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Rejecting the Plea for Modesty. Kant’s Truth-Directed Transcendental Argument Based on Self-Consciousness of Our Own Existence

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Abstract

Recent developments of transcendental arguments reflect the struggle to accommodate Stroud’s devastating objection by giving up of failed expectations in providing a proof of what the external-world skeptic calls into question: knowledge of the existence of the outside world. Since Strawson capitulation in 1984, the truth-direct transcendental arguments gave way to modest belief-direct transcendental arguments that concedes that truth-direct transcendental arguments are doomed to fail to establish ambitious conclusions about reality, but at the same time hold that they can nonetheless successfully establish modest conceptual connection between the major beliefs within our conceptual scheme. This article seeks the “reactionary” rehabilitation of the old hubris: a new defense of the truth-direct transcendental argument. I set forth a new reconstruction of Kant’s Refutation as successful truth-directed transcendental argument that meets Stroud’s objection. As several papers and books about the theme, this article is of a systematic and of a historical nature by connecting the contemporary debate about transcendental argument with Kant’ philosophy.

Keywords list (en): Transcendental Argument, Kant’s Refutation of Idealism, Strawson, Stroud

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General Overview

In the end of the fifties of the last century, Strawson (1959) introduced the suggestive expression “transcendental argument” in a somewhat unpretentious way to name some indirect anti-skeptical strategy.¹ He characterizes this peculiar form of transcendental reasoning with following remark:

3 The form of this argument might possibly mislead. It is not that on the one hand we have a conceptual scheme, which presents us with a certain problem of particular-identification; while on the other hand there exist material objects in sufficient richness and strength to make possible the solution of such problems. It is only because the solution is possible that the problem exists. So with all transcendental arguments (1959, p. 40).

4 A transcendental argument is an *indirect* argument against some unqualified skeptic (actually, a Straw figure in Strawson’s dialectic strategy) by arguing *the truth* of what the skeptic calls in question is a condition for his way of thinking and, therefore, for his own challenge: “the problem only exists because a solution is still available.”² In a nutshell, the argument aims to show indirectly that *the truth* of what the skeptic calls in question (roughly the awareness that particulars continue to exist even when unperceived is a condition for the formulation of his questioning).

5 The first mistake that we must avoid at all costs is the following. At first pass, one could imagine that Strawson with his indirect transcendental argument had in mind the subsection called “On Demonstrations” (A734/B762), of the *Transcendental Doctrine of Method* (A705/B733), where Kant named as “transcendental” propositions that require a peculiar method of proof. The proof is peculiar insofar as it is neither based on intuitions nor directly derived from concepts, but indirect in the sense that their truths are supposed to be proven through their relation “to something entirely contingent, namely *possible experience*” (A737/B765, original emphasis). That said, a transcendental proposition is what Kant calls a principle instead of a theorem “because it has the special property that it first makes possible its ground of proof, namely experience, and must always be presupposed in this” (A737/B76).³

6 In this Kant’s sense, transcendental proofs are unquestionable related to different forms of skepticism, such as Hume’s skepticism concerning the uniformity of nature (that Kant obliquely addresses in the first edition of his transcendental deduction) and Hume’s skepticism concerning the objectivity of the principle of causality (that Kant obliquely addresses both in his A-Deduction and in his in the *Second Analogy of Experience*). Moreover, it is also plausible to extract key passages of Kant’s transcendental deductions and construct with them arguments against some sense-datum skeptic as famously Strawson has done (1966). The sense-datum skeptic questions that we experience (or have cognition) of objects in the “strong sense” of something that exists mind-independently.

7 All appearances notwithstanding though, Strawson’s transcendental arguments are definitively not related to the transcendental proofs of the *Critique*. For one thing, “possible experience” invariably means in Kant “something as object of possible experience” (A737/B76), that is the cognition of what appears to intuitions *as objects*. Kant’s transcendental proofs are not addressed to a skeptic who questions the possibility of the experience or cognition of the mind-independent existence of the outside world. Quite the opposite, Kant’s transcendental arguments invariably assume that we have experience/cognition of objects and attempt to prove that his transcendental principles as necessary conditions for such experience. In that relevant sense Kant’s proofs are “regressive” insofar that they assume the possibility or the cognition of outside things (*PROL*, AA, 4: 277, n.).⁴

8 Strawson’s idea has launched decades of debates, which starts in 1968 but reaches the present day.⁵ However, in face of his criticism, the prevailing view in the is quite pessimistic about any prospect of success of “truth-directed” transcendental argument. Interestingly, Strawson was the first to capitulate:

9 For repudiation of the project of wholesale validation of types of knowledge-claim does not leave the

naturalist without philosophical employment. *E.M. Forster's motto*— “*only connect*”— is as valid for the naturalist at the philosophical level as it is for Forster's characters (and us) at the moral and personal level. That is to say, having given up the unreal project of wholesale validation, *the naturalist philosopher will embrace the real project of investigating the connections between the major structural elements of our conceptual scheme. If connections as tight as those which transcendental arguments, construed as above, claim to offer are really available, so much the better* (1984, p. 22, emphasis added).⁶

10 Truth-direct transcendental argument are doomed to fail to establish conclusions about reality. There is no way of proving the *truth* of a proposition (e.g., particulars continue to exist unperceived as bodies in space) by means of the application of criteria about the same proposition (e.g., the successful employment of criteria of identification for the enduring existence of particulars as bodies). Nonetheless, transcendental argument can still establish important conceptual connections between main beliefs within our own conceptual scheme.⁷ So was born the very idea of “modest” belief-directed transcendental arguments.

11 This article seeks the “reactionary” rehabilitation of old hubris, namely the very idea of a truth-direct transcendental argument. I set forth a new reconstruction of Kant's Refutation of Idealism as a world-directed transcendental argument that meets Stroud's fundamental challenge. As several papers and books about the theme, this paper is of a systematic and of a historical nature by connecting the contemporary debate about transcendental argument with Kant's philosophy.

