this claim? Is it defensible?

Kant connects cognitive awareness and self-consciousness by means of the notion of synthesis. He offers a definition of synthesis at A77/B107: 'By synthesis, in its most general sense, I understand the act of putting different representations together, and grasping what is manifold in them in one act of knowledge'. For Kant, therefore, synthesis amounts to the intellectual act of putting together or uniting the contents of discrete 'representations' in a single thought.

Re-identification, on our account then, can thus be seen as an example as an act of synthesis. When I re-identify an object present to me now I have the thought 'There is <u>that</u> object that was present to me before' and in so doing link my present experience with a past experience and grasp what is common to them, i.e. the presence of <u>that</u> object. But re-identification is only an example of a general ability to apply concepts at all, and it was concept application in general which Kant, of course, had in mind in his discussion of synthesis in the Transcendental Deduction.

How, then, is concept use to be seen as involving synthesis? How, for example, does my recognizing that

that thing present to me now is red involve synthesis?

For me to possess the the general concept 'red' and be able to apply the concept to my current experience is to view that thing now present to me as instantiating the universal red, of which, at least in principle, other objects can also instantiate. This is what it means to say that concepts are general. To have a grasp of the concept 'red', then, I must have a grasp of the idea that it can in principle be applied across a range of distinct particulars, and not just the thing now present to me. But it seems clear that I could not have such a notion if each experience that I had was treated in isolation from other experiences. For me to have the idea that that thing now present is red involves my having the idea that other items could also instantiate that concept. But if each experience is treated in isolation from other experiences I can have no notion of anything other than that which is currently present to me; which is to say that I cannot possess general concepts; which is ultimately to say, of course, that I do not even have a notion of that which is present to me, for to have such a notion I must possess a concept under which the present item falls (or seems to fall). So to possess general concepts I must be able to have an idea of the possibility of, what we might term, multiple instantiation, which would seem to require the capacity to link experiences in the way that Kant's notion of

synthesis suggests. In other words, a concept user is a synthesizer of experiences on Kant's terms.

Does this mean, however, that a concept user in general must have a notion of himself as the identical subject of a succession of experiences? Does the synthesis of a current experience with other experiences require a notion of self-identity as the subject of those experiences? It is not clear, at first, that there is a necessary requirement here. Why, for example, could I not just bring to memory past experiences such that a present experience is 'soaked with or animated by, or infused with...the thought of other past or possible perceptions'[14] to get the required idea of the possibility of multiple instantiation, yet never bring to mind the idea that those past experiences belonged to me? After all, if we can make sense of quasi-remembering, as we considered at the beginning, there is no reason to suppose that any past experience that is brought to mind actually is my own, let alone its being required that I have a notion that it is.

Kant himself doesn't appear to offer any argument to back up the claim that a notion of self-identity is required here. Nevertheless, I think one might attempt to defend Kant's view that a thinker -- a possessor of concepts -- must be able to self-ascribe at least some of his thoughts and experiences along the following lines.

It is <u>true of</u> me and other human beings that we

possess thoughts and experiences which represent the world as being a certain way. Thoughts and experiences represent the world at least in the minimal sense that they can be true or false (veridical or delusory). Now, insofar as humans are creatures which possess representational states we are not unique. Various creatures, natural objects, and created devices represent or register aspects of their environment in the sense that the intrinsic states of such creatures, objects and devices correlate with environmental happenings, and in virtue of this, they can take advantage of these correlations by acting in accord with them in certain determinate respects. This is obviously true of sentient creatures, but no less true of certain non-sentient objects and devices. Take, for example, devices such as thermostats. Changes in their intrinsic states correlate with changes in air pressure, and because of this thermostats can switch on or off such things as boilers, heaters, fans etc. So I think that we can say that it is not only true of human beings that they represent the world as being a certain way, but that it is also true of non-sentient objects and devices such as thermostats.

But, of course, we feel that there is a world of difference between having our thoughts qua representational states, and the kind of states ascribable to a device such a thermostat. We should not say (except in a highly metaphorical sense) that the

thermostat *believed* that it was cold so it turned the boiler on. But given, then, that it is both *true of* me and the thermostat that we have states which represent the world as being a certain way, and that we both act in accordance with these states, what is it that marks the difference between us? Why are we willing to ascribe thoughts to me and not to the thermostat? John Heil suggests the following answer:

> One possibility is this: creatures to whom thoughts are ascribable are not merely those that harbour representations, not even those whose behaviour is largely determined by representational states. A lowly thermostat satisfies both these conditions. Having thoughts, however, is not merely a matter of representing, perhaps, but of *appreciating* in some way that this is what one is doing.[15]

We might put this by saying that one has representational states *qua* thoughts on the condition that, at the very least, that it is not merely *true of* one that one has states which represent things as being such-and-such a way, but that one has the capacity at least in some instances for it to be *true for* one that this is the case: that one can *appreciate* that one harbours representations about the way the world is.

Let us assume, then, that it is a necessary condition for the possession of thoughts that this sense of appreciation holds true. The question that then arises is this: on what condition can it be said that it is *true for* one, and not merely *true of* one, that one possesses representational states? And here I think it is plausible

to claim that this requires one to not merely have thoughts with a certain content 'p', but to have the capacity for thoughts with the content 'I think that p'. For it to be true for me (and not just true of me) that I possess a certain representational state with the content 'p' then I must be able to represent the fact that this is the case. And this would seem to require me having a thought involving first-person concepts such as 'I' or 'me' along the lines of 'I think that p', or 'It seems to me that p' etc.

I claim no originality for trying to make sense of Kant along these lines. This is precisely the way Hubert Schwyzer has recently defended the Kantian claim that 'It must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all my representations...'. Thus Schwyzer argues:

> ...if things are thus and so for one, then one must be capable of seeing them as precisely such, namely as being thus and so for one...Thinking something to be so, unlike mere sentience, has that intrinsic reflexivity about it. Another way of putting this is to say that whenever one thinks 'p' one's thought can take the form 'I think p'. If something could not take that form, it would not be my thought (or my thought), it would not be a case of portraying how things are for me. This is equivalent to Kant's formulation: 'It must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all my representations'.[16]

This is not to say that whenever I have a certain thought 'p' I must also have the thought 'I think that p'. That would lead to an absurd regress. Rather, the point is that if I am to be construed as capable of possessing thoughts at all then I must display the general ability

to formulate at least some of those thoughts in first-person terms. This is at least partly what delineates the boundary between thinkers like us and those objects and creatures that harbour representational states, on the basis of which they act (or perhaps better, react) to aspects of their environment, but where the ascription of thoughts to such objects and creatures seems inappropriate. No doubt the point is not completely uncontroversial. But it is, I suggest, a plausible way to defend the Kantian claim that full blown cognitive (conceptual) awareness must involve a certain kind of self-consciousness.

4.6 Kant and Strawson: Synthesis and Objectivity

Kant claims in the Transcendental Deduction that if the 'I think' is to accompany our representations in the way necessary for thought then we must synthesize our experience by means of a system of concepts which he calls the Categories. Basically this claim amounts to the idea that it is a necessary condition of thought that we take ourselves (at least some of the time) to be confronted in experience by independently existing objects, i.e. that we conceptualize our experience in terms of such objects.

Can we make sense of this claim? And do we have here the seeds for the development of any kind of adequate transcendental refutation of scepticism?

One way to make sense of what Kant is claiming here, I think, would be to argue as follows. We have seen that thought requires not merely that a thinker have thoughts of the simple form 'p', but also thoughts of the form 'I think that p'. A thinker, then, must have a conception of herself-qua-thinker: she must recognize that she has thoughts. But what, then, is involved in such recognition? Well, it is plausible to argue that to recognize a certain thought as a thought, a thinker must recognize it as something that could be either true or false. To have thoughts at all, then, requires having a grasp of the distinction between truth and falsity; and this requires, it would seem, having a grasp of the distinction between how things actually are, and how the thinker takes them to be. That is, a thinker must have the conception that her thoughts represent a subjective impression of an objective world. And she could not have this conception, it would seem, unless she took at least some of the things which confront her in experience to be independent existents, i.e. objects in space.

Let us examine this argument. We might begin by asking the question: could a thinker have a conception of truth and falsity without her believing the objects which confront her in experience to be independent existents?

One way to go about answering this question is to consider an alternative scenario (a 'possibly possible' alternative[17]) to the one where an experiencer

conceptualizes her experience in terms of concepts of independently existing objects. And Strawson, whilst discussing Kant's Transcendental Deduction in the Bounds of Sense, examines the coherence of just such an alternative: an experience conceptualized purely in terms of concepts of sense-data. Such an experience, we are to suppose, would consist of a series of disconnected '...red, round patches, brown oblongs, flashes, whistles, tickling sensations, smells' etc., and it is suggested by hypothesis that an experiencer might just conceptualize her experience in terms of '...sensory quality concepts as figure in the early and limited sense-datum vocabulary'.[18] The question that arises, then, is this: Is the idea of such an experience truly intelligible or coherent?

Strawson makes the following comment on the idea of such an experience:

> The trouble with such 'objects of awareness' as those offered by the hypothesis is that just as their esse is, to all intents and purposes, their percipi -- i.e. there is no effective ground of distinction between the two -- so their percipi seems to be nothing but their esse. The hypothesis seems to contain no ground of distinction between the supposed experience of awareness and the particular item which the awareness is awareness of.[19]

The reason Strawson considers this to be a problem is that the experience does not provide for the idea of, what he terms, a 'component of recognition' which is not identical with the item recognized, and he connects the necessity for such an independent 'component of

recognition' to the idea that one should be able to self-ascribe one's experiences. Thus he says: '...the recognitional component, necessary to experience, can be present in experience only because of the possibility of referring different experiences to one identical subject of them all'.[20]

Now, all this seems very vague. But I think we might be able to make some sense as to what Strawson is perhaps getting at here on the basis of some of what we have found already. We have seen how it would seem to be a necessary condition of thought that a thinker should be able to recognize the fact that she has thoughts. And that to recognize this fact seems to require her having a conception that her thoughts could be either true or false -- that they represent her own subjective impression of things. But now, it might be argued, a thinker could not have a conception of her thoughts being as such unless her experience provided the occasion for her to draw a distinction between how things seemed to her and how things were in themselves. That is, unless she understood the things which confronted her in experience to be of a nature such that their seeming to be such-and-such was not necessarily exhaustive of their true character, then she could not have a conception of her thoughts representing her own subjective impression of how things are. And this is precisely what is not provided for on the sense-datum experience hypothesis.

For such an experience provides for '...no ground of distinction between the supposed experience of awareness and the particular item which the awareness is awareness of'.[21]

If this is the kind of argument that Strawson has in mind then I think the point is essentially sound. Unless at least some of the kinds of objects which form the subject matter of one's thoughts are such that their nature is conceived in terms where one can make sense of their being different to how they seem to be, then it is difficult to see how one could have a conception that one's thoughts could be either true or false, i.e. have a conception that one's thoughts were just that: thoughts. But the question is whether this is sufficient to establish the claim that only if one has thoughts about independent existents can one make sense of the idea that the objects of one's thoughts could be other than one thinks they are. Do only independent existents satisfy this condition?

4.7 Is/Seems and Temporal Extension

It was claimed in the last chapter that the idea that the objects that confront one in experience are independent existents seems intimately tied to the idea of one's viewing those objects as occupants of space. The question that I now want to ask, then, is whether a thinker whose conceptual repertoire lacked spatial concepts could have

the idea that the 'objects' which confronted her in experience were such that they could be other than she thought them to be. If such a thinker could have such an idea, then it would seem she could have a conception of her thoughts as thoughts, and seemingly fulfil the Kantian demand that in order to harbour thoughts at all she should be able to represent those thoughts as hers.

Imagine a thinker who had concepts of 'objects' such that the extension of such concepts was tied to the thinker experiencing certain kinds of qualitative arrays in certain temporal orderings. We might think of this in terms of her hearing a certain array of sounds. The concepts possessed by such a thinker are such that, for example, when she hears a certain sound of a certain pitch P followed by another sound of pitch P', the concept F is applicable. She might think to herself 'That is an F', where an F is an 'object' comprising of a certain temporal ordering of sounds of pitches P and P' in a single succession. An F, then, is a complex object consisting of two atomic sound-parts of pitches P and P' heard in that particular successive temporal order. Our thinker, we shall suppose, has a number of concepts relating to objects of this kind -- a G, for example, might be an object comprising two sounds heard at P'' and P''' respectively. So our thinker works at least partly with a class of concepts whose extension is such that they comprise of complex auditory 'objects' individuated

in terms of their being at certain pitches in certain temporal orderings.

Now our thinker, we are supposing, has no spatial concepts at her disposal. As such, she does not possess the concepts necessary to conceive of the 'objects' which confront her in experience as independent existents -- she cannot make sense of the 'sound-objects' which she experiences as being possible objects of re-identification between temporally discrete experiences. She conceives of the numerical identity of such objects, then, purely in terms of their temporal continuity. The question which concerns us is this: can such a thinker have at her disposal an is/seems distinction even though she does not conceive of 'sound-objects' as independent from her?

It seems clearly possible (on the face of it) that such a thinker could possess the idea of such a distinction. If our thinker hears a certain sound of pitch P she might think to herself 'That's an F', but where that sound was not followed by a sound of pitch P', she could surely think to herself whilst hearing the following sound, 'It seemed to me that <u>that</u> was an F, but in fact it isn't'. Perhaps she has a different concept she can apply whose extension ranges over successions of sounds of the kind she actually hears on this occasion. She might think to herself, then, 'I thought that was an F, but it turned out to be an H'. Now if she can do this

then she certainly has a conception of her own thoughts representing her own subjective view of things -- she has the idea that her thoughts could be either true or false -- without her having to view the 'objects' which form the subject matter of her thoughts as independent from her. It is true that they are independent in the sense that, at a given time, they can be other then she thinks them to be. But it doesn't follow from this that they are independent in the sense that they could exist whether or not she experienced them; and, of course, by hypothesis, whether or not they are independent from her in this sense, she doesn't have the conceptual resources to view them as such.

So it would seem, then, that one could have a grasp of an is/seems distinction without having a notion of objective independence (in the strong sense of interest to us, at least). This is not to claim, however, that there may not be hidden problems with this example. It may be the case that an argument could be made out for the idea that one can only have a grasp of an is/seems distinction if one has a conception that the objects that confront one in experience are independent existents. It might be claimed, for example, that while our complex sound-objects are of a kind suitable for the application of an is/seems distinction, some other condition for the possession of such a distinction is not fulfilled, where that other condition would require our experiencer having

a conception of an independently existing objective world. My point is, however, that no such argument, so far as I can see, is provided by Strawson in the Bounds of Sense or Kant in the Transcendental Deduction.

4.8 Scepticism and the Transcendental Deduction

Let us suppose for the moment, however, that Strawson's argument against the coherence of a pure sense-datum conceptualized experience did imply the idea that a experiencer/thinker must possess concepts of independently existing objects and be able to take herself to be confronted by such objects in experience. Would such a position offer any advance over scepticism?

The most common response to this kind of argument is to suggest that, at best, all that it establishes is the claim that an experiencer must believe that she is confronted by independent existents, and not that such beliefs are actually true, nor that she has anything like knowledge of such objects.

I dealt with this kind of objection in chapter 2, and suggested the kind of retort the transcendental arguer might want to make here. If Strawson's argument really does establish that we must believe ourselves to be confronted by independent existents then how can we even consider the idea that we might not be confronted by such objects? If we truly must believe this, then there is no conceptual scheme where such consideration (even whilst

doing philosophy) can be intelligibly formulated.

However, I think we might even question whether Strawson's argument can plausibly be viewed to establish anything as strong as the claim that we must *believe* ourselves to be confronted by independent existents. Much depends, I think, on whether we take the argument to establish the claim that we *must be able* to conceptualize our experience in terms of such objects, or whether we *must actually* conceptualize our experience as such. The former claim only says that we must possess concepts of such objects. The latter claim says that we must not only possess them, but also be active in applying them -- as though we have no choice in the matter. Only this latter claim, it seems to me, comes close to showing that we must believe that we are confronted by independent existents. However, I think that Strawson's argument can only be understood as establishing the former claim.

Let us consider the argument again. The argument, as I have set it out, starts from the premise that a thinker/experiencer should have a conception of *her* thoughts as *thoughts* if she is to be construed as a thinker at all, and this requires her having the idea that her thoughts could be either true or false. The claim then was that this requires that she must be able to make sense of the idea that at least some of the 'objects' which form the subject matter of her thoughts could be other than she thinks them to be. Hence the idea

of a thinker armed only with concepts of sense-data is incoherent -- since sense-data by their very nature are such that fundamentally they are how we take them to be -- their *esse* is their *percipi*, and *vice versa*. And from this we are supposed to infer that only if a thinker conceptualizes her experience in terms of independent existents can the condition be fulfilled that she be able to make sense of the idea that the objects she has thoughts about be different to how they seem to her.

But, now, it seems to me that all this shows is that a thinker should possess concepts of independently existing objects, not that she actually believe that any of the 'objects' which confront her in experience actually fall under the extension of such concepts. So long as a thinker possesses concepts of independently existing objects then she can make sense of the idea that whatever confronts her in experience could be such that they are different to how they seem. If what she experiences are independent existents then this possibility is accounted for. But she doesn't have to believe that what confronts her in experience are independent existents to make *sense* of this idea. All that is required is that she should have the conceptual resources to think that what confronts her *may be* independent existents. But she may in fact have no idea whether she experiences such objects or just plain sense-data.