12 This paper is outlined as follows: this overview is followed by six sections. The first section below brings back Stroud's classical objections in the sixties of the last century that launched the decades-long debate. The subsequent section is devoted to show that Stroud's criticisms boil down to one single devastating objection. It is from the struggle to accommodate this objection that emerges the idea of modest belief-directed transcendental arguments. In the third section I set forth a new reconstruction of Kant's *Fourth Paralogism* as Kant's direct answer to the skeptical idealist, that is *some* external-world skeptic of Cartesian inspiration.⁸

13 In the fourth section I present an outline of the argument of Kant's Refutation of idealism. In the fifth, I reconstruct the key passage of the argument to the effect that we know the mind-independent existence of outside things in the required relevant transcendental sense. The last section is a short section in which I present my concluding remarks. Kant's Refutation is a successful proof that I am directly aware of the existence of outside things in the transcendental sense, however only as noumena in the negative meaning. *I do know* (rather than *merely believe*) that exist some mind-independent thing in itself as the ground of the awareness of my own existence in time, without knowing, *positively*, how it really is in itself.

14

The Genealogy of Transcendental Arguments

15 Stroud's criticisms have been countless repeated since the sixties of the last century. However, we cannot help but to go back to Stroud's criticism if we want to understand why the modest belief-direct transcendental argument prevails. But for those acquainted with Stroud's paper, I recommend to skip this section and go directly to the next section where I lay down my assessment of Stroud's criticism. Let me briefly present Stroud's free reconstruction of Strawson's argument. Strawson allegedly aims to prove the following proposition:

16 “Objects continue to exist unperceived” (1968, p. 245). This will be our conclusion 6).

17 Nonetheless, his starting-point is a premise about how we think of the world around us as being (our “conceptual scheme”):

18 1) “We think of the world as containing objective (numerically identical) particulars in a single spatiotemporal system” (1968, p. 245).

19 Now, if Strawson's plan was to formulate an *indirect argument* against some unqualified skeptic (a Straw figure), he is supposed to show that the truth of 6) is a condition for the initial statement 1). Nonetheless, something seems to be missing—or so argues Stroud. What could bring

us from 1) to 6)? Indeed, everything relevant hinges on the correct understanding of the unbridgeable gap in Strawson's argument. From now on, Stroud undertakes a free reconstruction of Strawson's argument of 1959. The first missing premise is as follows:

20 2) "If we think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system, then we are able to identify and reidentify particulars" (1968, p. 246).⁹

21 The thought about those particulars entails that:

22 3) "If we can reidentify particulars, then we have satisfiable criteria on the basis of which we can make identifications" (1968, p. 246).

23 Even with 2) and 3), (6) still does not follow (1968, p. 246). From 1) to 3) alone, the most that Strawson's argument has established is the mere conditional: *if* the best criteria for identifying and re-identifying particulars are satisfied, *then* we know that particulars continue to exist unperceived (1968, p. 246). Given this, the first form that the putative unbridgeable gap takes in Strawson's original argument is between a conditional claim and *categorical* conclusion 6). For one thing, we cannot rule out that all identification and re-identifications of particulars went wrong, even when they are made on the basis of the best available criteria. Now, to rule out this possible skeptical reply, we need to assume that—argues Stroud:

24 4) "If we know that the best criteria we have for the reidentification of particulars have been satisfied, then we know that objects continue to exist unperceived" (1968, p. 246).

25 Stroud calls the development from 1) to 4) "the verification principle" (1968, p. 247).¹⁰ But again the gap boils down between the conditional and the categorical conclusion: *if* the skeptical challenge makes sense, *then* we must have criteria for identifying and re-identifying particulars as bodies that continue to exist unperceived over the time and, therefore, that we must be able know whether particulars exist unperceived as bodies in space (1968, p. 246). Yet, from this, 6) still does not follow. We need a factual premise for applying *modus ponens*, such as follows:

26 5) "We sometimes know that the best criteria we have for the re-identification of particulars have been satisfied" (1968, p. 247).

27 Here, 5) is the factual premise that instantiates the antecedent of the conditional and, by *modus ponens*, generates the aimed categorical conclusion 6). However, rather than answering the skeptical challenge once for all, Strawson's transcendental argument faces a dilemma. On the one hand, without the factual premise 5), which instantiates the antecedent of the conditional from 1) to 4), the argument does not get off the ground. It cannot achieve the aimed categorical conclusion 6) and, therefore, is powerless in the face of the unqualified skeptical challenge.

28 On the other hand, factual premise 5) and the verification principle [1) to 4)] renders the very idea of any indirect transcendental argument superfluous (1968, p. 256). For one thing, now we have a *direct* rebuttal of the skeptic. if we know that our best available criteria for re-identification are satisfied, then we whether particulars continue to exist even when unperceived or not (1968, p. 247).

29 Now even if put the verification principle [1) to 4)] aside, the gap still remains between the target statement 6) and the argument from 1) to 5). What 6) states would only be unavoidable if it belongs to what Stroud calls "privileged class" of propositions, for example, propositions that establish the general conditions for thinking (like the Cartesian cogito) or for signification:

30 There are some propositions [of the privileged class] which it is impossible for one particular person ever to assert truly. For example, Descartes cannot assert truly that Descartes does not exist-his asserting it guarantees that it is false. Also, there are some propositions which it is impossible for a particular person to assert truly in a certain way, or in a particular language. (...) *But the "self-guaranteeing" character of the members of the privileged class is more general than that of any of these [e.g. the existence of bodies].* There is no one, whoever he might be, whatever language he might speak, or whatever class of people he might belong to, who could truly deny any of the members of the privileged class of propositions (1968, p. 253,

emphasis added).

31 It is clear that the statement 6) does not belong to such “privileged class.” What 6) state is not general enough to be seen as a condition for thinking or for meaning. But let suppose just for the sake of argument that 6) displays the “self-guaranteeing” character of the privileged class. Even so, argues Stroud:

32 [t]he most that could be proved by a consideration of *the necessary conditions* of language is that, for example, *we must believe* that there are material objects and other minds if we are to be able to speak meaningfully at all (1968, p. 256, emphasis added).

33 This third and last objection is the last nail in the coffin. Starting from the way we think the world around us in 1), and achieving the necessity of employing criteria as a condition for 1), we can never conclude that we *know the truth of 6)*. Stroud phrases his last objection by opposing the following statements:

34 7) I *believe* that numerically identical particulars exist unperceived as bodies in space over time.

8) I *know* that numerically identical particulars exist unperceived as bodies in space over time.

35 In a nutshell, what follows from 1) to 5) is 7). What 8) states is at most *a sufficient condition* for our “conceptual scheme.”

36

Clarifying the Ground

37 Let us take stock. According to Stroud, Strawson’s argument is this:

1. We think of the world as containing objective (numerically identical) particulars in a single spatiotemporal system (1968, p. 245).
2. If we think of the world as containing objective particulars in a single spatiotemporal system, then we are able to identify and re-identify particulars (1968, p. 246).
3. If we can re-identify particulars, then we have satisfiable criteria on the basis of which we can make identifications” (1968, p. 246).
4. If we know that the best criteria we have for the re-identification of particulars have been satisfied, then we know that objects continue to exist unperceived (1968, p. 246).
5. We sometimes know that the best criteria we have for the re-identification of particulars have been satisfied (1968, p. 247).
6. Objects continue to exist unperceived (1968, p. 245).

38 The first objection does not have the bite that it appears at first to have. To be sure, in Strawson’s original transcendental argument (1959), the appeal to 5) renders the very idea of an *indirect* transcendental argument idle; after all, if we know that the best available criteria have been satisfied, we know thereby *directly* that objects continue to exist unperceived or not. However, there is no unbridgeable gap here. For one thing, we do not need 5) as factual premise to apply *modus ponens* and infer the aimed categorical conclusion 6). Indeed, when we consider Kant’s Refutation of Idealism, the factual premise—I am aware of my own existence in time—is not a short-cut that renders the argument *direct*. Now, is up to Kantian to show whether this awareness entails what the skeptic idealism questions.¹¹

39 Stroud’s second objection, the accusation of verificationism, is misleading, not to say misconceived. To be sure, “verificationism” is a philosophical term of art that Stroud may use as he wills. Still, Strawson’s argument is a not short-cut to a dismissal of skepticism *as meaningless* as Stroud accuses it to be in those passages:

40 What we need to know at this point is whether or not *some version of the verification principle* is true. It is not my intention to discuss that issue now, but I do want to insist that it is precisely what must be discussed by many of those who look with favor on the much-heralded “Kantian” turn in recent philosophy. *It could be*

that we are not so far as we might think from Vienna in the 1920's(1968: 256., emphasis added).

41 If the skeptic's claim makes sense, it must be false, *since if that proposition could not be known to be true or known to be false it would make no sense. This follows from the truth of the verification principle.* Without this principle Strawson's argument would have no force; but with this principle the skeptic is directly and conclusively refuted, and there is no further need to go through an indirect or transcendental argument to expose his mistakes (1968, p. 247, emphasis added).

42 This is even more embarrassing since Stroud never realized the mistake and continues to repeat it countless for decades. For example, nearly three decades later (1994), Stroud still accuses Strawson's reading of Kant (1966) of relying on a new version of the verification principle, which Strawson calls "principle of significance:"

43 But the "*principle of significance*" which would achieve that happy result does not stand on its own in Kant. *It appears to get its support, such as it is, from the dreaded doctrines of transcendental idealism.(...)* And even if some such "principle of significance" turned out to be acceptable, a blanket appeal to it would leave us with no special core of fundamental truths which are uniquely invulnerable because of their central position in our thought. *A completely general thesis linking meaning and empirical ascertainability would mean the end of all forms of epistemic skepticism* (1994, p. 237, emphasis added)

44 To be sure, Strawson (1996), has flirted with a milder form of verification principle, which he called the "signification principle." On his words: ¹²

45 9) If we wish to use a concept in a certain way, but are unable to specify the kind of experience-situation to which the concept, used in that way, would apply, then we are not really envisaging any legitimate use of that concept at all (Strawson, 1966, p. 16).

46 Now if we phrase the "principle of significance" in terms of Strawson's original argument (1959) would take the following form principle:

47 10) The meaning of the word "body"—or of the correspondent concept BODY—relies on the criteria that we possess to identify and re-identify qualitatively identical particulars over time as numerical identical bodies that continue to exist unperceived in space.

48 The vexed issue is that nothing along the lines of 10) has ever played a role in Strawson's original arguments of 1959. Let us take a closer inspection of Strawson's original argument (which is quite different from Stroud's reconstruction of it):

49 11) The unqualified skeptic doubts that successively perceived qualitatively identical particulars in time are perceptions of numerically identical things that continue to exist in unperceived as bodies in space over time.

12) Yet, the skeptical doubt *would not make sense* under the assumption that there were several unconnected spatiotemporal frames of reference.

13) Therefore, the *meaningfulness* of skeptical doubt presupposes the existence of a single spatiotemporal frame of reference.

14) However, the existence of a single spatiotemporal frame of reference presupposes exactly what the skeptic wants to rule out, namely the acknowledgement that the successively perceived qualitatively identical particulars in time are perceptions of numerically identical things that continue to exist in unperceived as bodies in space over time.

15) If I know the existence of single spatiotemporal frame of reference, then I know that numerically identical particulars continue to exist unperceived as bodies in space over time.