Why, then might a thinker come to question that the

'objects' which confront her are independent existing objects? Well, to repeat what was said earlier, the kind of sceptical argument outlined in chapter 1 might lead a thinker to such questioning. And once again, so far as I can see nothing in Strawson's argument really serves to undermine any of the premises of that argument. And this is what is required if the transcendental arguer is to make any real anti-sceptical advance.[22]

4.9 Concluding Remarks

A persistent problem appears to be emerging in our consideration of transcendental responses to scepticism. The problem is this: the arguments considered so far fail to undermine scepticism in that they fail to undermine the premises of the kinds of arguments (such as that considered in chapter 1) which lead to a sceptical conclusion. As such, even if they were successful in establishing a claim to the effect that we must believe ourselves to be confronted in experience by independently existing objects, their anti-sceptical force is severely limited. For we are still left with a piece of sceptical reasoning which appears to have the upshot that we are not in a position to know that what confronts us are such objects -- that their being independent existents is questionable at the very least. And this is troubling. Of course, if the transcendental arguer is right, there must be something wrong with the sceptical reasoning, for the

transcendental arguer is claiming that we just cannot do what the sceptical reasoning (seemingly at least) leads us to do -- i.e. question that the objects which confront us are independent existents. The transcendental arguer will claim, no doubt, that sceptical doubts are not real doubts, but merely apparent. But so long as we are left with the sceptical reasoning -- where the premises do seem to be true, and a sceptical conclusion does appear to follow -- then the sceptic can just dig his heels in against the transcendental arguer. For the sceptic's argument has as much force as the transcendental arguer's. The sceptic will just claim against the transcendental arguer that his doubts are real enough, and that therefore there must be something wrong with any argument which says he cannot entertain such doubts. In short, the sceptic and the transcendental arguer are stuck at an impasse, both engaged in a kind of dialectical mud slinging, with no hope of any real epistemological advance.

What is needed, it would seem, if there is to be a truly satisfying transcendental response to scepticism is some argument which questions one of the premises of the sceptic's argument, and not just the conclusion of that argument. We should focus our attention, then, in the rest of this thesis on searching for some such argument.

NOTES

1. See pp.42-3

2. See in particular, John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Chapter XXVII.

3. See Sydney Shoemaker, 'Persons and their Pasts', American Philosophical Quarterly Vol. VII (1970), pp.269-85.

4. Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation II

5. David Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature, Book 1, Part IV, Chapter VI: p.239 in the Everyman Edition (London, 1911)

6. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, the second book of the Transcendental Dialectic, Chapter I.

7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books (Oxford, 1958), p.67.

8. P.F. Strawson, Individuals (London, 1959), p.94.

9. G.E. Moore, 'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33', Mind Vol. LXIV (19), pp.13-14.

10. op. cit., p.103 onwards.

11. Paul Guyer, 'Kant on Apperception and A Priori Synthesis', American Philosophical Quarterly (1980).

12. Ibid., p.211.

13. Hubert Schwyzer stresses this point in some detail in his discussion of Guyer's paper. See his excellent Unity of Understanding (Oxford, 1989), pp.63-78.

14. This quote is taken from P.F. Strawson's 'Imagination and Perception' in his Freedom and Resentment (London, 1974), p.57.

15. John Heil, 'Thought and Talk', Philosophical Papers Vol. XXVII (1988) No.3, pp.156-57.

16. op. cit., p.81.

17. See Chapter 2 of this thesis, section 2.3.

18. P.F. Strawson, The Bounds of Sense (London, 1966), p.99.

19. Ibid., p.100.

20. Ibid., p.101.

21. Ibid., p.100.

22. In case the reader is wondering, it seems to me that the same points about conceptual competence argued for in section 4.4 of this chapter apply to the argument of this section as well.

Chapter 5

SCEPTICISM AND WITTGENSTEIN'S ON CERTAINTY

5.1 Introduction

It was claimed at the end of the last chapter that any truly philosophically satisfying transcendental response to scepticism should aim at undermining the premises of the argument put forward by the sceptic to show that we lack knowledge of the external world, rather than just attack the conclusion of that argument. Otherwise the transcendental arguer and the sceptic are just stuck at a kind of dialectical impasse -- each position having as much argumentative force as the other.

Our starting point here in the search for such a response will be Wittgenstein. For many philosophers have seen in Wittgenstein's On Certainty a line of reflection which undercuts the motivation for sceptical considerations getting a foothold in the first place.[1] That is, they have seen in On Certainty a line of reflection which undercuts the very idea that our most basic beliefs about the external world require some kind of justificatory or evidential basis to afford them epistemic respectability. The sceptic demands that such beliefs need justifying -- that we supply some kind of independent evidence to back them up -- if we can ever be said to know such beliefs to be true. Wittgenstein in On Certainty, however, sees this whole project as involving

some kind of deep conceptual ('grammatical') error.

In this chapter, then, I want to look at Wittgenstein's response to the sceptic, and see whether we have here the basis of a philosophically satisfying answer to scepticism.

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to point out that it is perhaps misleading, given that this is a thesis on transcendental arguments, to construe Wittgenstein's reflections in On Certainty as representing some such argument. On Certainty, after all, is nothing more than just a collection of notes, and it is alien to Wittgenstein's philosophical style to present any kind of argument in a straightforwardly linear fashion. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that Wittgenstein makes claims of a 'transcendental' nature in these notes. Thus he says such things as:

> I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language)... (OC 401)
>
> ...we are interested in the fact that about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist if making judgements is to be possible at all... (OC 308)
>
> ...one isn't trying to express even the greatest subjective certainty, but rather that certain propositions seem to underlie all questions and all thinking. (OC 415)

These claims seem to me to be precisely akin to the kinds of claim any transcendental arguer would want to establish -- especially since the propositions that Wittgenstein is talking about here are often paradigms of

the kinds of proposition that the sceptic would want to call into question.[2] It is at least part of Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical strategy in On Certainty, I think, to show that sceptical claims are in some sense incoherent in that the propositions the sceptic calls into question are basic to the very possibility of thought and judgement. Furthermore, a general line of defense for this position (if not a straightforward argument as such) is discernible in On Certainty. In this sense, then, a consideration of Wittgenstein's views is not entirely out of place in the context of this thesis.

What I shall do in this chapter is give an outline of what I take to be the main considerations that Wittgenstein is most keen to press in defense of his 'transcendental' claims, and consider whether this strategy truly answers scepticism in a fully satisfying way.

5.2. Wittgenstein and Moore on what we can know

In On Certainty Wittgenstein considers the status of G.E. Moore's truisms in his 'Defense of Common Sense', and the premises of Moore's 'proof of an external world' in the article of the same name.[3] In the former article Moore claimed to know for certain various propositions. These included such truths as: 'There exists at present a living human body, which is my body; 'The earth had

existed for many years before my body was born'; 'I am a human being'; 'I have often perceived both my own body and other things which formed part of its environment, including other human bodies'; and so on. In the latter article Moore attempted to provide a proof of 'things outside us' by showing that he could prove that two human hands existed. He could do this, he thought, quite simply, 'By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, "Here is one hand", and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, "and here is another"'. Such a proof, Moore claimed, was perfectly rigorous, for (amongst other things):

> I certainly did at the moment know that which I expressed by the combination of certain gestures with saying the words, 'there is one hand and here is another'. I knew that there was one hand in the place indicated by combining a certain gesture with my first utterance of 'here' and that there was another in the different place indicated by combining a certain gesture with my second utterance 'here'. How absurd it would be to suggest that I did not know it, but only believed it, and that perhaps it was not the case.[4]

Now, many philosophers have found Moore's response to the sceptic in these papers clearly unsatisfactory, since his response seems to amount to nothing more than a dogmatic re-affirmation of common sense against sceptical claims. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein thought that Moore had latched onto something of extreme importance, but that something had gone awry by his claiming to know such truths. Moore's response seems unsatisfactory and

dogmatic, on Wittgenstein's account, precisely because he couched the truths of common sense which he enumerated in his 'Defense of Common Sense', and the premises of his proof of an external world, within 'I know that...' locutions. Because Moore had expressed his claims as knowledge claims, Wittgenstein thought, his failure to provide any kind of evidential or justificatory basis to his claims, as would be required within our normal practice of making knowledge claims, strikes us as a serious lack; and his persistence in making such claims, even after himself admitting that no non-questioning begging grounds to back up his claims could be supplied, as a serious case of bloody mindedness.

This is not to say, however, that Wittgenstein is siding with the sceptic in saying that Moore should not have claimed to know the propositions he enumerated. On the contrary, Wittgenstein thought that Moore should not have claimed to know his propositions at least partly because one could not doubt them. Moore's propositions, according to Wittgenstein, were as little subject to doubt (in the kind of context within which Moore made his claims, anyway) as a proposition such as 'I am in pain'. Thus Wittgenstein says:

> Moore's mistake lies in this -- countering the assertion that one cannot know that, by saying 'I do know it'. (OC 521)

> The wrong use made by Moore of the proposition 'I know...' lies in his regarding it as an utterance as little subject to doubt as 'I am in pain'... (OC 178)

This last comparison of Moore's knowledge claims with the proposition 'I am in pain' is, I think, helpful. A sincere first-person avowal of 'I am in pain' has been traditionally taken to be such that its immunity to doubt is almost self-evident. Wittgenstein, then, is taking Moore's propositions to be in some sense akin to 'I am in pain' in this respect. This is what lies at the heart of his claiming that Moore should not have claimed to *know* his propositions. But, now, this might strike us as odd. For surely, it might be claimed, I can *know* whether I am in pain. This is something which even the Cartesian would not deny. And if I can know this, why should it be mistaken for Moore to claim to know his propositions if they are, as Wittgenstein says, '...as little subject to doubt as "I am in pain"' (OC 178)?

In fact Wittgenstein does deny that it makes any sense to say that 'I know that I'm in pain'. Thus in the *Philosophical Investigations* he says:

> ...It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* that I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean -- except perhaps that I *am* in pain?[5]

And in *On Certainty* he says:

> ...to say one knows one has a pain means nothing.(OC 504)

Why, then, did Wittgenstein want to deny that knowledge was possible here? If we stick with the case of 'I am in pain', whose immunity to doubt is not in question, then this may throw some light as to why

Wittgenstein criticized Moore for claiming to know the propositions he enumerated.

One popular understanding for Wittgenstein's claiming that 'I know that I am in pain' lacks any sense is the idea that Wittgenstein thought that expressions such as 'I am in pain' were logically akin to our natural or instinctive expressions of pain. Thus Norman Malcolm interprets Wittgenstein as holding the view that '...(our) sentences about (our) present sensations have the same logical status as (our) outcries and facial expressions'.[6]

There is some textual evidence in support of such an interpretation. Wittgenstein says:

> ...words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour.
>
> "So you are saying that the word 'pain' really means crying?" -- On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it.[7]

If 'I am in pain', then, is logically akin to a moan or a cry it lacks a truth value. If I say 'I am in pain', on this construal, I am not saying something which is either true or false, any more than crying or moaning involves saying something true or false. So it would be absurd for me to say that I knew that I was in pain -- nothing is given following the 'that' clause which could serve as a possible 'object' of knowledge, i.e. a proposition.

If this is Wittgenstein's reason for saying that 'I know that I'm in pain' is senseless then this may not get us very far in understanding his reasons for denying any sense to Moore's claims to know. Surely an expression of a sentence such as 'I am a human being' expresses my belief that I'm a human being. And it only express this belief because the meaning of the sentence gives the content of the belief -- i.e. expresses the proposition I am a human being. It is true that Wittgenstein does sometimes talk in On Certainty of Moore's propositions lacking a truth-value. But this is linked, I think, with their playing, as Wittgenstein puts it, '...a peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions' (OC 136), and not with their being logically akin to some natural or instinctive behaviour (though the attitude connected with such propositions, on Wittgenstein's account, is very often conceived as natural or instinctive. One should be careful here, I think, not confuse the logical status of a proposition with the nature of an attitude towards that proposition).

A far more plausible way to make sense of Wittgenstein's view that 'I know that I'm in pain' is senseless, I think, lies in a consideration of the function that Wittgenstein saw the word 'know' as playing in our language. This is suggested by PI 246 itself. Preceding the remark that 'It can't be said of me...that I know that I am in pain', Wittgenstein makes the point

that:

> If we are using the word 'to know' as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain.

So, according to Wittgenstein, you could be said to know of me that I am in pain (using the word 'know' as it is ordinarily used), though I could never be said to know of myself that I am in pain. To explain why this is the case Wittgenstein says:

> Other people can be said to learn of my sensations only from my behaviour, -- for I cannot be said to learn of them. I have them.
>
> The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not say it about myself.

Wittgenstein here, then, links the applicability of the word 'know' to situations where it is possible to come to learn that something is the case, and hence where it is possible to doubt that something is the case. I can know that p, therefore, iff it is possible to doubt that p, where this possibility enables one to come to learn that p is the case. Hence Wittgenstein is saying that since I cannot seriously doubt that I am in pain, and hence cannot come to discover that I am in pain, I cannot then be said to know that I am in pain.

But why should this be? Why should the applicability of the word 'know' be linked to the possibility of doubt and learning in this way?

John Canfield has suggested that we can see why Wittgenstein held such a view if we consider some simple,

artificially constructed, language-games to serve as comparisons to the language-games where the term 'know' naturally occurs in everyday life.[8] Such comparisons, he argues, make explicit the essential function of 'know', and show why a use of the term 'know' would just be idle in circumstances where doubt was not possible. Let us, then, consider one of Canfield's artificially constructed language-games:

A certain community of other-worldlings live in such a way that the reading of certain instruments are important to them. These instruments are shaped like a clock face with a single pointer. The numbers on the clock face are raised, and whenever the pointer points at a particular number, a certain sound is given off peculiar to that number. One can thus read the instrument either by sight, hearing, or touch. Visual distortions, however, are common in this world, leading to numerous misreadings of the instrument _via_ sight. Such misreadings are discovered to be such because they do not coincide with readings made _via_ the senses of touch and hearing (where these latter methods of reading the instrument do generally coincide in their results). Reports of pointer readings are sometimes questioned. It is sometimes asked 'Do you _know_ that _that_ is what the instrument read?'. The convention or rule is to answer 'Yes' where a reading is made _via_ touch or hearing, and 'No' where a reading is

made via sight. Readings via touch and hearing, however, are not incorrigible. Mistakes can sometimes occur even here. A further finesse on the use of 'know', then, is that if a reading via touch or hearing is found to be mistaken, then a person who has claimed to know such a reading has to retract his claim. Such a person might say 'I thought I knew that dial pointed at 2, but I didn't'. Knowing that p, then, where 'p' is the value of a pointer reading, logically implies for such other-worldlings that p is true. This is their only use of the word 'know'.

The crucial function of the word 'know', Canfield remarks, in the above language-game '...is to differentiate between various epistemic routes to a conclusion'.[9] That is, 'know' functions to differentiate a reading of the dial made by touch or hearing, from a reading made by sight, where the reliability of the dial reading is the point at issue. If there were only readings by touch or hearing in such a world, Canfield remarks, the word 'know' would serve no function. The sentence 'The dial points at 2' would be just functionally equivalent to (would say the same thing as) 'I know that the dial points at 2'. The word 'know' would stand idle, without a function. If someone said 'The dial points at 2', then the question couldn't be asked of them whether they knew that the dial pointed at 2, for what piece of information could be added in their reply which

was not already implied by their original assertion? If they were to reply 'Yes' to such a question, then this could only imply that they either heard or touched the dial as being at 2. But that is already implied by their saying 'The dial points at 2' in the first place. (Such creatures, we shall take it, never guess pointer readings). So, given the idleness of such a question, on Wittgenstein's terms, one can question the sense of asking such a question. If meaning is tied up with use or function, as it is on Wittgenstein's account[10], such idle questioning would seem to be meaningless, and with it any claim to know by the original speaker.

The idea, then, is that a consideration of such a simple language-game throws some light on the 'grammar' of our own everyday use of 'know'. Thus Canfield comments:

> When we look at our ordinary use of know...it appears that here too the function of 'I know that' is to pick out, though very roughly, a certain class of epistemic approaches to an assertion, statement, or conclusion. If I say "I know where he is", this gets sense in contrast with a vaguely demarcated set of ways I might have used to arrive at the 'conclusion' that he is in the place I have in mind. For example I might have guessed it, or speculated about it, or made an inference from some quite insufficient data. In claiming to know I am claiming that I haven't done any of these things...Positively, my claim is a claim to epistemic access to my conclusion by one of an again vaguely demarcated number of ways. I might have been told by a reliable person where he is; he himself, also a reliable person, might have told me where he is going...; and so on. Without the contrast between these two classes (or two such classes) of epistemic access, my claim to know where he is would have no sense. It would have no sense because it would do no job in he language game.[11]

If, then, our use of 'know' is such that it serves to pick out a certain class of epistemic routes to the truth of the proposition I am claiming to know, where these routes are distinguishable from other routes insufficient for knowledge of the proposition, then it seems reasonably clear why 'I know that I'm in pain' cannot be said. For there are no epistemic routes by which I come to the conclusion that I am in pain. As Wittgenstein puts it, I do not come to learn that I'm in pain. So a use of the word 'know' could not serve to pick out such a route (a means of coming to know), as it is wont to do.