16) I know the existence of single spatiotemporal frame of reference.

To return to missed

8) *I know that* numerically identical particulars continue to exist unperceived as bodies in space over time.

50 In this brief reconstruction, Strawson is arguing that the "meaningfulness" of skeptical doubt presupposes the existence of a single spatiotemporal frame of reference. If there were several

unconnected spatiotemporal frames of reference, *the skeptical question* would *make no sense*. On closer inspection, though, “making sense” and “meaningfulness” are just rhetorical expressions. Their function consists only in empathizing the conceptual implication between the premises. The point is that anything like 10) is presupposed in the argument. Nothing that Strawson says presupposes any version of the verification principle.

51 Again, “verificationism” is a philosophical term of art that Stroud may use as he wills. Now, if nothing like the verification principle is either assumed or presupposed in Strawson’s argument, the question is what does Stroud have in mind with “verificationism?” In his paper of 1994, we find a clue:

52 *But the “principle of significance” which would achieve that happy result does not stand on its own in Kant. It appears to get its support, such as it is, from the dreaded doctrines of transcendental idealism. Strawson tries to free it from that support, both in Kant and for his own use. But then it stands out as a so-far unsupported and controversial thesis about meaning in general (1994, p. 237, emphasis added).*

53 Given this, Stroud’s “verificationism” amounts to the following claim:

54 17) *Truth* is reducible to *verification*, e.g., *the truth* about the enduring existence of particulars is reducible to *the successful employment of criteria* of identification for the enduring existence of particulars as bodies.¹³

55 The skeptic distinguishes our absolute concept of *truth* from our relative context-dependent concept of *verified*. We can never infer the *truth* if any proposition like 6), from the fact that 6) was *verified* by means of the best available criteria. The reader may wonder how am I so sure in my charitable reading of Stroud? On closer inspection Stroud’s “verificationist premise” 4) is nothing but a way of rephrasing of 17).¹⁴ Now we have

56 4) “If we know that the best criteria we have for the reidentification of particulars have been satisfied, then we know that objects continue to exist unperceived” (1968, p. 246).

57 Given this, we should take Stroud’s verificationist objection literally here (1968, p. 256). All appearance notwithstanding, Stroud is not accusing Strawson’s transcendental argument of being a short-cut dismissal of the external-world skeptical of Cartesian inspiration challenge *as meaningless*. Rather, when purged from misunderstandings, Stroud’s objection amounts to an accusation of reductionism:

58 17) The *truth* of the claim about the enduring existence of particulars as bodies in space over time is reducible to *the successful employment of criteria* of identification for the enduring existence of particulars as bodies.¹⁵

59 Now, let us turn now back to the last objection. According to Stroud, even if the Kantian could show that the unperceived enduring existence of particulars as bodies is a condition for thinking of for meaningfulness, it is open to the skeptic to reply that all it is required is a *belief* in the enduring existence of particulars. Let us consider again the pair of contrasting proposition 7) and 8):

60 7) *I believe* that numerically identical particulars exist unperceived as bodies in space over time.

8) *I know that* numerically identical particulars continue to exist unperceived as bodies in space over time.

61 According to Stroud, the proponent of a transcendental argument claims that 8) is the *necessary condition* for all antecedent premises from 1) to 5). To this, the skeptic replies that 8) is at most a *sufficient condition* of 1). The vexed question is: does this last objection add anything to the verification objection?

62 On closer inspection, all of Stroud’s criticisms to the very idea of a transcendental argument boil down to a single objection, namely the reductionism that 17) captures. In a nutshell,

there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between truth conditions and verifiable conditions of the target statement 6). Again, one cannot reduce *the truth* about the enduring existence of particulars as bodies to the *verification* of the enduring existence of particulars based on the best available criteria.

63 Now in face of this seemingly devastating criticism, the moral to be drawn is that truth-directed transcendental arguments are doomed to fail. In this way the old truth-directed transcendental argument gives way to the modest belief-directed transcendental arguments. Modest transcendental arguments concede that transcendental arguments fail to establish ambitious anti-skeptical conclusions about reality. Still, they claim that they can successfully establish modest epistemic claims concerning the structures of our beliefs about reality. Is this concession the final word? Should we capitulate and plea for modesty?

64

Kant's Fourth Paralogism

65 In the first edition of his *Critique*, Kant phrases the skeptic idealism (Cartesian external-world skepticism) as resulting from a simple reasoning:

66 18) "That whose existence can be inferred as a cause of given perceptions has only a doubtful existence" (A366).

19) "Now all outer appearances are of this kind: their existence cannot be immediately perceived, can be inferred only as the cause of given perceptions" (A367).

20) "Thus, the existence of all objects of outer sense is doubtful" (A367).

67 Kant's *Fourth Paralogism* can be easily regimented in a form of a simple argument.

68 21) If we are never being directly aware of external things (but only indirectly by inference, as the most probable cause of our ideas (E)), then we can never be sure of their existence ($E \supset P$).

22) It is a fact that we are never directly aware of things outside us (E).

23) Therefore, awareness/knowledge of the existence of things outside us is dubious [modus ponens 10, 11] (P).

69 The gist of Kant's anti-skeptic of the *Fourth Paralogism* is to call attention to the to the "ambiguity" of the expression "outside us" in the argument:

70 [t]he expression *outside us* carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity, since it sometimes signifies something that, *as a thing in itself*, exists distinct from us and sometimes merely something that belongs to outer appearance, then in order to escape uncertainty and use this concept in the latter significance - in it is taken in the proper psychological question about the reality of our outer intuition - we will distinguish *empirically external* objects from those that might be called "external" in the transcendental sense, by directly calling them "things *that are to be encountered in space*" (A373, original emphasis).

71 To be sure, when we consider the existence of outside things, transcendently, namely as things in themselves, skeptical idealism seems to be the unavoidable consequence. For one thing, in the transcendental sense of the existence of things "outside us" we lack direct cognitive access to things outside us. In this transcendental sense, we can only know the existence of object of outer sense based on some inference, that is, as the plausible cause of the appearances in space and time. This inference is "problematic" since "the existence of a real object outside me (...) is never given directly in perception" (A367). Therefore, we can never exclude the possibility that what causes our experience something internal rather than external: "whether all so-called outer perceptions are not a mere play of our inner sense, or whether they are related to actual external objects as their cause" (A368).

72 Given this, we can rephrase the skeptical argument as follows:

73 21) If we can never be directly aware of the mind-independent existence of outside things (but only indirectly by inference, as the most probable cause of our experiences (E)), then we can never be sure of the mind-independent existence of outside things ($E \supset P$).

22) It is a fact that we never directly aware of mind-independent outside things (E).

23) Therefore, knowledge of the existence of mind-independent things outside our minds is dubious [*modus ponens* 10, 11] (P).

74 Still, the problem is easily solved when we take the existence of outer things in the empirical sense, namely as what appears to us as representation in space and time. We directly perceive the existence of what appears to us and that is supposed to be “a “*sufficient proof* of their reality” (A371, emphasis added). To put in slightly different words: “every outer perception therefore *immediately proves* something real in space, or rather is itself the real; to that extent, realism is beyond doubt, i.e., to our outer intuitions there corresponds something real in space” (A375, emphasis added). What does it look like Kant’s sufficient and “direct proof?” His argument takes the form of the simple argument that can be regimented as follows:

75 24) If we can perceive external things directly [in the relevant empirical sense of mind-dependent things] (E), then we can be sure of knowing their existence (E \supset P).

25) It is a fact that we directly perceive things external to our mind (E) in the relevant empirical sense of mind-dependent appearances.

26) Therefore, knowledge of the existence of things outside our minds is undoubtable [*modus ponens* 10, 11] (P).

76 Two key remarks are required here. To start with, to claim in 24) that we perceive directly outside things in the relevant empirical sense is not to deny that we also perceive outside things indirectly when this means, for example, perceiving something through a mirror, by seeing a TV screen of what happens elsewhere, etc. The point is that all those “indirect” ways of perceiving outside things are also empirical rather than transcendental. Second, to claim that we know of the existence of outside things in the relevant empirical sense is not to deny that there can arise deceptive representations, to objects do not correspond, and where the deception is sometimes to be attributed to a semblance of the imagination (in dreams), sometimes to a false step of judgment (in the case of so-called sense-deceptions)” (A376). Finally, the outside things that we directly perceive as appearances continue to exist unperceived, in the same empirical sense that they persist in space even when unnoticed.

77 Now, it is an indisputable fact that Kant became dissatisfied with his “direct” refutation of Cartesian external-world skepticism. The intriguing question is why. As we know in-between the first and the second editions of the *Critique*, Kant became aware of the famous Feder-Garver Review (1782/1989) that portrays his idealism as a phenomenalism similar to that of Berkeley’s:

78 An idealism that encompasses spirit and matter in the same way, that transforms the world and ourselves into representations, that has all objects arising from appearances as a result of the understanding connecting the appearances into one sequence of experience, and of reason necessarily, though vainly, trying to expand and unify them into one whole and complete world system (Feder and Garver 1989, p. 193).

79 If we assume—at least for the sake of argument—that Kant’s idealism is a sophisticated version of Berkeleyian phenomenalism, the premise 24) of our reconstruction of Kant’s proof must be read along the following lines:

80 27) We are directly aware of the unity of the successive representations according to some conceptual rule of synthesis as an object.

81 Regarding this, Kant’s way of circumventing Cartesian skepticism is quite similar to the Berkeley’s: if we assume a phenomenalist reading of “outside us,” we remove the obstacle to the claim that we know the existence of outside things:

82 28) We know the unity of successively apprehended mental representations according to some rule of synthesis as objects.

83 There is no doubt that Kant has changed his anti-skeptic strategy when he replaced the *Fourth Paralogism* with the Refutation of idealism. The questions are the following. First, was Kant’s original anti-skeptic strategy the Berkeleyian of avoiding skepticism? Second, is this change motivated by his given up on his old putative phenomenalism? This reading was championed by

Paul Guyer at the end of the last century, when he famously claims that “Kant’s new Refutation of Idealism was meant to break with his reductionism of 1781” (Guyer, 1987, p.288). To be sure, there are lots of passages in the *Fourth Paralogism* that seem to corroborate Guyer’s reading:

84 The transcendental idealist, on the contrary, can be an empirical realist, hence, as he is called, a dualist, i.e., *he can concede the existence of matter without going beyond mere self-consciousness and assuming something more than the certainty of representations in me*, hence the *cogito, ergo sum*. For because he allows this matter and even its inner possibility to be valid only for appearance— which, separated from our sensibility, is nothing—*matter for him is only a species of representations (intuition), which are called external*, not as if they related to objects that are external in themselves but because they relate perceptions to space, where all things are external to one another, but that space itself is in us (A370; emphasis added).

85 Why do we have need of a doctrine of the soul grounded merely on pure rational principles? Without doubt chiefly with the intent of securing our thinking Self from the danger of materialism. But this is achieved the rational concept of our thinking Self that we have given. For according to it, so little fear remains that if one took matter away then all thinking and even the existence of thinking beings would be abolished, that it rather shows clearly that *if I were to take away the thinking subject, the whole corporeal world would have to disappear, as this is nothing but the appearance in the sensibility of our subject and one mode of its representations* (A383; emphasis added).¹⁶

86 In order to avoid the false illusion here, one proceeds according to the rule: *Whatever is connected a perception according to empirical laws, is actual* (A376, original emphasis).