To know that p, then, for Wittgenstein, requires that (in a particular context) p is such that there are a number of possible epistemic routes to ascertain that p is true, say a,b,c. The word 'know' serves to pick out a certain route (or class of routes), say a, differentiated from the other routes, b,c, in terms of its reliability over the others towards establishing the truth of p. To say 'I know that p', then, is to say that one has established the truth of p by such a reliable route. A further finesse on the use of 'know' is that to know that p requires that p is in fact true.

The connection between knowing and doubting can now be spelt out as follows. If to know that p requires that there are different possible epistemic routes to p, some of which are unreliable in establishing the truth of p and hence insufficient for one's coming to know that p

(even if it leads one to truly believe that p), then it is possible to take a route to p where p's truth would still be open to question, and hence where doubt could get a foothold.[12]

So much, then, for Wittgenstein's characterization of the function of 'know'. Let us now see why he thought Moore's propositions, like the proposition 'I am in pain', were such that one could not be said to know them.

5.3 Moore's propositions and their immunity from doubt

There is an important difference between the 'I am in pain' case and Moore's propositions which Wittgenstein was sensitive to. In the case of the former, it is difficult to imagine <u>any</u> context where doubt might be intelligible, or where evidence might be produced to support the proposition. In the case of many of Moore's propositions, however, one can imagine contexts where doubt and evidence might be considered appropriate; though they are, in general, characteristically bizarre. Thus, to construct such a bizarre case, I might wonder whether <u>this is a hand</u> if I awake up after an operation during which one of my hands was amputated and a plastic replacement put in its place. Not remembering, perhaps, whether it was my right or left hand which was amputated, I might well think to myself, 'Is <u>this</u> a hand?', and set about applying various tests to compile evidence to verify the proposition (check that it was not plastic

etc.). In such a context one could, presumably, on Wittgenstein's terms, be said to come to know that this is a hand. However, Wittgenstein's point is that Moore's claims are not like this. Wittgenstein thought that, given the particular context of Moore's claims, to talk of evidence being sought to remove some doubt was unintelligible. Hence any claim to know misplaced.

Wittgenstein's strategy in On Certainty to establish this claim might be broadly characterized as 'transcendental' in that he ties in the certainty of Moore's propositions to the very possibility of activities such as doubting, knowing, justifying etc. One cannot doubt Moore's propositions (in the sort of context within which Moore made his claims to know, anyway) because doubt itself, according to Wittgenstein, presupposes that such propositions be regarded as certain, as removed from questioning, and hence as removed from the need to establish their truth by means of evidence. Wittgenstein says:

> If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty. (OC 115)

Moore's truths, according to Wittgenstein, are the 'hinges' on which our language-games turn (language-games such as doubting that p, affirming that p, seeking evidence for p, knowing that p etc.) (OC 341;343;655). They are the foundations (OC 253; 401-03), the scaffolding (OC 211) supporting such language-games.

Unless their certainty is taken as given, then, Wittgenstein says, '...the foundation of all judging would be taken away from me' (OC 614;cf.308).

Why, then, should Moore's propositions be regarded as 'foundational' to judgement in this way?

Very briefly, I think one way to understand Wittgenstein is so see him as arguing for the following claim: there is nothing that would count as doubt concerning the truth of any one of Moore's propositions that would not at the same time count as evidence that the 'doubter' had not grasped the relevant concepts in the 'doubted' proposition. Thus, if someone said 'I doubt that this is a hand' whilst pointing at their hand, in perfectly ordinary circumstances, then this would only show that they had not grasped the concept 'hand' -- what the word 'hand' means -- and thus were not in a position to make the judgement in the first place.

I think this claim has some plausibility. One way to appreciate Wittgenstein's claim is to consider how we should normally treat someone who, in perfectly normal circumstances, said of their own hand, 'I doubt that this is a hand'. I think, in general, we should treat them as not knowing what the word 'hand' meant. If they were a foreigner or a young child, for example, perhaps we should just correct them and say, 'No, <u>that is</u> a hand', where our reply serves as a kind of ostensive definition of the meaning of the word 'hand'. We might treat (some

of) Moore's propositions, therefore, as teaching paradigms in the uses of words. We were all taught as children the meanings of words like 'hand', 'dog', 'rabbit' etc. by having instances of such objects pointed out to us, accompanied by the verbal expressions of such words, perhaps in sentences involving a demonstrative ('That is a hand', or 'This is a dog'). We judge a child to have a mastery of the meanings of such words when they (with some consistency) correctly apply such words in certain paradigmatic instances. Being certain that that is a hand, therefore, should perhaps be seen as a criterion of having a grasp of the meaning of the word 'hand'. For this reason, then, saying 'I doubt that this is a hand' should perhaps be construed as a criterion of some kind of linguistic or conceptual incompetence. Thus Wittgenstein comments: 'The truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements' (OC 80; cf. 81, 83).

If this account is correct, then, it would seem that we can only intelligibly doubt the existence of hands, say, in contexts which do not form the paradigmatic contexts where the absence of doubt serves as an indication or criterion of conceptual competence. This is not to say that we can never have doubts of the form this is a hand. But what seems characteristic of the sceptic's doubt, on Wittgenstein's account, is that it is too all-embracing. The sceptic wants to doubt this is a hand even

in those paradigmatic contexts where the expression of such a 'doubt' could only show that one had failed to grasp the concepts necessary for its meaningful formulation.

However, it is worth mentioning at this point, that examples such as the 'this is a hand' example really only form a small part of Wittgenstein's concern in On Certainty. With such examples, i.e. examples involving demonstratives such as 'this' or 'that', it is easy to see how they can be regarded as teaching paradigms in the uses of words. However, it is quite clear that many of Moore's propositions cannot be regarded this way. Indeed, Wittgenstein seems to think that many of the propositions which play a 'foundational' role with regard to the possibility of thought and judgement are not explicitly learned at all. He says:

> I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can discover them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates...(OC 152)

Wittgenstein here, again, I think is right. To bring out the point we might consider some of our very most basic 'beliefs', such as our 'belief' in the law of induction, or our 'belief' that objects don't go out of existence when not perceived, or just our 'belief' that physical objects exist. One doesn't explicitly learn that physical objects exist when learning how to talk of chairs, tables, books etc. One doesn't explicitly learn that objects don't go out of existence when not perceived

when learning how to talk of objects not currently in view. And one doesn't explicitly learn the law of induction when learning how to predict future events. (All these learned abilities are, of course, interconnected. We do not learn them independently from one another). We gradually learn to act in accordance with these laws, propositions etc. by means of responses to conditioning which is, according to Wittgenstein, largely instinctive. Wittgenstein describes our certainty towards such laws and propositions in the following way:

> Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life...(OC 358)
>
> But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (OC 359)
>
> I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to whom one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination. (OC 476)

Our certainty, according to Wittgenstein, compares with the certainty of a squirrel that it will need stores of food for winter (OC 278), or a cat's certainty that there is a mouse (OC 478). Thus, our 'attitude' towards these laws and propositions is not to be characterized as some mental state or disposition with a specific propositional content. Our 'attitude', according to Wittgenstein, is at the level of instinct, not propositional thought. It is primitive, pre-linguistic, and pre-rational. With regard

to such basic laws and propositions it is quite clear that any supposed 'questioning' of their 'truth' takes us beyond the realms where it is conceptual incompetence which is merely at stake on the part of the questioner. It is not failure to grasp the meaning of a word which is the problem here, but something more serious: something more akin to madness or mental disturbance perhaps (cf. OC 71; 420). It is partly for this reason, then, on Wittgenstein's account, that we just cannot take sceptical questions seriously. It is not just that sceptic shows himself to be conceptually incompetent when he says such things as 'I doubt that this is a hand'. Rather, the wholesale character of the sceptic's supposed doubting places him, in a sense, outside of the boundaries within which we can even ascribe conceptual competence or incompetence to him. We cannot even regard him as a speaker/thinker.

So much, then, for Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical strategy in On Certainty. What I now want to do is ask whether Wittgenstein's position does truly undercut the philosophical basis of sceptical claims. Or whether, as before, scepticism remains largely untouched by this kind of account.

5.4. Scepticism, Naturalism, and Experience

We might begin our assessment of Wittgenstein's position by considering, once again, why we should believe

Wittgenstein when he says that doubt towards Moore's propositions is unintelligible? And I think the only answer that could be given here would be something like, "just consider how we should normally treat someone who said such things as 'I doubt that this is a hand'". That is, the ultimate court of appeal for such a philosophical claim is our normal everyday practice. This is clearly consonant with Wittgenstein's view of philosophy as pure description.[13] But this, I think, might strike the sceptic as unacceptable for two reasons.

Firstly, the sceptic might claim that this means that our only reasons for accepting Wittgenstein's view rest on our taking up an essentially third person point of view on our ordinary practice which assumes the very 'knowledge' he (the sceptic) calls into question ('knowledge' of an objective world, other minds etc.). In this sense, then, the sceptic might claim that Wittgenstein's position is no better than Moore's in begging the very question at issue against him.

Or secondly, the sceptic might wonder why it should matter to his account what it is normally intelligible to doubt in the course of our everyday pursuits. He might readily grant that in normal everyday contexts we should regard doubt towards Moore's propositions as unintelligible, but then argue that the kinds of consideration he brings into focus creates a context within which doubt becomes perfectly understandable. It

is the particular context within which sceptical questions arise, he might argue, which make him immune from the charge of conceptual incompetence.

Marie McGinn in her recent book Sense and Certainty has suggested a response, on Wittgenstein's behalf, to the first of these criticisms.[14] Wittgenstein's purely third person descriptive or 'naturalistic' stance in On Certainty does not amount to his begging the question against the sceptic, McGinn argues, for the sceptic too in the initial stages of his philosophical appraisal of knowledge, adopts such a stance. According to McGinn, the process by which the sceptic is led to the conclusion that we lack knowledge of the external world has seven discernible stages:[15]

1 The sceptic takes up a reflective stance vis-a-vis our ordinary practice of making and accepting knowledge claims.

2 He observes that he has fallen into error in the past and undertakes the critical examination of his current claims to know.

3 He discovers that they are made within a framework of judgements which he implicitly claims to know, but which he has never justified.

4 He formulates a project of justification regarding the judgements of the frame.

5 He uncovers an unproved assumption lying behind his acceptance of the framework judgements.

6 He constructs the Sceptical Hypotheses which reveal that the general assumption cannot, without circularity, be justified.

7 He concludes that there should be complete suspension of judgement concerning the nature of the objective world.

On McGinn's assessment, then, the sceptic's initial reflective stance towards our ordinary practice is akin to Wittgenstein's. The difference between Wittgenstein and the sceptic is not that Wittgenstein makes certain methodological assumptions which are not also present in the sceptic's project at the outset. Rather, the difference lies in the fact that whereas the conclusions of Wittgenstein's enquiry have the upshot that '...both ordinary practice and the naturalism of the starting point remain entirely secure', '...the sceptical conclusion concerning our right to make judgements about the nature of reality is in an important respect at odds with the position that the sceptic holds at the beginning

of his philosophical enquiry...the conclusion he is led to draw concerning human practice has the effect of depriving him of the right to believe in the phenomenon he began by investigating'.[16]

Given, then, that Wittgenstein and the sceptic share a common starting point in their respective enquiries, McGinn argues that Wittgenstein gives a satisfactory assessment of where the sceptic goes wrong before sceptical doubts can get a foothold. The sceptic makes the mistake at stage 3 above in seeing the 'framework judgements' (Moore-type propositions) underlying our explicit knowledge claims as themselves being regarded by us (implicitly) as things which we must know if we know anything about the external world at all, and hence as requiring epistemic justification. This misrepresentation of our practice, then, occurs at the purely descriptive level of the sceptic's philosophical assessment of our practice. Wittgenstein, however, on McGinn's account, gives an alternative (and correct) description of our practice, which sees these 'framework judgements' as having a non-epistemic status (not coming under the scope of 'I know that...', 'I doubt that...' locutions), and hence as not requiring independent justification. Thus McGinn concludes:

> An account which starts by taking up a reflective stance towards human practice but which is never led, as the sceptic is, either into holding that the judgements of the frame lack an essential justification, or into conjuring up the idea of experience as something conceivable purely

> subjectively, should not, therefore, be seen as begging any questions. The point is that such an account never allows the sceptic's misapprehensions to arise and threaten ordinary practice or the naturalistic outlook that characterizes our initial position in philosophy. The natural outlook that is Wittgenstein's starting point should not, therefore, be regarded as needing to regain ground from the sceptic: the sceptical conclusion has not yet been allowed to arise and threaten it.[17]

I think McGinn's portrayal of the sceptic's reflective stance as on a par with Wittgenstein's descriptive naturalism is an attractive one, and insofar as such an observation does seem to rescue Wittgenstein from the charge that he begs the question against the sceptic, then I am in agreement with McGinn. However, it is not clear to me that McGinn's defense of Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical method completely disarms the sceptic. This is because it is not clear to me that the motivation for scepticism need be rooted in the kind of descriptive error that McGinn notes. It seems to me that the sceptic can take on board Wittgenstein's descriptive point that we do not <u>ordinarily</u> regard Moore-type propositions as subject to requiring independent justification etc., yet still generate, by considering our practice as a whole, the feeling that this represents some kind of <u>lack</u> within our normal practice, given certain other facts which we normally feel compelled to take on board. And it is because of this, I think, that the second criticism of Wittgenstein that we considered at the beginning of this section -- i.e. the criticism that sceptical questions

arise within a particular context where they do seem perfectly intelligible -- may have some validity.

Let us consider the sceptic's claim (as McGinn portrays it) that the only possible non-circular source of justification for Moore-type propositions would have to appeal to statements about experiences conceived 'purely subjectively' or 'solipsistically'. The sceptic, then, on McGinn's account, constructs Sceptical Hypotheses, e.g. brain in a vat or evil genius type scenarios, to show that such a source of grounding would be insufficient to secure knowledge.

McGinn sees the idea of experience as conceived 'purely subjectively', or 'solipsistically', as being something which is 'conjured up' as a response to the search for some non-question-begging evidential base to ground Moore-type propositions. McGinn gives the impression that she thinks that had philosophers not made the mistake (at stage 3 onwards) of seeing Moore-type propositions as things which we implicitly claim to know, and hence requiring an epistemic ground, then they would never have been led to such a purely subjective conception of experience. I think McGinn is wrong here. I think a purely subjective conception of experience can quite easily be generated, independently of epistemological considerations. Indeed, such a conception is the predominate one amongst contemporary philosophers, generally for reasons which have no direct bearing on

epistemology.

We generally all accept that our experiences, whether they be visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic etc. are the end result of a causal process culminating in certain brain activity, where seemingly that brain activity is causally sufficient for our having the experiences that we do. It is part of our ordinary (scientific) practice, one might think, to accept causal explanations of our experiences on these terms. However, if this is truly the case, then the following would also appear to be true: our experiences could be just as they are if only the activity in our brains were the same and other facts about their causal history, e.g. facts about the objects and events we take them to be experiences of, were completely different. This is what it means to say that our brain states are causally sufficient for our having the experiences that we do. Thus, to take my current visual experience of the book on the desk in front of me, I could have type-identical brain states to the ones I have now which are currently caused by the presence of a book in the world, without there actually being a book there at all causally responsible for those brain states. And if those brain states are causally sufficient for my experiences, in the way suggested, I could have type-identical experiences to the ones I have now without the book being there either. This means that no part of my experience is identical with the book, even when the book

does figure in the causal explanation of my experience.[18]

What, then, does this tell us? Well, one might minimally take it to have the upshot that our experiences should be construed purely subjectively or solipsistically. At best, it would seem, external objects are only extrinsically related to our experiences, and are not constitutive of their intrinsic features. Any description, then, of our experiences, where our experiences are to be conceived of purely in terms of their non-relational properties, should not involve any existential commitment to the external objects we normally take them to be experiences of. This is essentially what I take to be meant by a 'purely subjective' or 'solipsistic' conception of experience.

However, this is still not enough to warrant scepticism. From the fact that our experiences are to be conceived of purely subjectively in this way, it does not immediately follow that we cannot have knowledge of the objects and events we normally take our experiences to be experiences of, especially if the prime motivation for scepticism is rooted in the kind of descriptive error McGinn notes. Thus Michael Williams has recently argued that scepticism can only gain a foothold if we assume at the outset a foundationalist epistemology where knowledge of one's sensory states or experiences is thought to be prior and foundational to any account of how we could possess knowledge of the external world.[19] It is true,

given a purely subjective conception of experience, no facts about our experiences are going to provide an adequate evidential basis for knowledge of the external world. But, Williams asks, why should we assume experiences to be foundational in this way? Our having certain experiences may be a causal precondition of our having knowledge of the external world. But it does not follow from this that we must first know facts about our experiences before we can know facts about the external world. Thus Williams says:

> Recall once more Wittgenstein's remark that "My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything I could produce in evidence for it" (OC 250). It might well be that, if I had spent my entire life in a coma, I would never come to think of myself as having two hands. But, at least in normal circumstances, this does not put me in a position to treat its looking to me as if I have two hands as evidence for my having two hands. The experiential "evidence", the (apparent) sight of my hands, is not normally any more certain than the belief about how things objectively are, which is why it is not a ground for that belief, even if it is a causal precondition.[20]

Nevertheless, one can be led to scepticism, I think, without assuming the kind of foundationalism Williams is objecting to. Let us consider, again, the seven stages which McGinn sees as leading to sceptical doubt. McGinn, as we have seen, thinks that the sceptic begins to fall into error at stage 3 by seeing the framework judgements (Moore-type propositions) as things which we implicitly claim to know, and hence require justification. McGinn saw Wittgenstein as correcting this error, by his

pointing out that we do not implicitly claim to know these propositions at all -- that they are truths which we do not regard as requiring some kind of epistemic grounding. But, now, let us suppose that the sceptic takes this on board. Let us suppose that instead of stage 3 following from his undertaking the critical examination of his claims to know, the sceptic realizes the following:

3' He discovers that his claims to know are made within a framework of judgements which he regards as indubitable, and not subject to epistemic assessment.