87 Still, I think that we must take Kant’s words at face value, when he so vehemently rejects the Göttingen Review as a misunderstanding. Kant has made a lot of disclaims regarding the Göttingen Review. He complains:

88 One would do us an injustice if one tried to ascribe to us that long-decried empirical idealism that, while assuming the proper reality of space, denies the existence of extended beings in it, or at least finds this existence doubtful, and so in this respect admits no satisfactorily provable distinction between dream and truth (B519).

89 The same complaint is stated in the famous letter to Beck:

90 Messrs. Eberhard and Garver’s opinion that Berkeley’s idealism is the same as that of the critical philosophy (...) does not deserve the slightest attention. For I speak of ideality about the form of representations, but they interpret this to mean ideality on the matter, that is, the ideality of the object (Br, 11, p. 395).

91 In his *Prolegomena*, Kant’s reaction is even more blunt:

92 The reviewer therefore understood nothing of my work and perhaps also nothing of the spirit and nature of metaphysics itself, unless on the contrary, which I prefer to assume, a reviewer’s haste, indignant at the difficulty of plowing his way through so many obstacles, cast an unfavorable shadow over the work lying before him and made it unrecognizable to him in its fundamentals (*Prol*, 4: 377).

93 Yet, besides Kant’s vehement protests, there is also textual evidence that rules out the phenomenalist reading. In the Preface to the second edition, Kant states explicitly:

94 [T]hat the same objects can be considered from two different sides, on the one side as objects of the senses and the understanding for experience, and on the other side as objects that are merely thought at most for isolated reason striving beyond the bounds of experience. If we now find that there is agreement with the principle of pure reason when things are considered from this twofold standpoint, but that an unavoidable conflict of reason with itself arises with a single standpoint, then the experiment decides for the correctness of that distinction (Bxviii–xix n.; emphasis added).

95 In the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, we also find overwhelming evidence against the phenomenalist reading of Kant’s idealism:

96 We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only from the human standpoint. If we depart from the subjective condition under which alone we can acquire outer intuition, namely that through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all. This predicate

is attributed to things only insofar as they appear to us, i.e., are objects of sensibility (A26–7/B42–3; emphasis added).

97 But they did not consider that both [space and time], without their reality as representations being disputed, nevertheless belong only to appearance, which always has two sides, one where the object is considered in itself (without regard to the way in which it is to be intuited, the constitution of which however must for that very reason always remain problematic), the other where the form of the intuition of this object is considered, which must not be sought in the object in itself but in the subject to which it appears, but which nevertheless really necessarily pertains to the representation of this object (A38/B55; emphasis added).

98 Thus, we have good reasons to assume that that Kant never given up on his idealism and hence that the Feder-Garver review was deeply mistaken. Therefore, we must reject 27) as translation of the premise 24) of Kant direct refutation of Cartesian external-world skepticism. Yet, the question remains: why Kant became dissatisfied with his original anti-skeptic strategy of his *Fourth Paralogism*?

99 Even if Kant has never been a metaphysical phenomenalist reductionist, he must have realized that his “direct proof” was far from being unconvincing. And the reason is quite obvious. Regardless of whether Kant has endorsed something along the lines of 27), what the *Fourth Paralogism* proves, if anything, is only that I am directly aware of the *mind-dependent existence* of outside things (in the empirical sense). However, the skeptic requires a proof the *mind-independent existence* of outside things (transcendental sense). Given this, Kant’s *Fourth Paralogism* is a further case of what Stroud calls a failed verificationist attempt to rebut skepticism.

100

The Outline of Kant’s Refutation

101 Kant’s Refutation of Idealism (B 275-279) is an addendum to the second edition of the *Critique*, interpolated the chapter on the *Postulates of Empirical Thinking in General*, replacing the *Fourth Paralogism* of the first edition. At first glance, the “Refutation of Idealism” is at the same time a concise and clear argument against some external-world skepticism of Cartesian inspiration, what Kant in the first edition calls “empirical idealism” or “skeptical idealism” (A377) and in the second edition “problematic idealism” (B274). On closer inspection, though, the putative clarity fades away and the conciseness becomes a problem rather than a virtue.¹⁷

102 To a first approximation, Kant has replaced his previous anti-skeptic strategy for a new one: rather than provide a *direct proof* of the immediate awareness of outside things, the now anti-skeptic strategy now aims to refute external-world skepticism *indirectly* in the sense of Strawson’s transcendental argument. This is what clearly emerges from the second *Note* to the Refutation:

103

One will realize that in the preceding proof the game that idealism plays has with greater justice been turned against it. Idealism assumed that the only immediate experience is inner experience, and that from that outer things could only be *inferred*, as in any case in which one infers from given effects *indeterminate* causes, only unreliably, since the Cause of the representations that we perhaps falsely ascribe to outer things can also lie in us. Yet here it is proved that outer experience is really immediate, that only by means of it is possible not, to sure, consciousness of our own existence, its determination in time, i.e., inner experience (B276-277, original emphasis).

104 While in his *Fourth Paralogism* Kant assumes without argument, based only on the doctrine of his transcendental idealism, that we are directly aware of the existence of outside things namely, from now on Kant is in business to prove rather than presuppose that we are directly aware of outside things. Moreover, while in his *Fourth Paralogism*, Kant set fourth an “immediate proof” (A371-A375) of the existence of the outside world, now he is in the business of providing an *indirect proof*, “by turning the idealist game against himself,” i.e., by showing that what skeptic assumes as undoubted, namely the existence of our inner experience, is only possible under the assumption of what the external-world skeptic wants to rule out in the first place: that I am directly aware of the existence of the world outside me.