But instead of just leaving things at that, as McGinn seems to suggest the sceptic should, let us suppose that the sceptic (in line with the way we set out the reasoning for scepticism in chapter 1) notes that, for example in dream or hallucination circumstances, he has on certain occasions regarded many of the beliefs in that framework of judgements to be certain, when in fact they have turned out to be false. The question then naturally occurs to the sceptic: 'Despite my current conviction that, for example, this is a hand, how do I know that I am not falsely believing this?'. How do I know that I am not now dreaming or hallucinating? It is in response to such questioning that he seeks some non-question-begging basis to his belief. Couple such reflections with the

ones outlined earlier regarding the purely subjective nature of experiences, and a sceptical result seems inevitable. Everything about his experience, the sceptic notes, could be the same whether or not objects such as tables, chairs, books, hands etc. figure in the causal history of that experience. As such, no facts about his experience can be appealed to to justify his conviction that such objects exist. Indeed, it seems that he could have such experiences if he were merely a brain in a vat. The move to a fully blown sceptical position seems unavoidable.

Against such reflections it just seems idle for a defender of Wittgenstein to argue that the search for a basis for such beliefs involves a kind of conceptual error. For it is difficult to see now exactly what this error actually consists in. Sure enough, we do not normally ask for such beliefs to be justified. But this is because the possibility of error regarding such beliefs is not normally brought to mind. Once this possibility is made explicit, however, isn't it just natural to seek some grounding here? Isn't the search for a ground for such beliefs in such circumstances a valid response, reflective of our normal epistemic demands?

Here, then, scepticism is not generated by the sceptic making a descriptive error in regarding the framework of judgements as something 'known' but 'never justified'. The felt need for that framework needing some kind of

justificatory basis arises from an appreciation of the possibility of error, illustrated by facts about our life, about dreams, hallucinations, and the causal processes involved in perception, which we all feel bound to accept.

It is difficult to find anything in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* which seriously calls into question scepticism if it is motivated by such concerns. Wittgenstein's claims to the effect that we would not ordinarily regard someone who said something like 'I doubt that this is a hand' as engaging in actual doubting behaviour, but as conceptually incompetent, hold no truck with the sceptic who is led to his sceptical position *via* the route I have suggested. He will simply accept the point, but argue that the bounds of intelligible doubt are shifted once one takes on board the kinds of consideration he brings into focus -- facts about the possibility of error, the subjectivity of experience etc. Such reflection, he will argue, provides the context within which he can doubt such things as *this is a hand*, and avoid the charge of conceptual incompetence being levelled against him. After all, he may say, the very considerations which lead him to his doubting such things -- facts about the causal processes involved in perception etc.-- show him to have a more than adequate grasp of normal everyday concepts. He, paradoxically, takes on board Moore's propositions in order to generate his doubts concerning their truth. It

will not worry him, however, that his account, unlike Wittgenstein's, doesn't have the upshot (to quote McGinn) that 'both ordinary practice and the naturalism of the starting point remain secure'. For, as Quine points out, 'he (the sceptic) is quite within his rights in assuming science in order to refute science; this, if carried out, would be a straightforward argument by reductio ad absurdum'.[21]

NOTES

1. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty (Oxford, 1969), G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H.von Wright eds.. All references to sections of On Certainty (henceforth OC) will be cited in the main text in parentheses.

2. Other philosophers have also seen in certain aspects of Wittgenstein's later philosophy -- particularly in his famous Private Language Argument -- so-called 'transcendental' elements. See in particular, Jonathan Lear's 'The Disappearing "We"', Aristotelian Society, Supp. Vol. 58, (1984); 'Leaving the World Alone', The Journal of Philosophy (1982) pp.382-403; 'Transcendental Anthropology' in Subject, Thought and Context, Phillip Pettit and John McDowell eds., pp.267-98. See also Meridith Williams, 'Wittgenstein, Kant, and the "Metaphysics of Experience", Kant Studien (1990), pp.69-88; and Quassim Cassam's, Transcendental Arguments and Necessity (Oxford D.Phil thesis, unpublished), Chapter 2.

3. G.E. Moore, 'A Defense of Common Sense', and 'Proof of an External World', both reprinted in his Philosophical Papers (London, 1959).

4. 'Proof of an External World', p.146 in Philosophical Papers.

5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford, 1959), section 246.

6. Norman Malcolm, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations', in G. Pitcher ed., Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations (New York, 1966), p.82.

7. Philosophical Investigations, section 244.

8. John Canfield, '"I Know that I am in Pain' is Senseless' in Analysis and Metaphysics (Reidel, 1975), Keith Lehrer ed., pp.129-44.

9. Ibid., p.136

10. Thus Wittgenstein says in a famous passage in the Philosophical Investigations:

> For a large class of cases -- though not for all -- in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language...(section 43)

Such a view of meaning is central to the whole of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, including On Certainty (see OC 61; 64). However, I think there may be a kind of tension between such a view of meaning and some other of Wittgenstein's claims concerning Moore's propositions in On Certainty. This is spelt out in my 'Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Propositions', Philosophical Investigations 16:2 (1993), pp.154-62.

11. Op.cit., p.136

12. I think that the above characterization of the function of 'know' preserves some of the appeal of Wittgenstein's dictum that meaning is use as applied to this case, whilst rescuing it from fairly obvious objections, which due the vagueness of the view, a meaning as use theory invites. Thus John Searle traces Wittgenstein's claim that 'It can't be said of me...that I know that I'm in pain' to his being guilty of '...the fallacy of confusing the conditions for the performance of the speech act of assertion with the analysis of the meaning of particular words occurring in certain assertions' (John Searle, Speech Acts (1969), p.141). This is Searle's so-called assertion fallacy. According to Searle, whilst it is true that I would not normally assert that I know that I'm in pain when I'm in pain, it would be fallacious to conclude from this that it would then be meaningless to say of me that I know that I'm in pain under such conditions -- that the concept 'know' was not somehow applicable here. On Searle's account, I would not use the sentence 'I know that I'm in pain' to make the speech act of assertion just because it is obvious that when I'm in pain I know that I am; too obvious to warrant asserting that I know. One cannot read off, then, from the inappropriateness of making an assertion to the effect that one knows that such-and-such in a given context, according to Searle, the inapplicability of the concept 'know' in such a context.

I think Searle is right here to call for meaning conditions and assertion conditions to be clearly distinguished. I also think that adherence to the vague idea that meaning is use has engendered a conflation of meaning conditions and assertion conditions in much recent philosophy, as Searle suggests. However, I think it is far from clear that Wittgenstein is actually guilty of this fallacy. Certainly, if we take Wittgenstein's claims about the connection of knowing with doubting and learning, and explain this connection, a la Canfield, as 'know' functioning to pick out and distinguish certain 'epistemic routes to a conclusion', then a assertion condition/meaning condition distinction, it seems to me, can still be maintained. To use Canfield's invented language-game as an example, a speaker might know the dial on the instrument reads 2 since he makes his reading by touch and hearing, but it might be inappropriate for him to assert that he knows. It might be obvious to everyone in his vicinity that he knows, since they can clearly perceive him touching and hearing the instrument, and he himself might be aware that this is obvious to everyone around him. An assertion that he knows, then, would be misplaced or inappropriate. But everything would seem to be in place for it to be at least meaningful to say that he knows. Canfield's understanding of Wittgenstein, then, can seemingly preserve an assertion condition/meaning condition distinction, whilst retaining some of the appeal of accounting for meaning in terms of use or function.

13. In the Philosophical Investigations Wittgenstein characterizes the role of philosophy in the following terms:

> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. It cannot give it any foundation either; it leaves everything as it is...(section 124)

14. Marie McGinn, Sense and Certainty (Oxford, 1989), Ch.8, especially p.148 ff.

15. Ibid., p.6.

16. Ibid., pp.149-50.

17. Ibid., pp.149-50.

18. See J.J. Valberg's The Puzzle of Experience (Oxford, 1993), especially chapters 1 and 6, for more on the conception of experience that is at work here, and the argumentation which leads to such a conception. Valberg generates a puzzle about the object of experience by appealing to the causal processes involved in perception such that we are led to the conclusion that what confronts us in experience must be internal, rather than external, objects. From this 'primary puzzle' Valberg thinks one may be led to epistemological scepticism concerning the external world (see especially pp.188-90). I agree that the question of the object of experience is central to the overall force of scepticism, but will delay detailed discussion of this until the next chapter (see section 6.9).

19. See Michael Williams, Unnatural Doubts (Oxford, 1991), in particular Ch.2.

20. Ibid., p.70.

21. W.V.O Quine, 'The Nature of Natural Knowledge' in S. Guttenplan ed. Mind and Language (Oxford, 1975). But see note 15 on pp.195-6 in Valberg op cit.

Chapter 6

SCEPTICISM AND SEMANTIC CONTENT

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter we considered a certain kind of response to scepticism based on some of Wittgenstein's remarks in On Certainty. We found that such a response failed to give a satisfactory answer to the sceptic insofar that the sceptic's demand that our most basic beliefs about the world around us need some kind of evidential or justificatory base is not rooted in a descriptive error of our practice, but is rather a response to the possibility of error regarding such beliefs implied by certain facts about our experience which we feel compelled to take on board. Once such facts are brought to mind, to seek a justification of those beliefs does not seem ill conceived, but rather a natural epistemic demand. Nothing that Wittgenstein says in On Certainty really serves to threaten the rationale for scepticism here. As such, scepticism remains a problem awaiting a satisfactory response.

In this chapter, then, I want to look at a different kind of response to scepticism. This response turns on some recent work in the theory of semantic content. In particular, I want to look at so-called externalist views of content, and see whether such views can be invoked to

undermine the philosophical basis of sceptical claims.

To recap, in the last chapter we noted that it seems to be a fact about perceptual experience that all my experiences could be just as they are even if the external objects I now believe myself to see, hear, touch etc. do not figure in the causal history of those experiences, so long as what is going on the relevant parts of my brain are held constant. Once experience is conceived of in this way, this clearly opens the way for the construction of sceptical hypotheses such as the brain in a vat hypothesis, and the seeming inevitability of a sceptical conclusion regarding the possibility of knowledge of the external world.

However, the kind of response to scepticism I want to consider in this chapter questions a crucial assumption here. There clearly is a sense, which we are all bound to accept, in which my experiences would be just as they if they had some deviant cause. But some philosophers would argue that there would also be a relevant difference if my experiences did have some such cause, and were not typically caused by everyday physical objects, which the sceptic crucially ignores: a difference with regard to their <u>semantic contents</u> (a point which goes for beliefs as well as experiences). And it is this difference, once appreciated, according to the response to scepticism I want to look at in this chapter, which blocks the route to a sceptical conclusion.

I shall begin, then, by looking at the notion of content at the heart of such a response. I shall largely focus, for the sake of brevity, on the notion of content with respect to propositional attitudes, in particular beliefs, rather than experiential or sensory content. It should be noted, however, that much of what is said with regard to propositional attitudes is also thought by many externalists to pertain to experiences as well (indeed, it will be briefly suggested later in this chapter that both accounts are intertwinned). Whether talking about beliefs or experiences, the anti-sceptical point nevertheless remains essentially the same. The externalist wants to claim that once we appreciate all the relevant factors that contribute towards our beliefs and/or experiences having the content that they have, the idea that our beliefs/experiences could remain identical across radically different accounts of their causal history, as suggested by the brain in a vat hypothesis, is seriously undermined.

6.2 Content and Externalism

Beliefs have contents which individuate them as the beliefs they are. The content of a belief is given in its description by the sense of the embedded sentence following the 'that' clause. Thus I believe that the table in front of me is made of wood. Here the content of

my belief is given by the sense of the embedded sentence 'the table in front of me is made of wood'. My belief would not be the belief that it is, but some other different belief, if it did not have that particular content (e.g. 'the table in front of me is made of plastic'). This is what it means to say that beliefs are individuated by their contents.

The kind of response to scepticism considered in this chapter appeals to a view about the contents of beliefs and other attitudes (desires, hopes, fears etc.) in this sense, i.e. where those contents are expressible in propositional form -- so-called 'propositional attitudes'. This view of content is known as externalism (or sometimes anti-individualism). An externalist view of content involves the claim that there is some kind of necessary dependence between the contents of a person's propositional attitudes and the nature of the environment they inhabit.

Externalism, then, is a radical denial of traditional Cartesianism. According to the Cartesian, the contents of a person's beliefs about the outside world are logically independent of any factors external to them. This, in many respects, may seem a natural position to take. For it is indisputable that for any particular belief a person may have about the external world, it is logically consistent that that belief be false. It seems a small step to take from this to conclude that all such beliefs

could be false, and secure the conclusion of logical independence. It is such thinking, of course, which allows scepticism to get a foothold. This view, furthermore, does not seem to be bound to a specifically dualistic theory of the mind such as Descartes, but can be just as easily embraced by materialists -- content being seen as supervening, say, on the local properties of the brain. Thus it is perhaps best to avoid the label 'Cartesian' here, and opt for the slightly less theoretically loaded term (used by Burge) <u>individualism</u>, understanding this to cut across both dualist and materialist traditions. Individualism, then, is the view that there is <u>no</u> kind of necessary dependence between content and environment. Content, according to individualists, is merely a function of the intrinsic states of the individual. More precisely, to use Tyler Burge's characterization:

> ...according to individualism about the mind, the mental natures of all of a person's or animal's mental states (and events) are such that there is no necessary or deep individuative relation between the individual's being in states of those kinds and the nature of the individual's physical or social environments.[1]

Externalism, then, denies this position by claiming that <u>there is</u> a necessary or deep individuative relation between at least some of an individual's mental states and events (where those states and events have propositional content) and the nature of the physical or social environment they inhabit and interact with.

6.3 Putnam and Burge

Tyler Burge and Hilary Putnam, famously, were led to an externalist position via so-called Twin Earth thought experiments.[2]

Putnam's initial concern was with word meaning -- in particular with the meanings of so-called natural kind terms. Thus in his paper 'The Meaning of "Meaning"' Putnam set out to dispute certain 'grotesquely mistaken' philosophical accounts of meaning which arise due to a tendency to ignore the contribution made by our natural environment to the meanings of our words. These mistaken views, he thought, embodied two incompatible assumptions. Firstly, that the meanings of words are fixed by the intrinsic psychological states of those who use them, and that to know the meaning of a word, therefore, involves being in a certain psychological state. And secondly that meaning determines reference such that a difference of reference is sufficient for a difference in meaning. Putnam uses the following Twin Earth example to show that these two assumptions are incompatible.

Suppose there is a planet, Twin Earth, which is as similar to this earth as it can be except for the fact that the substance that people call 'water' on Twin Earth does not have the chemical constitution H_2O, but a different constitution, say XYZ, though superficially the two substances are identical -- they feel and taste the same, and you can use XYZ in exactly the way that we use

H_2O. Each individual on Earth, furthermore, has a duplicate or doppelganger on Twin Earth, atom-for-atom identical to each of us. Intrisically speaking, then, our doppelgangers are physically and psychologically type-identical. The only difference between us, by hypothesis, is a relational one in terms of the fact that they come into contact with a substance XYZ in exactly those circumstances where we come into contact with H_2O.

The question that Putnam asks is that if I use a sentence involving the word 'water' and my doppelganger makes the same utterance on Twin Earth, do our utterances mean the same? It is requirement for identity of meaning by the second assumption that our utterances have the same extension -- meaning determines reference. Yet it would seem that this is not the case. Our utterances cannot mean the same for they have a different extension: when I use the word 'water' I refer to the substance that is H_2O whereas my doppelganger refers to XYZ. Yet by hypothesis our intrinsic psychological states are the same. So assuming we should not reject the principle that meaning determines reference, we must reject the idea that the meanings of terms are fixed in terms of the intrinsic psychological states of those who use them. We must conclude, Putnam argues, that meanings aren't in the head.

A similar thought experiment can be set out, of course, where it is not the meanings of words which are

at stake, but the contents of our attitudes. Assuming that our attitudes have truth conditions, where a change in truth conditions is sufficient for a change of content (and hence a change of attitude), then Putnam's Twin Earth example can be used to show that despite my Twin and I sharing the same intrinsic psychological states we have different attitudes. If meanings aren't in the head, then it seems neither are at least many of our common place beliefs, desires etc.