105 Now, because of the Refutation of Idealism is a replacement of the *Fourth Paralogism*, the scholar faces a lot of questions. Yet, two of them are of key relevance for the present debate over

the feasibility of truth-directed transcendental arguments. They are the following. To begin with, from what have seen so far, Kant has changed his anti-skeptical strategy, by replacing the previous *direct* proof with an *indirect* proof, by attempting to prove now what he has assumed previously, namely that we have direct cognitive access to the existence of outside things. Nonetheless, one wonders whether the results of the Refutation of Idealism and the *Fourth Paralogism* are compatible or not. Now, for those scholars who read Kant's idealism as a version of Berkeleian phenomenalist the answer is unequivocal: the arguments of the Refutation of Idealism and of the *Fourth Paralogism* are pretty much incompatible.¹⁸ According to Smith (2003, p. 301), for example, the Refutation "proves the opposite of what is stated in the first edition," and is a "striking contradiction between various Kant's Refutations of Idealism". Similarly, Vaihinger notes that it is impossible to find an interpretation that can reconcile this "stark contrast" because the two "relate to each other as yes and no, as affirmation and negation, as A and not-A. They were, are, and remain irreconcilable" (1884, pp. 31–2). However, as we saw in the last section, there is overwhelming textual evidence to support the claim that Kant has never abandoned his idealism because his idealism was never a Berkeleian phenomenism in the first place. In contrast, for those scholars who reads Kant's idealism as an epistemological or methodological doctrine rather than as a metaphysical one, the answer is also unequivocal: the arguments are pretty much compatible.¹⁹

106 However, this raises a second question. Let us assume that the Refutation and the *Fourth Paralogism* are compatible. Now one wonders whether Kant's Refutation presupposes Kant's own idealism. Hanna (2000), for example, holds that the argument of the Refutation is independent of Kant's idealism, even recognizing the compatibility between both arguments. In contrast, Allison holds that the Refutation is not just compatible with Kant's idealism, but rather presupposes it:

107

Moreover, the Refutation of Idealism is not merely compatible with transcendental idealism, properly construed; it presupposes it. In order to appreciate this, we must keep in mind that its goal is to demonstrate the objective reality of outer intuition, that is, the existence of objects in space (Bxxxix) [...] but this goal cannot be accomplished on the transcendental realistic assumption that our outer intuition or experience must be of things as they are in themselves (Allison 2004, p. 300).²⁰

108 The key issue is as follows. If the Refutation of Idealism presupposes Kant's idealism, Kant's proof is at best a belief-directed transcendental argument rather than a truth-directed transcendental argument. However, that means that Kant has failed in his aim of showing that we have reasons to accept the existence of outside things as something beyond mere *belief*. Indeed, if the Refutation of Idealism presupposes Kant's idealism, what we have is another failed "verificationist" attempt to rebut external-world skepticism of Cartesian inspiration. Be that as it may, the very reading of the argument hinges on whether Kant's idealism is presupposed.

109 Let us take a first look at Kant's proof of his Refutation. Kant states the conclusion of his Refutation in the form of a theorem:

110

The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me (B275; original emphasis).

111

30) I am conscious of my existence as determined in time (B275).

31) All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception (B275).

32) But this persisting element cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered in me are representations and as such they themselves need something persisting distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined (Bxxxix).

33) Thus, the perception of this persistent thing is possible through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself (B275 n.).

34) Now consciousness in time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time-determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with

the existence of the things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me (B276).

112 Since these steps are not clearly premises in an argument, I believe that the best way of regimenting Kant's argument in the Refutation of Idealism is to start with the simple sketch that Dicker (2004) proposed years ago:

113 35) I am conscious of my own existence in time, i.e. I am aware that I have experiences that occur in a specific time-order (E).

36) I can be aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order only if I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order ($E \supset P$).

37) No conscious state of my own can serve as this permanent frame of reference ($\sim C$).

38) Time itself cannot serve as this permanent frame of reference ($\sim T$).

39) If (2), (3), and (4) are true, then I can be aware of having experiences that occur in a specific temporal order only if I perceive persisting objects in space outside me by reference to which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences. $\{[(E \supset P) \& (\sim C \& \sim T)] \supset (E \supset O)\}$.

40) I perceive persisting objects in space outside me by reference to which I can determine the temporal order of my experiences ($E \supset O$)" (Dicker, 2004, p. 196).

114 Based on this sketch, we can easily see that the crux of the argument of Kant's "Refutation" can be summarized as follows:

115 41) If I am aware of having experience in a successive time-order, then I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine their temporal order ($E \supset P$).

42) I am aware of having experiences in a successive time-order (E).

43) Therefore, I perceive something permanent by reference to which I can determine the temporal order [*modus ponens*: 7), 8)] (P).

116 Again, the crucial point in any reading of the argument is how we should construe 43), more specifically the claim that something persistent (*etwas Beharrliches*) is a condition for the temporal determination of the awareness of my own existence. If we follow Allison, and the mainstream in scholarship, "this persistent" is only what exists *mind-dependently*, i.e., what appears in space and is categorized as a substance in the sense of Kant's *First Analogy of Experience*. Let me call this the empirical reading of Kant's Refutation. In contrast, one may read "this persistent" as something that exist *mind-independently* as a condition for the determination of the awareness of my own existence, for the determination of any representation in me.²¹ Let me call this the transcendental reading of Kant's Refutation.

117

Unpacking the key Argument

118 Kant explicitly states that the aim of his Refutation of Idealism is to prove the existence of something that *is not an appearance*:

119 If the world were an epitome [*ein Inbegriff*] of the things in themselves, so would it be impossible to prove the existence of a thing outside the world; [...] *But if we take the world as appearance, it proves just to the existence of something that is not appearance* (Refl. 5356, 18:305; trans. Emended, emphasis added).

120 Yet, this *Reflection* is not an isolated passage. The textual evidence that supports the transcendental reading of Refutation is overwhelming:

121 We remain in the world of the senses [*crossed out: however*], and would be led by nothing except the principles of the [*crossed out: law*] understanding that we use in experience, but we make our possible progression into an object *in itself*, by regarding the possibility of experience as something real in the objects of experience" (Refl. AA, 18: 278, R5639, original emphasis).