The claim that meanings and beliefs aren't in the head has come under much attack, and certainly it would seem that one can embrace the individuative role of environment to meaning and content a la Putnam without embracing this conclusion. Thus Donald Davidson argues as follows:

> It should be clear that it doesn't follow, simply from the fact that meanings are identified in part by relations to objects outside the head, that meanings aren't in the head. To suppose this would be as bad as to argue that because my being sunburned presupposes the existence of the sun, my sunburn isn't a condition of my skin.[3]

If we are to believe Putnam, then, that my having beliefs about water depends upon there being H_2O in the environment I inhabit, then this dependence alone, Davidson argues, doesn't indicate that my beliefs are anything but 'in my head'. Certainly their being described as beliefs, or at least their being described as the particular beliefs that they are, depends upon making reference to external factors. But this does not

mean that beliefs are anything else but states of the brain, say, anymore than a rash on my arm being described as sunburn because it was caused by overexposure to the sun means that the sunburn is anything but a condition of my skin. Thus Davidson concludes:

> ...an appreciation of the external factors that enter into our common ways of identifying mental states does not discredit an identity theory of the mental and the physical.[4]

The important point for our purposes, however, whether or not beliefs etc. are in the head, is that it does seem that if Putnam is right, we could not have many of our common attitudes unless our relation to the world is of a certain kind. And this may cause trouble for the sceptic who appears to assume that all our beliefs could be what they are independently of the nature of the environment we inhabit. We shall consider how problematic this is for the sceptic later on. But let us now consider Burge's argument for externalism.

Burge, whilst agreeing that the nature of our natural environment is partly determinative of the contents of our attitudes (and sensory states) also emphasizes the role that social factors play in fixing the contents of our thoughts, in particular the role of the linguistic communities that we inhabit. His famous 'arthritis' thought experiment to show this goes as follows.

Suppose I have a large number of beliefs about arthritis. Many of my beliefs are true, but I falsely

believe that I have arthritis in my thigh. My belief is false, because although I have a grasp of the concept 'arthritis', I misapply the concept in this case. One can only get arthritis in the joints. But now suppose on Twin Earth, my type identical twin or doppelganger, with all the same intrinsic psychological states as myself, applies the word 'arthritis' in the same way, but on Twin Earth it is the practice in my twin's community to apply the word in such a way that it can be correctly applied to cover many rheumatoid complaints, including the disease my Twin and I have in our thighs. Whilst I have a false belief that I have arthritis in my thigh, then, my twin has a true belief. But, Burge argues, this is because my twin and I do not share the same beliefs -- the concept expressed by the use of the word 'arthritis' by me is not the concept expressed by the use of the same word by my twin. Yet by hypothesis our intrinsic psychological states are the same. The conclusion that this thought experiment seems to point to, then, is that the beliefs ascribable to a person depends upon the linguistic practices of their community, and is not simply a function of what goes on 'in their heads', their intrinsic psychological states.

Burge's argument has a wider focus than Putnam's in that whereas Putnam's argument deals exclusively with so-called natural kind terms, Burge's argument can be seen to cover any any term that someone could mistakenly

misuse. Again, this may cause some problems for the sceptic. The sceptic appears to assume that we can consider belief contents independently from all social and environmental considerations. On the sceptic's picture, I could have all the beliefs I have now without my occupying any kind of linguistic community at all. But on Burge's account, if I did not occupy such a community I could be said to have any beliefs at all, for their would be nothing by which to individuate their contents.

What then are we to make of Putnam and Burge's arguments? Do they succeed in showing content to be externalistically individuated?

It seems to me that their thought experiments rest on not altogether convincing intuitions about natural kinds and the relation between conventional meaning and speaker meaning.

Firstly, let us consider Putnam's claim that because the extension of my use of the term 'water' is H_2O and the extension of my twins is XYZ then 'water' doesn't mean on my lips what it does on my twins (by the principle that a change of extension is sufficient for a change in meaning). One question that clearly arises here is why should we take the microstructure of the substance being referred to as the relevant feature by which to establish that my use of 'water' and my twin's use of 'water' truly differ in extension? Why not say that all that Putnam's example really shows is that the extension

of 'water' can potentially cover not only substances with the chemical structure H_2O but also other chemical structures as well? After all, isn't heavy water (D_2O) a kind of water?

Of course, there are terms where microstructure would clearly seem to be the relevant feature by which to establish a change of extension, such as the names of the elements (gold, lead, helium etc.). So couldn't Putnam's example just be changed so as to include such substances?

Tim Crane considers such a case.[5] Aluminium and molybdenum are two practically indistinguishable metals. Let us suppose that whereas on Twin Earth my type-identical twin uses the term 'aluminium' to refer to molybdenum, I use the same term to refer to aluminium, though of course there is no difference in our intrinsic psychological states. Does this show, then, that there is a difference in the concepts that my twin and myself possess? Does this show that, despite our intrinsic or 'narrow' psychological states being type-identical, we have different beliefs expressed by our use of sentences containing the word 'aluminium'?

Crane argues that we need not take the argument this way. For, he asks, why should we not say that neither my twin nor myself has a full understanding of the meanings of the words we use to express our beliefs? The beliefs we have are the same, and contain the concept whose extension covers both aluminium and molybdenum -- Crane

calls it molyminium for convenience. Molyminium distinguishes less finely across substances than do the concepts aluminium and molybdenum, and Crane's idea is that what this changed version of Putnam's example shows is that neither my twin nor myself have beliefs containing the latter two concepts, only the former.

Crane makes a similar point against Burge's arthritis thought experiment. Burge's thought experiment rests on the idea that I could have a false belief that I had arthritis in my thigh whilst attributing to me a grasp of the concept arthritis. However, Crane asks whether my error can simply be explained by attributing to me a false belief of the form 'I have arthritis in my thigh' is the correct sentence to express my belief, where my belief does not actually contain the public concept arthritis at all, but a different concept (call it tharthritis) which carries under its extension both arthritis and whatever disease I have in my thigh. How are we to decide which attribution is correct? Certainly my having the false belief 'I have arthiritis in my thigh' is the right sentence to express this belief is sufficient to explain why my utterance of 'I have arthritis in my thigh' is false. And ex hypothesi there is no non-linguistic behavioural evidence which one could appeal to here to show that I had a grasp of the concept arthritis rather than tharthritis. Indeed, given that I show no general ability to discrminate between arthritis

and tharthritis, it would seem that the latter attribution -- attributing the false belief 'I have arthritis in my thigh' is the correct sentence to express my belief -- is the preferable option.

No doubt much more needs to be said here. The literature is vast. Nevertheless, I do think these points sufficiently call into question the convincingness of the intuitions governing our responses to Putnam and Burge's thought experiments. This is not to say, however, that there may not be other grounds for accepting an externalist account of the mind. Indeed, I think the strongest grounds for accepting such an account rest on, not twin earth thought experiments and the like, but on more general considerations in semantic theory. It is to such considertations that we shall now turn our attention.

6.4 Davidson on Radical Interpretation

Radical interpretation, for Davidson, is concerned with the necessary conditions for understanding the speech of others. These conditions are revealed, above all, through a consideration of the essential methods by which an interpreter comes to understand speakers of an alien tongue (without the aid of previously constructed translation manuals etc.). For it is in this context, according to Davidson, that the basis of all understanding, even of speakers of our own language,

becomes manifest. He says:

> The problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign: it surfaces for speakers of the same language in the form of the question, how can it be determined that the language is the same? Speakers of the same language can go on the assumption that for them the same expressions are to be interpreted in the same way, but this does not indicate what justifies the assumption. All understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation.[6]

According to Davidson, at the most basic level, it is necessary for an interpreter to detect what sentences a speaker is caused to hold true. The idea here is quite simple. If a speaker is caused to hold true the sentence 'It is raining' regularly and consistently under conditions when it is raining (and perhaps when error about its raining is explicable on the part of the speaker) an interpreter can come to understand that sentence as having the meaning it is raining. By knowing when a speaker is caused to hold true a particular sentence-type, an interpreter can assign truth conditions to that sentence-type (e.g. 'It is raining' is true iff it is raining), and it is on this basis that an interpreter comes to understand what that sentence means.

Now, Davidson notes that a speaker holds a sentence true because of two things: what the sentence means, and what he (the speaker) believes. Thus, to use our example, a speaker holds true the sentence 'It is raining' because the sentence means it is raining, and because he believes it is raining. To come to an understanding of the meaning of a sentence uttered by a speaker, then, an interpreter

has to know what the speaker believes. To know that the sentence 'It is raining' uttered by our speaker means it is raining, an interpreter would have to know that the speaker believed that it was raining. But how is an interpreter to ascribe such a belief to a speaker without having some prior grasp of the meaning of his utterance? Our only grasp of what people believe, according to Davidson, is fundamentally through an understanding of what they say. But then we can only come to an understanding of what they say, it would seem, if we know what they believe. Belief and meaning seem inextricably bound together in this respect. As Davidson puts it, '...we cannot infer the belief without knowing the meaning, and have no chance of inferring the meaning without the belief.'[7]

It is here, then, that the famous so-called principle of charity comes into play. The interpreter, according to Davidson, has no option but to assume that in such circumstances the speaker believes what he (the interpreter) believes. Thus assuming that the speaker believes what he believes about the conditions under which the speaker holds true the sentences that he does, the meanings of those sentences can be fixed. Davidson argues that, given the interdependence between belief and meaning, unless we are charitable in the beliefs we ascribe to speakers, we have no hope in coming to understand the meanings of the sentences they utter. He

says:

> The method is intended to solve the interdependence of belief and meaning by holding belief constant while solving for meaning. This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right.[8]

It is important to note here that in interpreting the speaker's utterance of the sentence 'It is raining' it is not merely necessary that an interpreter ascribe to the speaker the belief that it is raining, but also a whole host of attendent beliefs. To ascribe to him the belief that it is raining depends on what other beliefs can be ascribed to him: 'Beliefs are identified and described only within a dense pattern of beliefs.'[9] In particular, an interpreter would have to ascribe to a speaker other beliefs about the about the conditions in the world within his perceptual environment, and many other general beliefs about the nature of the world. In short, interpretation requires a general assumption of world-view between interpreter and interpretee. One can, of course, make sense of cultural differences. But only, Davidson argues, against a general background of shared belief.

What has all this got to do with externalism? The idea is that if, as Davidson claims, the assignment of truth conditions to sentences is the key to our understanding those sentences, then it would seem that it is the conditions in the world under which particular sentence-

types are held true which individuates their propositional content, their meaning. For Davidson, then, in the most basic cases, the conditions under which we are typically caused to hold a sentence true determines the meaning of the sentence and the content of the belief that it expresses. To put the point schematically, for Davidson the following externalist principle holds true (at least for our 'most basic' beliefs):

P1 Necessarily, for any belief-type B and object-type O, where B is about O, then token instances of B are typically caused by token instances of O.

On the basis of this principle, then, Davidson holds that if our most basic beliefs only have the content they have because they are typically caused by the objects and events they are about, then our most basic beliefs about the world around us cannot be radically mistaken. Davidson says:

> ...as long as we adhere to the basic intuition that in the simplest cases words and thoughts refer to what causes them, it is clear that it cannot happen that most of our plainest beliefs about what exists in the world are false. The reason is that we do not first form concepts and then discover what they apply to; rather, in the basic cases the application determines the content of the concept. An interpreter who starts from scratch -- who does not already understand the language of a speaker -- cannot independently discover what an agents beliefs are about, and then ask whether they are true. This is because the situations which normally cause a belief determine the conditions in which it is true.[10]

6.5 Davidson's Omniscient Interpreter

The move to a full blown externalism, as represented by P1 above, from considerations of what is necessary to interpretation, might be thought to be rather dubious. It might be the case that for speakers to interpret one another they have to share the same beliefs etc., and on that basis assign meanings to one another's utterances on what they take to be the causes of their beliefs. But one can imagine a kind of sceptic interjecting here by asking, 'Could it not be the case that speakers and interpreters, despite having to share the same beliefs, are fundamentally wrong about the nature of the world?' If this was the case it would not follow from the fact that interpretation involved assigning meaning on the basis of the believed causes of another's beliefs that content was determined by the actual causes of those beliefs.

To illustrate this, try to imagine the following scenario. Two brains in vats are wired together such that communication between them is possible. That is, they both have similar experiences of what they take to be slightly different perspectives of a shared objective world. Thus when one brain utters 'It is raining' the other interprets this utterance in terms of his experience of water falling from the sky and takes this to be the cause of the other's utterance and interprets that utterance accordingly, i.e. as meaning <u>it is</u>

raining. Both brains, then, share common beliefs, and successfully interpret one another, yet both are radically mistaken about the nature of the world they inhabit.

Davidson seems aware that a criticism along these lines might be levelled against him. Thus he comments:

> It may seem that the argument so far shows only that good interpretation breeds concurrence, while leaving quite open the question whether what is agreed upon is true. And certainly agreement, no matter how widespread, does not guarantee truth. This observation misses the point of the argument, however. The basic claim is that much community of belief is needed to provide a basis for communication or understanding; the extended claim should then be that objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed must be true if some of what is agreed is false.[11]

To back up the extended claim that interpretation requires not merely agreement, but true belief, Davidson goes on to produce an argument -- the so-called Omniscient Interpreter Argument (henceforth OIA). He says:

> We do not need to be omniscient to interpret, but there is nothing absurd in the idea of an omniscient interpreter; he attributes beliefs to others, and interprets their speech on the basis of his own beliefs, just as the rest of us do. Since he does this as the rest of us do, he perforce finds as much agreement as is needed to make sense of his attributions and interpretations; and in this case, of course, what is agreed is by hypothesis true. But it is now plain why massive error about the world is simply unintelligible, for to suppose it intelligible is to suppose there could be an interpreter (the omniscient one) who correctly interpreted someone else as being massively mistaken, and this we have shown to be impossible.[12]

These remarks are rather opaque and bear further

investigation. Not only is the structure of the argument unclear, but it also embodies certain assumptions which need to be made explicit if we are to properly assess its validity.

Firstly, it is important in understanding the argument to appreciate that the idea of omniscience at work here does not appear to be one of absolute all-knowingness. The omniscient interpreter doesn't know absolutely everything. This is true, I take it, by the very fact that he (or she) is an interpreter, and attributes beliefs to others 'just as the rest of us do'. He does not have prior or privileged knowledge of the meanings and contents of our beliefs and utterances, but is reliant on the same methods of interpretation as ourselves. We should suppose the omniscient interpreter, I take it then, to be omniscient about everything bar the meanings and contents of the utterances and beliefs of others.

Another important assumption in the argument is that we have to suppose that the omniscient interpreter can interpret us. The connection between the idea of an omniscient interpreter, i.e. an interpreter with only true beliefs, and the idea that our beliefs must be largely true is clearly supplied by the idea that we can be interpreted by such a being only insofar as we share beliefs with him which are largely true 'by his lights', i.e. beliefs which (by his being omniscient) in actual

fact are true.

The importance of this latter assumption cannot be underestimated, and indeed it might seem as though there is something disingenuous about the whole argument if we have to assume that we can be interpreted by the omniscient interpreter. For suppose in actual fact we had largely false beliefs -- a possibility, of course, which the argument is attempting to rule out. Wouldn't this, on Davidson's terms, render us uninterpretable by the omniscient interpreter? And doesn't this show that if we have to assume that we can be interpreted by the omniscient interpreter for the argument to get off the ground, then the whole question of the overall truth of our beliefs is simply being begged?

It might be suggested that Davidson will not allow for the idea that the omniscient interpreter may not be able to interpreter us, for he regards the idea of languages which are not largely intertranslatable as incoherent. On Davidson's account, we cannot make sense of the idea of there being total failure of translation between languages, and hence for it to be impossible for speakers of any language to interpret one another. Thus he says, '...nothing...could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted in our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity was not speech behaviour'. The problem is, however, that his main grounds for holding this view very

much rests upon his seeing our understanding of notions such as interpretation, meaning, content etc., as relying on our understanding of the notion of truth, and vice versa. But this embodies the very question at issue here: Does the possibility of interpretation/meaning require speakers to share beliefs which are largely true, or is mere agreement in belief sufficient for interpetation/meaning? If the former claim is true, then the idea of there being speakers which even an omniscient interpreter couldn't interpret does, indeed, seem ruled out. But if interpretation requires only agreement, then it seems perfectly possible that there should be speakers the omniscient interpreter is unable to interpret, i.e. speakers who share mostly false beliefs. All this suggests, therefore, that Davidson's OIA presupposes what it sets out to establish: the connection between meaning and truth (as opposed to agreement).

So much, then, for the assumption of interpretability in Davidson's OIA. Given this assumption, however, what is the form of the argument, and even given the assumption of interpretability, can the argument achieve what it sets out to establish?

The omniscient interpreter has to, like the rest of us, maximize agreement between himself and speakers by the principle of charity, such that to be interpreted by such a being would imply that he attributes beliefs which are largely true. That is, if he has to attribute, by the

principle of charity, beliefs which are true 'by his lights', and given his restricted omniscience what is true 'by his lights' is true, then he must attribute a preponderance of true beliefs.

But what does this show us? At best, it would only seem to show that if there is an omniscient interpreter who interprets us, then most of our beliefs must be true. But we have no reason to believe that there is such an interpreter, and hence we are given no reason to believe that most of our beliefs are true. If this is all there is to Davidson's argument then it quite clearly fails.[13]

Davidson's argument, however, appears to be more subtle. The claim is not that there is an omniscient interpreter, but that 'there is nothing absurd in the idea of an omniscient interpreter', or that 'it (is) intelligible to suppose there could be an (omniscient) interpreter'. Davidson's argument seems to rest up the idea that an omniscient interpreter could possibly exist, and not on the much stronger claim that such an interpreter actually exists.

Let us imagime, therefore, a possible world exactly like our own except for the fact that it contains an omniscient interpreter. Thus in this supposed possible world we (or our counterparts) have the same sets of beliefs that we have in the actual world, and the truth-value determining conditions of those beliefs are the same. The omniscient interpreter interprets our

utterances by ascribing to us beliefs largely consistent with his own, as the principle of charity requires. And since the beliefs of the omniscient interpreter are true, it follows that most of our beliefs in such a possible world could not be false. Since, therefore, by hypothesis the only difference between the actual world and this supposed possible world is that the latter contains an omniscient interpreter, it follows that our beliefs must be largely true in the actual world. That is, the truth-value determining conditions of our beliefs are the same in both worlds.

The problem with this reading of Davidson's OIA, as Vrinda Dalmiya points out[14], is that one cannot just stipulate that there is a possible world containing an omniscient interpreter where our beliefs and their truth-value determining conditions are the same as the actual world. Suppose, for example, a supposed possible world containing a deluded interpreter who holds all and only false beliefs (apart from the ones he comes to have about the meanings and contents of our thoughts and utterances). Again, our beliefs and their truth-value determining conditions are stipulated to be the same as the actual world. <u>If there is</u> such a possible world, then by the same count as most of our beliefs must be true if there is a possible world containing an omniscient interpreter, it follows that most of our beliefs must be false. Our beliefs cannot be mostly true and mostly

false. So either there is a possible world the same as ours with an omniscient interpreter, or there is a possible world the same as ours with a deluded interpreter. But how are we to tell which world is truly possible? Surely only by knowing whether or not most of our beliefs are true or false. Thus in order for the above argument to go through, we need to presuppose its conclusion, i.e. we need to presuppose that most of our beliefs are true.

In short, I think it is difficult to see how the idea of an omniscient interpreter can be of use to Davidson here. Indeed, even as sympathetic a commentator as J.E. Malpas doubts the validity or even coherence of the idea of an omniscient interpreter in the context of Davidson's semantics ('The dynamism and indeterminacy of the psychological casts doubt on such a notion...'), though, according to Malpas, Davidson's appeal to the idea of an omniscient interpreter is idle in any case, for he already has enough machinery in place to show how the idea of our having mostly false beliefs is incoherent given that his account implies a rejection of the scheme-content distinction. Malpas says:

> ...whatever the merits of Davidson's use of the notion of omniscience, it is by no means clear that it is needed to establish the desired conclusion. Much of the force of the argument for the truth of our beliefs, as it derives from a consideration of the nature of interpretation, consists in the recognition of the inseparability of 'the world' or the speaker's environment or 'truth' from the speaker's utterances and beliefs. The notion of a speaker who is massively mistaken is the notion of a world radically divorced

> from the beliefs and utterances of a particular speaker. Yet such separation is just what Davidson maintains is unintelligible, and he can maintain this without any recourse to the notion of an omniscient interpreter, for this is just what lies behind the rejection of the scheme-content distinction.[15]

Is Malpas right here, however? Does Davidson's rejection of the scheme-content distinction render his appeal to the omniscient interpreter idle?

It might be claimed that an appeal to Davidson's rejection of the scheme-content distinction is of no help at all in answering the kind of sceptic we are considering here, for such a sceptic will just point out that Davidson's rejection of the scheme-content distinction is largely bound up with his acceptance of externalism in the first place. Davidson rejects any wholesale separation of 'the world' or 'truth' from the utterances and beliefs of speakers precisely because he sees the contents and meanings of those beliefs and utterances as being determined, in a deep sense, by the objects and events outside of speakers' heads. So one cannot appeal to his rejection of the scheme-content distinction to save his externalism.

Nevertheless, one might now question why we should accept the sceptic when he claims that speakers/believers could share the same beliefs yet be largely mistaken about their environment. What are the grounds of this claim? Does the sceptic have an argument for his scepticism?

In the last chapter, when considering Wittgenstein's naturalistic stance in On Certainty, it was suggested that Wittgenstein should not be viewed as begging the question against the external world sceptic for adopting such a stance, for the argument which leads to a sceptical conclusion derives its force from adopting just such a stance. The sceptic shows, from a standpoint where the existence of external objects etc. is not initially in question, that our lacking knowledge of those objects is paradoxically already implied by what we ordinarily think we know. This is why scepticism is of interest.

Can the same, however, be said of the kind of sceptic being considered here? Our hypothesis was of two brains in vats sharing the same beliefs about an objective world like ours, and succesfully interpreting each other on the basis of what they (falsely) took to be the causes of those beliefs, i.e. everyday physical objects and events, and not computer input etc. This was supposed to block the idea that the actual causes of our beliefs need be their content determinants. But this assumes at the very outset a possibilty that Davidson would deny -- i.e. the idea that brains in vats could have beliefs which were not largely true. The argument for such a scepticism does not start from, and hence reach its sceptical conclusion, on the basis of premises which Davidson is bound to accept. Davidson is quite entitled to just reject the hypothesis which motivates the kind of

scepticism being considered here. There is no common starting point between Davidson and the sceptic to force Davidson into a quandary. As such it would seem that the sceptic's position lacks any real force in blocking the move from a consideration of the conditions of radical interpretation to a full blown externalism as represented by P1. In short, Davidson need not have appealed to the idea of an omniscient interpreter to facilitate such a move.

6.6. Davidson's Principle of Charity and Verificationism

A similar line of argument to that above can be urged against the view that the anti-sceptical force of Davidson's position is seriously threatened insofar as the principle of charity, central to Davidson's anti-sceptical argument, embodies a species of verificationism.

In chapter 2 we considered the idea that transcendental arguments involve somekind of commitment to verificationism, rendering them superfluous in combatting scepticism. Davidson's position can be broadly charaterized as transcendental, I think, in that in spelling out the conditions under which interpretation is possible, he is concerned with the necessary conditions of thought, or at least with the conditions under which certain kinds of thoughts can be ascribed to thinkers. He

has certainly been willing to employ the term 'transcendental' in reference to his own work, and many other philosophers have also emphasized the transcendental aspect of his philosophy.[16]

However, how far is it true to say that Davidson is guilty, along with certain other philosophers employing transcendental arguments, of a commitment to verificationism, and how far does this threaten the anti-sceptical force of his position?

We have seen that Davidson argues that interpretation requires, in the most basic cases, that we take the utterances of a speaker (and the contents of the beliefs those utterances express) to be about the objects and events the speaker is responding to. This is a point about <u>what we must do</u> to interpret another's utterances and ascribe certain beliefs to them. But, it might be objected, why assume that interpretation and ascription here should be generally successful? From the fact that one is constrained to assigning meaning in such-and-such a way, why should it necessarily follow that the meanings that one is constrained to assign are generally correct? Perhaps the only way to guarantee the correctness of one's interpretations here would be to assume a premise to the effect that certain relevant features involved in the epistemology of assigning meaning are identical with the ontological determinants of meaning. When these epistemological constraints are concerned with truth

conditions, i.e. the conditions under which a sentence is held true by a speaker, then we have a position very close to traditional verificationism. For the conditions under which a sentence can be deemed to be true or false (verified or falsified) are those conditions which determine the meaning of that sentence.

Davidson's position in this sense, I think, does have certain affinities with verificationism. The question is, however, whether this really threatens the anti-sceptical force of his position. This might be thought to be the case, in particular, if his species of verificationism is taken as just an assumed premise in his argument, for without any support for such a premise the sceptic may just reject it. However, I think Davidson's position has a more secure status than just an assumption.

The idea that there could be a fundamental gap between the meanings and beliefs we are constrained to assign to speakers and what those speakers actually mean and believe probably gains much of its appeal from assuming an individualist view of the mind. The idea might be this: it is what goes on in speakers' heads (in their minds) that is fundamentally relevant to what they really believe and what they mean by their words. Our only basis for knowing what is going on in their heads is by knowing what they say and how they behave. But, of course, we can only know what they say if we know what they believe, so we have to assume that they believe what we believe etc.

in order to know what they say (Davidson's principle of charity). But whilst this is what we must assume, this falls short of our actually knowing for certain what they're thinking. What is going on in their heads could be radically different to what goes on in our heads in such conditions, though much of the behavioural output 'fits' with our own. In which case there is no guarantee that in interpreting speakers in the way we do that we are interpreting them correctly. An assumed verification principle could, of course, supply such a guarantee. But why assume such a principle?

However, it seems to me that Davidson's position does not amount to his just assuming verificationism to supply such a guarantee, but by his showing the individualist view of the mind which the objection largely rests on to be a philosophical invention, contrary to our actual practice of assigning meaning and content to peoples' beliefs and utterances.

Davidson's theory of interpretation attempts to bring to the surface the fundamental mechanisms by which we come to ascribe beliefs etc. A Wittgensteinian might put it by saying that he attempts to show us the 'hinges' on which the language-game of assigning meaning and content turns. An essential 'hinge' in the language-game, on Davidson's account, is '...the basic intuition that in the simplest cases words and thoughts refer to what causes them'.[17] In other words, according to Davidson, an

externalist view of the mind is a presupposition of our practice in assigning meaning and content. Think about it. If we assumed that what went on in peoples' heads were the only fundamental factors in determining meaning and content, then the certitude by which we readily ascribe beliefs to others and interpret the meanings of their words would be undermined. If we seriously took our belief ascriptions to be so 'underdetermined by the data' that they were compatible with the people to whom we were ascribing such beliefs having radically different beliefs then our whole confidence in the language-game would be seriously threatened. It is because, according to Davidson, that (implicitly) we hold the objects and events typically causing such beliefs to play an individuating role with regard to their contents that we ascribe beliefs to others with a degree of certitude and confidence.

On such an account, then, the idea that there is a gap to be bridged by means of a verificationist premise doesn't get a foothold. The individualist view of the mind which displaces the gap in the first place hasn't come into play. It is only when we illegitimately start importing aspects of philosophical theory into the account that an epistemological gap between our method of belief ascription and what people actually believe is introduced. It seems, then, that far from Davidson assuming assuming a certain kind of verificationism to

bridge the gap in question, it is the objector who takes on board a certain assumptions about the nature of the mind to create such a gap -- assumptions, which Davidson attempts to show, have no basis in our ordinary practice.

6.7 Scepticism and First Person Authority

In the last two sections I have argued that an externalist view of the mind, as represented by principle P1, does appear to be a consequence of Davidson's theory of radical interpretation, and that the idea that the theory only calls for agreement in belief rather than truth is without foundation. Davidson's appeal to the idea of an omniscient interpreter to secure this, however, was found to be worthless. I have also claimed that whilst Davidson's position might appear to have certain affinities with verificationism, this does not seriously threaten the anti-sceptical force of his position.

Nevertheless, it might still be claimed that an appeal to P1 alone is not sufficient to answer the sceptic. The claim might be made that even whilst Davidson's theory does seem to have the consequence that our most basic beliefs about the world must be true, this is still not enough to answer the sceptic.

Consider, again, the brain in a vat hypothesis. A brain in a vat, it is argued, could have type-identical

beliefs and experiences to myself despite those beliefs and experiences having radically different external causes from what I take to be the causes of my own beliefs and experiences, i.e ordinary everyday physical objects. This is implied by the 'purely subjective' conception of experience we considered in the last chapter. If this is the case, then, the sceptic asks, how do I know that I am not in fact a brain in a vat? And if I cannot know this, how can I be said to have knowledge of the world around me?

Now on Davidson's account it would seem that the sceptic's illustration here is fundamentally flawed. For a difference of external environment causing beliefs, according to Davidson, results in a difference in the content of those beliefs (see P1). A brain in a vat, then, on Davidson's account could not have radically false beliefs about its environment. A brain in a vat (if such an entity could be construed as having beliefs at all) could only possess predominantly true beliefs about the vat-computer environment it inhabits.

Can I know, then, on Davidson's account, that I am not a brain in a vat? It has been suggested that there is a difficulty here. I could certainly know that I was not a brain in a vat if I could know that I didn't have beliefs predominantly about a vat-computer environment. But could I know this on Davidson's terms without having somekind of prior knowledge of what objects and events typically

caused my beliefs.

Anthony Brueckner has claimed that the anti-sceptical value of Davidson's position is severely limited because of this. He says:

> All that has been shown is that no matter whether or not I am a brain in a vat, my beliefs have content such as to make them true. Either I am a normal embodied human being holding true beliefs with normal content, or I am a brain in a vat holding true beliefs with strange content (such as that a certain computer state now exists). Unless I can claim to know what my belief contents are, I cannot claim to know that I am not a brain in a vat but rather a sitting embodied human. And I cannot claim to know what my beliefs' contents are unless I claim to know what their causal determinants are. To claim the latter knowledge is to beg the question against the sceptic.[18]

Brueckner's objection here exploits the difficulty which some philosophers have thought externalist accounts of content have in accommodating any notion of privileged access to the contents of our thoughts. If content is necessarily individuated by objects and events in the external world, i.e. the objects and events which typically cause our beliefs, how could we have any kind of privileged/authoritative/a priori knowledge of the contents of our own beliefs without having such knowledge of those content-individuating objects and events, which of course we lack?

We might illustrate the difficulty here by means of Davidson's own analogy which we considered earlier when discussing Putnam. Suppose I have a rash on my arm which has been caused by over-exposure to the sun, i.e. the rash is a case of sunburn. That rash is individuated as

sunburn, we might say, by means of its being caused by the sun in this way. It could have the same intrinsic properties, but where it was not caused by over-exposure to the sun, then it would not be a case of sunburn. We might put this by saying that sunburn is externalistically individuated in terms of its cause (the sun) in a similar way that the contents of our beliefs are held by Davidson to be externalistically individuated in terms of their typical causes.

How then can I know that the rash on my arm is a case of sunburn? Well it would seem that I can only know that it is sunburn if I know that it has been caused by the sun. No inspection of its intrinsic properties will put me in a position to know that it is a case of sunburn -- for its having those properties is quite consistent with its having some other cause and not being sunburn at all. So it must also be the case, it might be claimed, with the contents of our thoughts if they are externalistically individuated. We can only know their contents if we know their typical causes. But this seems problematic. For it is surely the case that we are better placed to know the contents of our own thoughts (at least our own present conscious thoughts) than others are placed to know the contents of those thoughts. There lacks the same capacity for error in our beliefs about the contents of our own thoughts that exists in our beliefs about the contents of the thoughts of other

people. But can externalism accommodate such a notion? For if my knowing the contents of my own thoughts depends upon my knowing their typical causes then there seems no reason to suppose that I am better placed to know those causes (and hence the contents of my thoughts) than anyone else.

The problem is accentuated when knowledge of the external world is in question. For any supposed rebuttal of a sceptical hypothesis, such as the brain in a vat hypothesis, appealing to the identificatory role of the typical causes of our beliefs with regard to their content can only, it would seem, beg the question at issue. I can only know that I am not a brain in a vat if I can know that I do not have beliefs about a vat-computer environment. But I can only know this, given that the typical causes of my beliefs identify their contents, if I know that my beliefs are not the effects of such an environment. But that is precisely what has to be shown. Davidson himself puts the point well:

> Those who accept the thesis that the contents of propositional attitudes are partly identified in terms of external factors seem to have a problem similar to the sceptic who finds we may be altogether mistaken about the 'outside' world. In the present case, ordinary scepticism of the senses is avoided by supposing the world itself more or less correctly determines the contents of thoughts about the world...But scepticism is not defeated; it is only displaced onto knowledge of our own minds. Our ordinary beliefs about the external world are (on this view) directed onto the world, but we don't know what we believe.[19]

Is this, however, truly a problem for the externalist?

Can the externalist accommodate a notion a notion of privileged access into his view of the mind?

Davidson thinks so. Indeed, Davidson thinks that authoritative knowledge of the contents of our own thoughts (or as he calls it first person authority, henceforth FPA) is not merely consistent with his externalism, but is essentially explained by it. The explanation of FPA, Davidson holds, simply follows from the truth of P1 above, i.e. that in the most basic cases a person's beliefs are about the objects and events which typically cause them. He says:

> The explanation (of FPA) comes with the realization that what a person's words mean depends in the most basic cases on the kinds of objects and events that have caused the person to hold the words to be applicable; similarly for what the person's thoughts are about. An interpreter of another's words must depend upon scattered information, fortunate training, and imagainative surmise in coming to understand the other. The agent herself, however, is not in a position to wonder whether she is generally using her own words to apply to the right objects and events, since whatever she regularly does apply them to gives her words the meaning they have and her thoughts the contents they have...unless there is a presumption that the speaker knows what she means, i.e. is getting her own language right, there would be nothing for an interpreter to interpret.[20]

Now, these remarks bear further investigation, for on the face of it they seem puzzling. The conclusion that Davidson is aiming to establish is the idea that FPA is a condition of meaning or interpretation. Generally speaking, according to Davidson, if I mean anything at all by my utterances, i.e. if my utterances are interpretable, then I must know what I mean and think. I

cannot wonder what my words mean or what my thoughts are about in the same way as an interpreter can wonder without the whole idea of my meaning or thinking anything collapsing. So let us say that Davidson is attempting to establish the conclusion,

> (C) Necessarily, if one's beliefs and utterances are contentful or meaningful then one has <u>authoritative knowledge</u> of their contents and meanings.

What then are the basic premises from which Davidson attempts to derive this conclusion? They would appear to be as follows:

> (1) Necessarily, the contents and meanings of one's beliefs and utterances are individuated by the kinds of objects and events which typically cause them.
>
> (2) Necessarily, if one's beliefs and utterances are contentful and meaningful, then one must <u>know</u> their contents and meanings.
>
> (3) It is always possible that an interpreter could be mistaken about the contents and meanings of one's thoughts and utterances.

Let us grant that (2) and (3) together imply (C), and that (1) and (3) are true. The premise which requires further investigation is (2). Why does Davidson think (2) to be true?

From the above passage it would appear that Davidson thinks that (1) fairly straightforwardly implies (2), and the reason he thinks this would seem to consist in the fact that if (1) is true, then so is the following:

> (1a) Necessarily, if one's beliefs and uttertances are contentful or meaningful, then one must be (as Davidson puts it) <u>getting one's language right</u>.

Now, it is not altogether clear how Davidson conceives of the relationship between (1a) and (2). In particular, it is ambiguous whether Davidson thinks that (1a) and (2) are in some way equivalent, or whether he thinks that (1a) implies (2). However, it seems to me that if Brueckner is right in holding the view that Davidson's account of content (as stated in (1) and P1) involves a commitment to the following:

> (4) Necessarily, one can only <u>know</u> the contents and meanings of one's beliefs and utterances if one knows the objects and events which typically cause them

then it is difficult to see how Davidson can hold to there being any kind of necessary connection between (1a) and (2).

Davidson is clearly right, I think, in seeing (1a) as following from (1), because on his terms getting one's language right simply consists in one's being caused to apply words regularly and consistently to particular kinds of objects and events in one's environment; those objects and events being individuative of the meanings of those words. But one might wonder what this has got to do with (2), i.e. knowing the contents and meanings of one's thoughts and utterances? If Davidson is truly committed to (4), as Brueckner seems to claim, then his account clearly opens up the possibility that one could be caused to apply one's words in a certain way (by the presence of certain kinds of objects and events) without necessarily knowing what they mean, i.e. without having the requisite knowledge of the objects and events causing one's verbal responses as required by (4). One could be caused to say something, it would seem, without necessarily knowing what it is one is saying.

The question that really should concern us here, then, is whether Davidson is committed to (4). Does his commitment to (1) really imply a commitment to (4)?

Davidson's externalist position is essentially an ontological view -- a view about what it is that gives our most basic thoughts the contents that they have. And

one might wonder why the view that such thoughts owe their contents to their typical causes should imply the epistemological view that we can only know their contents by first knowing those causes. What supplies the connection between this ontological view and the epistemological one? The connection is obviously not a direct logical one. So we need to look closer at what has tempted philosophers such as Brueckner to suppose there to be a connection between these views.

It is here, I think, that Davidson's position comes into clearer focus. For Davidson argues that this connection is supplied by a faulty picture of the mind. If we return to the sunburn example considered earlier we might begin to appreciate this. It does seem true in this case that it is necessary to know that a state of one's skin is sunburn that one should first know that it is caused by the sun, where sunburn is what it is because it has such a cause. Here, then, there does seem to be a necessary connection between the ontology of the case and the epistemology. It is because we are tempted by a similar picture with regard to what it is to know our own thoughts -- where this involves the inspection of some object -- that Davidson thinks we are led to think to suppose there is such a connection here too. If we get rid of the idea that thoughts are like objects 'before the mind' which the mind inspects in coming to know them, then Davidson suggests there is no reason to suppose that

we must first know the typical causes of our most basic thoughts in order to know their contents. FPA is threatened if we retain a grip on such a picture and embrace externalism, for 'if to be in a state of mind is for the mind to be in some relation like grasping to an object, then whatever helps determine what object it is must equally be grasped if the mind is to know what state it is in'.[21] However, an appreciation of the role that external factors play with regard to the determination or individuation of thoughts does not threaten FPA if we give up this picture. Thus Davidson suggests:

> Most of us long ago gave up the idea of perceptions, sense data, the flow of experience, as things 'given' to the mind; we should treat propositional attitudes in the same way. Of course people have beliefs, wishes, doubts, and so forth; but to allow this is not to suggest that beliefs, wishes and doubts are entities in or before the mind, or that being in such states requires there to be corresponding mental objects.[22]

However, whilst Davidson is keen to rid us of the view that thoughts are kinds of mental objects in or before the mind, Davidson still clearly views propositional attitudes as states which have a causal history. Later on in this chapter I shall suggest, with particular regard to the notion of experience, that a taxonomy of the mental in terms of states and events is very much allied to the problem of scepticism. But, furthermore, it is not clear whether Davidson really avoids the problem of FPA by denying that thoughts are kinds of object if he persists in talking of propositional attitudes as states.

To return to the sunburn example, sunburn is a state of my skin, not an object. Yet here its being recognized as sunburn requires I know its causal history. Similarly, my beliefs are states of my mind (or brain), so if their contents are individuated externalistically in terms of their typical causes, is it not necessary for me to know their typical causes to know their contents? Does not their being states supply the necessity of my knowing their typical causes in order to know their contents? How can the mind know its own states if this doesn't involve 'inspecting' them in some way, and grasping their contents in terms of their relations to objects and events in the world?

These maybe psuedo-problems for the externalist. The trouble is, however, that whilst Davidson is keen to emphasize what knowing one's own mind doesn't consist in (grasping an object etc.), his positive account seems to amount to nothing more than a few cursory remarks about 'getting one's language right'. Certainly someone's regularly and consistently applying words correctly is normally considered both necessary and sufficient for our supposing that they know what they mean (consider the conditions under which we accredit a child with mastering the meaning of a word). But much more needs to be said here, e.g. about the connection between thought and language, and the relation between knowing what a word means and knowing what one thinks, before the problem of

FPA can be satisfactorily answered. So far as I can see, Davidson's account here is seriously lacking.

This is not to say, however, that Brueckner's objection stands. There is, I think, something suspect about Brueckner's connecting the problem externalists may have in accounting for FPA with the problem of scepticism.

The tenor of Brueckner's objection appears to embody a prior conception of knowledge as resting ultimately on our knowledge of our own thoughts. That is, it sees first person knowledge as essentially foundational. To recap, Brueckner argues that I can only know that I am not a brain in a vat if I know that I do not have thoughts about a vat-computer environment, which I can only know, on Davidson's account, if I know the typical causes of my thoughts -- this latter knowledge begging the question against the sceptic. But why should this seen as question begging?

I surely know that my thoughts are not caused by a vat-computer environment because I know, with regard to the objects which I now experience, <u>that</u> is a chair, or <u>that</u> is a desk. This knowledge doesn't beg the question against the sceptic on Davidson's account because his view of content does not allow the sceptic to make the claim that we could be caused to think (on most such occassions) that <u>that</u> was a chair, desk etc. without such objects being present to us. That is, Davidson's account

shows an essential premise in the sceptic's argument (as we outlined it in the last chapter) to be false. Thus the claim that I must first know the contents of my thoughts in order to know that I am not a brain in a vat doesn't follow through. My knowledge of the external world hasn't yet been thrown into question. Thus I can appeal to such knowledge to over-rule the idea that I am a brain in a vat.

6.8 Davidson's Social Externalism

So far we have considered Davidson's claim that the contents and meanings of our thoughts and utterances are individuated by the objects and events which typically cause them. I have defended Davidson against an objection that such an externalist position does not really fall out of a consideration of the conditions of interpretation, and argued that the anti-sceptical value of such a position is not threatened by any supposed failure on the externalist's part to accommodate a plausible account of knowledge of content.

I now want to consider another aspect of Davidson's externalism -- what we might call his social externalism. According to Davidson, social factors too play an individuating role with regard to content. In particular, Davidson stresses the role that communication between individuals must play in the determination of the

contents and meanings of their thoughts and utterances.

I shall consider Davidson's social externalism, however, via a rather oblique route. That is, I shall consider his social externalism through a consideration of his claim that sense experience has no theoretical role to play in his account of content. These may seem rather disparate topics, but my reasons for considering together should become clear in due course.

Davidson argues that whilst sense experience does play a causal role with respect to our attitudes, a consideration of experience is theoretically irrelevant to the semanticist or epistemologist. He says:

> ...the senses and their deliverances play no central theoretical role in the account of belief, meaning, and knowledge if the contents of the mind depend upon the causal relations, whatever they may be, between the attitudes and the world.[23]

And he goes onto explain:

> The reason that the senses are of no primary importance to the philosophical account of knowledge is that it is an empirical accident that our ears, eyes, taste buds, tactile and olfactory organs play a causal role in the formation of beliefs about the world. The causal connections between thought and objects and events in the world could have been established in entirely different ways without this making any difference to the contents or veridicality of belief.[24]

Now, in a restricted sense this is obviously true. It is surely only a contingent fact about us that we have the particular sense modalities that we do to put us in touch with the world. Things could have been very different, in ways which we cannot perhaps imagine. But

it does not follow from this that the senses, which as a matter of fact we do have, play only a causal role with respect to our attitudes. I shall argue that on the terms set by Davidson we should regard, what I shall term, experiential facts as playing a individuating role with respect to content. To appreciate this we need to consider a problem facing Davidson's account as it stands.

P1 tells us that, for our most basic beliefs, the objects or events those beliefs are about typically cause those beliefs. Now, one might be tempted to infer from this the following:

P2 Necessarily, for any belief-type B and object-type O, if token instances of B are typically caused by token instances of O then B is about O.

But it is important to grasp for our purposes, however, that P2 doesn't fall out of Davidson's account of content. P2 cannot be a consequence of Davidson's account because for any belief there would seem to be a number of factors typically causally responsible for that belief. If I hold the belief that there's a rabbit, then this is typically caused by there being a rabbit in my immediate environment. But also associated with my having this belief is my having a certain pattern of nerve ending stimulations, which play an equally important causal role

with respect to that belief. My belief, however, is about the rabbit, and not the nerve ending stimulations. So it doesn't follow that just anything typically causally responsible for a belief has a content determining role with respect to that belief. This then leaves us with a puzzle: how are we to individuate those causes which play a content determining role? How are we to pick out those causes which form the objects of beliefs from those which play a causal role yet are not content determining. Let us call this the problem of individuation.

It is to solve (or dissolve) this problem that Davidson argues that social factors must play a role in the individuation of content. According to Davidson, one can only be said to verbally respond to a particular object or event in the nexus of objects and events causally responsible for that response insofar as another (an interpreter) correlates that response with a particular object or event in that nexus. He says:

> ...it is only when an observer consciously correlates the responses of another creature with objects and events in the observer's world that there is any basis for saying the creature is responding to those objects or events (rather than any other source of the creature's stimuli).[25]

We might put this by saying that for Davidson, in the absence of others to correlate verbal responses with particular objects or events causing those responses, there is just no fact of the matter about which objects or events causally responsible for those responses (and

in each case there are many) they can then be said to be intentionally directed towards. And if there is no fact of the matter here, those responses cannot be said to be intentional responses at all -- they are not about anything.[26]

It is not, however, sufficient for a creature to have thoughts about particular objects or events that an interpreter correlate their responses with such objects and events. One way to appreciate this is to appeal to a distinction we drew in chapter 4. For a creature to have thoughts about particular objects and events it has to be not only true of them that they respond to such objects and events, but it also has to be true for them -- they must appreciate that this is what they're doing. It is characteristic of thought that it involves such reflexivity. But given that it is true of them only insofar as an interpreter correlates their responses with such objects and events, for it to be true for them it is necessary that they have cognitive access to the interpreter's responses to their responses. And this, Davidson argues, requires that they be in communicative contact with one another. Thought and communication, for Davidson, are interdependent.

The following quotations set out (roughly) the stages of the argument as I have outlined it above:

> If we consider a single creature by itself, its responses, no matter how complex, cannot show that it is reacting to, or thinking about, events a certain distance away rather than, say, on its skin. The

> solipsist's world can be any size, which is to say, it has no size, it is not a world.[27]
>
> So we can say, as a preliminary to answering the question with which we began, that before anyone can have thoughts there must be another creature (one or more) interacting with the speaker. But of course this cannot be enough, since mere interaction does not show how the interaction matters to the creatures involved. Unless the creatures concerned can be said to react to the interaction there is no way they can take cognitive advantage of the three-way relation which gives content to the idea that they are reacting to one thing rather than another.[28]
>
> The only way of knowing that the second apex, the second creature or person, is reacting to the same object as oneself is to know that the other person has the same object in mind. But then the second person must also know that the first person constitutes an apex of the same triangle another apex of which he, the second person, occupies. For two people to know that they are so related, that their thoughts are so related, requires that they be in communication. Each of them must speak to the other and be understood by the other.[29]

Davidson's argument here is puzzling in many respects. But perhaps the most contentious idea involved is its starting premise: that in the absence of others to correlate our responses with particular objects or events causally responsible for them, there is just no fact of the matter that those responses are intentional responses to those objects and events, and not the other objects and events in the nexuses causally responsible for them. This misses an important fact about the way that the objects and events that our thoughts are about (in the most basic cases) are presented to us -- a fact of presentation which is independent from the fact that our thoughts are about those objects and events. The kind of

fact I am talking of here is to be spelled out experientially. The objects and events that our thoughts are about (in the most basic cases) are experientially presented to us in a way in which the other causes of those thoughts (nerve ending stimulations, retinal images, and the like) are not. For this reason I think Davidson is wrong to view facts about experience as theoretically irrelevant to an account of content.

Before, however, proceeding to fill out an account along these lines, let us consider an objection to the idea that experience could have any role to play in solving (or dissloving) the problem of individuation.

Consider, again, a brain in a vat. A brain in a vat, it might be argued, could have experiences type-identical to our own, yet on Davidson's account, have different beliefs. For if we consider how we would go about interpreting such a creature, as Rorty points out (and as we discussed earlier) on Davidson's account '...the best way to translate the discourse of a brain which has always lived in a vat will be as referring to the vat-computer environment the brain is actually in'.[30] We could not, then, ascribe to a brain in a vat beliefs about chairs, tables, books etc., but only beliefs about, say, computer programmes. So if we suppose the brain to have type-identical experiences to our, yet different beliefs, those experiences cannot be deemed to play an individuating role with respect to the content of those

beliefs.

Davidson himself has criticized Quine and Dummett for assigning a role to experience in their respective theories of meaning for similar reasons. He says:

> ...Quine and Dummett agree on a basic principle, which is that whatever there is to meaning must be traced back somehow to experience, the given, or patterns of sensory stimulation...Once we take this step, we open the door to scepticism, for we must then allow that a very great many -- perhaps most -- of the sentences we hold to be true may in fact be false...When meaning goes epistemological in this way, truth and meaning are necessarily divorced.[31]

He goes onto explain:

> For clearly a person's sensory stimulation could be just as they are and yet the world outside very different. (Remember the brain in a vat.)[32]

Given, then, that type-identical experiences could be the causal upshot of radically different external environments, Davidson argues that to tie meaning or content to experience implies the separation of any necessary connection between truth and meaning. But given that truth and meaning must be seen as fundamentally connected it is the tie of meaning with experience which must go.

Now clearly for the brain in a vat example to work against the idea that experience could play an individuating role with regard to the content of our attitudes, it is necessary to assume that one can reasonably assign to a brain in a vat type-identical experiences to ourselves. However, it might be argued that the plausibility of this rests upon taking on board

certain philosophical conceptions of experience. Note, for example, how Davidson talks of 'experience', 'the given', and 'sensory stimulations', and then uses the latter conception to deny the general point that meaning cannot be seen to be tied to experience *per se*.

However, suppose that instead of talking of a brain in a vat's experiences in terms of its patterns of sensory stimulation we were to talk in terms of its experiences as themselves having a content. Many philosophers now talk of experiences, perceptual states etc. as having *non-conceptual* contents.[33] Could we say that a brain in a vat would have identical experiences in terms of content to ourselves? It would be odd to posit identity of content here, I think, given the difference in the resultant beliefs for which those experiences are held to be causal. If experience is causal with respect to belief, and a brain in a vat would have radically different beliefs to ourselves, then this difference in belief content should not merely be explained in terms of the difference in external environment between ourselves and the brain in a vat, but through there being a difference in content between our experiences and those of a brain in a vat, however else those experiences are held to be type-identical. An externalist account of belief content, then, seems essentially married to an account of experiential content in this respect.

I do not, however, wish to pursue this point. One

suspects that it would be of little help in solving our problem. For if we end up with an externalist account of experiential content which ties the contents of our experiences to their typical causes, as would be seemingly required here to make the tie between experiential and propositional attitude content sufficiently tight, then the same problem of individuation would arise as with propositional attitudes.[34] Which causes are content determining with respect to experience, and which are irrelevant?

The question that I want to focus on, rather, is the problem concerning the object of experience -- the question concerning the things which we directly perceive. For it is here, I think, that the essential role of experience in dissolving the problem of individuation is most clearly appreciated.

It is not always clear what is meant by the notion of direct perception. The phrase crops up in numerous philosophical works, often concerned with very different species of question (some ontological, some epistemological etc.), yet very rarely is the notion clearly defined. However, Paul Snowdon has recently elucidated the notion of direct perception in a way which I find congenial. According to Snowdon, '...the notion of direct perception is to be explained as the relation yielded by perception which enable nondependent demonstrative thought-contact to be made'.[35]

The idea of a nondependent demonstration is intended to draw a contrast between two kinds of demonstrative reference. Sometimes we demonstratively refer to an object on the basis of some other object related to the object of our demonstration. For example, if I say 'That man is bald' whilst looking and pointing at a picture of the man, I demonstratively refer to the man in question on the basis of his picture. The picture is not identical to the man I refer to, and it would seem that unless that I can acknowledge that the picture bears a certain (pictorial) relation to the man then my demonstration would fail. I would mistake the picture for the man. Sometimes, however, no such acknowledgement of any relation is required, e.g. if I say 'That man is bald' whilst looking and pointing at the man himself. A nondependent demonstration is of this latter kind. Thus Snowdon claims, '...your perceptual experiences put you in a position to nondependently demonstrate x just in case they put you in a position to demonstrate x where that does not depend on there being a y (not identical to x) such that you can count as demonstrating x only if you can acknowledge that y bears a certain relation to x'.[36]

What, then, are the objects to which we have nondependent demonstrative thought-contact? I think we should all feel compelled to reply here 'what else but common or garden external objects such as books, tables, chairs etc.?'. Just try to pick out anything else! Of

course, in non-standard cases (e.g. hallucinations etc.) it might be argued that we perceive 'things in the mind' which we mistake for external objects. But in standard perception all that is available for nondependent demonstrative thought-contact, I suggest, are external objects and events. No philosophical exotica present themselves to us in the required way -- sense-data, representations, ideas, or the like. Neither, of course, do our own nerve ending stimulations, or retinal images etc.

Here, then, I suggest, we have an intuitive means by which to answer the problem of individuation outlined earlier. If, as Davidson claims, our most basic beliefs are about the objects and events which typically cause those beliefs, then those causes that our beliefs are about are precisely those objects and events which are directly present to us in experience, i.e. are available for nondependent demonstrative thought-contact. This, then, by-passes the need for the external correlation of our responses with such objects and events by an interpreter to supply the relevant fact of the matter, and hence the need for communicative contact between interpreter and interpretee. Indeed, it seems to me that communication between creatures itself presupposes that the same objects and events are perceptually present to one another in this way. The fundamental role of ostension and demonstration in the teaching and learning

of language clearly bears this out.

A child learns the meanings of words such as 'book', 'table', 'rabbit' etc., in the most fundamental cases, by having instances of such objects pointed out to him (or her). They're told 'that is a book', or 'that is a rabbit' etc. But the notion of demonstration that is at work here is precisely that which Snowdon uses to elucidate the notion of direct perception. In teaching a child the meaning of 'rabbit' etc. we presuppose that the child has <u>that object</u> (the rabbit) perceptually present to him (or her) in the same way that the rabbit is perceptually to us, i.e. that it is demonstratively available to him in a <u>nondependent</u> way. We grant the child with the relevant conceptual mastery when he (or she) has the ability to make such basic demonstrations. This is the fundamental mechanism by which creatures come to have communicative contact with one another, which assumes a shared perceptual presence of the same public objects and events. A notion of perceptual presence, then, I suggest should play a central place in semantic theory.[37]

6.9 Scepticism and the Object of Experience

In the last section I argued that Davidson's attempt to solve the problem of individuation by arguing for the necessity of a communicative link between interpreter and interpretee is ultimately redundant if a notion of

experience is assigned its rightful place in an account of content. Davidson's arguments for the claim that experience should not play any role in such an account were shown to have no real basis once a sufficiently robust conception of experience, involving a notion of perceptual presence, was brought to bear in dissolving the problem of individuation.

In suggesting that the problem of individuation can be dissolved in this way, however, it might now be claimed that we have reached a position where P1 itself might be called into question. The problem of individuation brought to light the idea that a principle such as P1 was insufficient to pick out exactly what objects and events causally responsible for our beliefs play a content determining role. But the manner by which we responded to that problem, by introducing the notion of perceptual presence, might call into question not just the sufficiency of P1 in this respect, but its very necessity in an account of content. For it would now perhaps seem that it is the perceptual presence of an object, rather than its being a cause, that renders such an object content determining in the required way. In interpreting a speaker, it is not because we take certain objects and events to be causing them to hold certain beliefs and make certain utterances that we make the content and meaning ascriptions that we do, but because we take those objects and events to be perceptually present to them in

the same way that they are perceptually present to us. Because we take this be the case, we take them to have largely the same beliefs about such objects as we do, and interpret them accordingly. Once, then, that the notion of perceptual presence is brought to bear, it is not clear that there is any need to talk of the causal role of objects with respect to our attitudes in determining their content.

Let us take it, then, that it is the fact of what objects and events are perceptually present that determines the contents of our most basic beliefs about the world. Where, then, does this leave us with regard to scepticism?

It was suggested in the last section that we should all feel compelled to say that common or garden objects such as tables, chairs etc. were perceptually present to us. Despite philosophical arguments to the contrary, we do not come across such things as sense-data, ideas, representations or the like in experience. When I look in front of me right now I see a computer, not some private object that stands between myself and the computer. I do not have an experience of a computer-idea, representation, or sense-datum etc., just a computer. Seeing the computer does not involve some indirect perceptual acquaintance between myself and the computer, but a direct one. As Snowdon would put, it is the computer which is available for nondependent

demonstrative thought-contact, and no other intermediary.

The question that might now be asked, however, is that despite our deepest most conviction that this is the case -- that it is the computer which is directly present to me -- what then of those arguments often put forward by philosophers to suggest the contrary: that the computer is something which I only, at best, perceive indirectly. For it would now seem that it is no good just ignoring such arguments. If we are to give an account of the relation between ourselves and the world, which accounts for the contents of our beliefs in terms of the objects and events which are perceptually present to us, but which allows no room for scepticism, such arguments demand a response. Otherwise, the sceptic can just insist that there are good grounds for thinking that physical objects and events are not perceptually present to us in the way that our account of content demands. Our account, then, would not undermine the kind of argument that the sceptic might wish to push in defense of his position.

Davidson, of course, despite apparently conceding the fact that there are some genuine philosophical problems concerning the object of experience, rejected such problems as relevant to epistemology. According to Davidson, because the contents of our most basic attitudes rested on the causal relations that hold between them and the world, a consideration of what was directly experienced was of no consequence vis-a-vis the

problem of the external world or other related epistemological problems. He says:

> There is an abundance of puzzles about sensation and perception; but these puzzles are not, as I said, foundational for epistemology. The question of what is directly experienced in sensation, and how this is related to judgements of perception, while as hard to answer as it ever was, can no longer be assumed to be a central question for the theory of knowledge. The reason has already been given: although sensation plays a crucial role in the causal processes that connects beliefs with the world, it is a mistake to think it plays an epistemological role in determining the contents of those beliefs.38

But, of course, the grounds for Davidson rejecting such puzzles as relevant to epistemology are now lacking. It was because Davidson saw merely the causal role of certain objects and events as relevant to individuating the contents of our attitudes that he could regard the question of the object of experience as irrelevant to epistemology. But once we introduce the notion of perceptual presence into the account, the question would seem to take on epistemololgical significance. If <u>that</u> is not a computer -- if the computer is not something with which I can have nondependent demonstrative thought-contact -- how can I know that there are such things as computers, or any external things at all?

The weight of the sceptic's argument would now seem to rest on the question of the object of experience. If he can render a convincing argument to show that we never directly perceive external objects, then our accounting for the contents of our thoughts in terms of the notion

of perceptual presence lacks any argumentative force against the sceptic.

It is beyond the scope of this project to conduct any thorough examination of the kinds of arguments put forward to suggest that we do not directly perceive external objects. Nevertheless, I do think there is a genuine philosophical puzzle here. In the last chapter much was made of the kind of causal accounts that we take for granted in the explanation of perception. It was argued that such accounts implied, what Marie McGinn called, a 'purely subjective' or 'solipsistic' conception of experience, where external objects are no longer seen as constitutive features of a person's experiences, but as only extrinsically related (by means of a causal link) to them. I could have the very same experience that I am now having if only everything in my brain were as it is now, even if the presence of the computer that I now see were no part of the causal explanation of my current visual experience. This would seem to mean, however, that no part of my current visual experience is identical with the computer itself. The computer is not a constitutive part of my experience, even if it is part of the causal explanation of my experience.[39]

But that seems to involve a denial of what I earlier claimed we should all feel compelled to assert: that <u>that</u> (the thing directly present to me, available to nondependent demonstrative thought-contact) is a

computer. We ordinarily take it for granted that external objects are, quite literally, in our experience. But, it would seem, as soon as we attempt to explain our experiences causally, we are led to a position where it is difficult to see how this could be the case.

Much more needs to be said here. Perhaps there is a way of reconciling the kinds of causal accounts we want to give to explain our experiences with our deepest convinction that external objects are directly present to us in those experiences. What is clear, however, is that if scepticism is seen to rely on denying the direct presence of external objects in experience, then accounting for the possibility of our having thoughts about such objects in terms of their direct presence to us, as was suggested in the last section, offers no resources by which to answer the sceptic.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see what role transcendental arguments of any kind could have here. A transcendental argument might attempt to show, for example, that we couldn't have experiences at all unless external objects were sometimes present to us. But this does not solve the problem, but merely makes it more puzzling. It might give our conviction that external objects are directly present to us somekind of intellectual backing or philosophical credence. But we should still be left with the puzzle as to how, when we attempt to explain our experiences causally, we are drawn

to the conclusion that external objects cannot be directly present to us.

This might seem to be a disappointing result. It seems that the most plausible way to account for the semantic contents of our most basic beliefs, and the meanings of sentences used to express those beliefs, turns on seeing the objects and events they are about as being directly present to us in experience -- something which the sceptic has seemingly got good grounds to deny -- thereby rendering any answer to scepticism turning on semantic considerations idle. Nevertheless, we have come to a clearer view of where the real problem with scepticism lies. The problem has not so much a uniquely epistemological basis, but springs from a general ontological problem in accounting for the relation between the mind and nature, experience and the world. For this reason, then, it seems to me that any proposed solution to scepticism which deals purely with epistemological concerns, such as dealing with definitions of the word 'know' or conditions of knowledge, are likely to be unsatisfying.

The problem of scepticism is bound to a general conception of the mind, which sees propositional attitudes and experiences as coming within the realms of causal explanation, as 'states' or 'events' which have causes in the physical world. Davidson, despite his general antipathy to talk of mental objects or private

objects before the mind etc. is still committed to this picture. We all are. Our methods of explaining human behaviour seems inextricably causal, bound to a taxonomy of the mental in terms of states and events. The philosophical problem of scepticism results from the implications such a picture of the mind has in creating a seeming epistemological and ontological gap between ourselves qua bearers of such states and the objects and events in the world those states are about. Any solution to scepticism will have to find a way of reconciling such a picture of the mind with our convinction that objects and events in the world are directly present to us. It is difficult to see how such an account might proceed.

NOTES

1. T. Burge, 'Individualism and Psychology', The Philosophical Review 95 (1986), pp.3-4.

2. See in particular H. Putnam, 'The Meaning of "Meaning"', in his Philosophical Papers Vol.2: Mind, Language and Reality (Cambridge, 1975), pp.215-71; and T. Burge, 'Individualism and the Mental', Midwest Studies in Philosophy Vol.4: Studies in Metaphysics, P.A. French, T.E. Uehling, H.R. Well stein (eds.) (Minneapolis, 1979), and a number of other related papers.

3. D. Davidson, 'Knowing One's Own Mind', Proceedings and Adresses of the American Philosophical Association (1987), p. 451.

4. Ibid, p.452.

5. T. Crane, 'All The Difference in the World', The Philosophical Quarterly Vol.41 No.162 (1991), especially pp.9-15 and 16-22.

6. D. Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', in his Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, hencforth ITI (Oxford, 1984), p.125.

7. D. Davidson, 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', in ITI, p.142.

8. 'Radical Interpretation', ITI, p.137.

9. 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', ITI, p.200.

10. D. Davidson, 'Epistemology Externalized', Dialetica 45 (1991), p.195.

11. 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', ITI, p.200.

12. Ibid., p.201.

13. Richard Foley and Richard Fumerton criticize Davidson's OIA along similar lines in their 'Davidson's Theism?', Philosophical Studies 48 (1985), pp.83-9.

14. This point is put forward by Vrinda Dalmiya, 'Coherence, Truth and the Omniscient Interpreter', Philosophical Quarterly 40 (1990), pp.86-94.

15. J.E. Malpas, Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning (Cambridge, 1992), p.217.

16. Davidson explicitly refers to his argument against conceptual relativism in 'On The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' as a kind of transcendental argument in his paper 'In Defence of Convention T', ITI, p.72.

    Many other philosophers who have emphasized the transcendental aspects of Davidson's philosophy. See, for example, Colin McGinn, 'Charity, Interpretation and Belief', Journal of Philosophy 74 (1977),p.522; Richard Rorty, 'Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference and Pragmatism, in P. Beiri et al eds. Transcendental Arguments and Science (Dordrecht, Holland, 1979), pp.95-9; and Hilary Putnam, 'Philosophers and Human Understanding', Realism and Reason, Philosophical Papers Vol.3 (Cambridge, 1983), pp.191-6.

17. D. Davidson, 'Epistemology Externalized', p.195.

18. A. Brueckner, 'Charity and Scepticism', Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 67 (1986), p.267 (my emphasis).

19. D. Davidson, 'Knowing One's Own Mind', pp.445-6.

20. Ibid., p.456.

21. Ibid., p.454.

22. Ibid., p.454.

23. D. Davidson, 'The Myth of the Subjective' in New Essays on Relativism (1989), M. Krausz, J. Meiland (eds.), p.165.

24. Ibid., p.165.

25. D. Davidson, 'Three Varieties of Knowledge', in A.J. Ayer Memorial Essays, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 30 (1991), p.159.

26. It may not be a consequence of there being no fact of the matter here about which causes are content determining that the responses cannot then be assigned a semantic value if one can make sense of semantic indeterminacy. Quine famously argued for semantic indeterminacy in Word and Object (Cambridge, Mass. 1960). Because the patterns of sensory stimulation for the assent by speakers to 'observation sentences' remained identical across various 'analytical hypotheses' formed to translate those sentences, giving no empirical grounds by which to prefer one such hypothesis to another, there was just no fact of the matter as to which hypothesis was correct. Meaning as such was indeterminate. Davidson also argues for semantic indeterminacy on similar grounds. See his 'The Inscrutability of Reference' in his ITI, pp.227-41. It is, then, puzzling as to why Davidson should seem clearly so opposed to accepting that there maybe semantic indeterminacy because of an indeterminacy regarding what causes of speakers' verbal responses are content determining when he accepts meaning to be indeterminate anyway. If communication can be invoked to clear up the indeterminacy regarding the location of causes, why should it not also be invoked to determine whether, to use Quine and Davidson's favoured example, a speaker means 'there's a rabbit' or 'there's an undetached rabbit part'?

    For a criticism of the indeterminancy thesis see J. Searle, 'Indeterminacy, Empiricism, and The First Person' in The Journal of Philosophy Vol.LXXXIV, No.3 (1987).

27. D. Davidson, 'The Conditions of Thought', Grazer Philosophische Studien (1989), p.198.

28. Ibid.,p.198.

29. Ibid., p.199

30. R. Rorty, 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth' in Truth and Interpretation, E. LePore (ed.) (Oxford, Cambridge Ma. 1986), p.340.

31. D. Davidson, A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', Ibid., p. 313.

32. Ibid., p.313.

33. See for example T. Crane, 'The Nonconceptual Contents of Experience' in The Contents of Experience (Cambridge, 1992), pp.136-57.

34. For discussions on externalist accounts of experiential content see in particular T. Burge, 'Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception' in P. Pettit and J. McDowell (eds.) Subject, Thought and Context (Oxford 1986); M. Davies, 'Perceptual Content and Local Supervenience', Aristotelian Society Proceedings (1992); and M. Davies 'Individualism and Perceptual Content', Mind vol.100 (1991), pp.461-84.

35. P. Snowdon, 'How to interpret direct perception', in The Contents of Experience (Cambridge, 1992), Tim Crane (ed.).

36. Ibid., p.59.

37. For more on the connection between how we acquire concepts and the perceptual presence of objects to us see J.J. Valberg, The Puzzle of Experience (Oxford, 1992), Ch.3.

38. D. Davidson, 'The Myth of the Subjective', p.

39. As mentioned in the last chapter (see note 18), Valberg op.cit develops what he calls the puzzle of experience by showing that reflection on the causal processes involved in perception leads to the view that what is present to us in experience are internal objects, which conflicts with our 'being

open' to our experience where all we find is the world, i.e. external objects. He also connects the former view with our regarding experience as a kind of state or process, distinct from a different, more elusive, conception of experience which accommodates the presence of the world to us. See in particular chapter 6.

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