122 We must determine something in space in order to determine our own existence in time. That *thing outside of us* is also represented prior to this determination as a *noumenon*" (Refl. AA 18: 416, R5984, emphasis added).

123 Still, by far the most significant textual evidence is the *Critique*:

124 As to the appearances of inner sense in time, it finds no difficulty in them as real things, indeed, it even asserts that this inner experience and it alone gives sufficient proof of the real existence of their object (*in itself*) along with all this time-determination" (B519; emphasis mine).

125 In B519 Kant made it crystal clear that appearances of inner sense in time and inner experience itself is proof of the real existence of a thing in itself as the grounds for time-determination. Thus, there is no reasonable doubt that the aim of Kant's Refutation was to prove the existence of the objects of outer sense in the transcendental meaning as things-in-themselves.

126 Finally, the transcendental reading of Kant's Refutation of Idealism also finds support in Kant's dissatisfaction with the *Forth Paralogism* and his declared motivation of the Refutation of Idealism, again the alleged "scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us must be accepted merely on faith" (Bxxxix). Kant could never be satisfied with any proof of the existence of outer things as "a mere representation in me" (B275), that is, with the representation of outer things *in the empirical sense*. 43) must be read as:

127 44) I am directly aware of the existence of outside *things in themselves* that appear to me as something persistent in space over the time.

128 Now, even if Kant's aim is to prove 44), the question is: where is his argument that support 47)? Kant's argument was already quoted before:

129 But this persisting element *cannot be an intuition in me* For all the determining grounds of my existence that can be encountered *in me are representations* and as such *they themselves need something persisting distinct from them*, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined (Bxxxix, emphasis added).

130 Kant presents the same reasoning in the *Reflection* R6312:

131 Now since in inner sense everything is successive, hence nothing can be taken backwards, the ground of the possibility of the latter must lie in the relation of representations to something outside us, and indeed to something that is not itself in turn a mere inner representation, i. e., form of appearance, *hence which is something in itself*. The possibility of this cannot be explained. – Further, the representation of that which persists must pertain to that which contains the ground of time-determination, but not with regard to succession, for in that there is no persistence; consequently, *that which is persistent must lie only in that which is simultaneous, or in the intelligible, which contains the ground of appearances*" (AA, 18: 612, R6312; emphasis mine).

132 Now, as I have said, Kant's Refutation is a concise and dense argument that needs to be unpacked. That is particular true of the decisive step to be appreciated from now on. Kant's implicit argument here is the regress. Since we are not able to perceive the temporal order, we need something "persisting" in the interval between X and Y in order to claim that X existed before Y. Now according to the idealist this persisting item is the thinking being itself. Yet, the thinking being is not object of an inner perception. Thus, we must assume that another thing in time, say Z, is this "persisting thing in time" by means of which we determine the temporal sequence from X to Y. However, the problem recurs: if we did not know how to determine the temporal sequence from X to Y, how do we know the temporal relation of Z to the sequence from X and Y? A regress is launched. The only way of stopping it is assuming that such a persisting thing is not a representation in me in time, but rather a mind-independent thing in that appears as the persistent in space. Thus, from the assumption that I am aware of my own existence in time it follows that I am also aware of the existence of things in themselves outside me.

133 45) I cannot perceive the temporal relations between my representations X and Y.

46) Something persistent is required to determine temporal relations between my representations X and Y.

47) Hypothesis: this something persistent could be the mind-dependent existence of

what appears in space over time.

48) However, as the mind-dependent existence in space, this persistent would be again a representation in me in time that requires determination.

49) Therefore, on pain of launching an infinite regress, the hypothesis 47) is absurd: this persistent must be something that exists mind-independently in itself appearing to me as something persistent in space.

50) Corollary: I am directly aware of the existence of mind-independent things that persist existing in themselves.

134 **Concluding Remarks**

135 Now, one may wonder whether Kant's argument can meet Stroud's challenges. For a start, the first problem that Stroud raised against Strawson's transcendental argument was its conditional form (see Stroud 1968, p. 247). Stroud claimed that a factual premise 5) was required if the argument was supposed to reach a categorical conclusion. Without 5), Strawson remains *a long conditional*. However, 5) and the verification principle [1) to 4)] render the very idea of any indirect transcendental argument superfluous (1968, p. 256) since from now on we have a direct answer to the skeptical challenge. As I have anticipated, this objection does not have the bite that it appears to have. The objection specifically was directed against Strawson's argument in the light of Stroud's free reconstruction. Be that as it may, in the case of Kant's Refutation of Idealism, the factual premise that via *modus ponens* enables the categorical conclusion is 42) or 50), i.e., a cogito-like thought:

136 42) I am aware of having experiences in a successive time-order (E).

137 Moreover, in addition to being a cogito-like thought, 42) is presupposed by the skeptical challenge: if one wonders whether if one knows whether outside things continue to exist mind-independently, one must assume that one is conscious of one's own existence as a subject of successive experience in time.

138 Given this, Kant's Refutation is a successful *indirect* argument in the original sense that Strawson claims for his argument. It shows indirectly that *the truth* of what the skeptic calls in question, roughly the knowledge of the mind-independent existence of things outside us is a condition for the formulation of his questioning, namely the temporal determination of one's awareness of his own existence.

139 But what about the two additional objections? As I have been arguing, they boil down to a single objection, namely transcendental arguments reduce *the truth* of whatever the skeptic questions to *the verification* of the truth of whatever the skeptic questions. To be sure, the notions of "true" and "verified" should not be confused. "Verified" is a relational and context-dependent notion: a proposition is verified by one or several people. Moreover, it may be recognized as true by some people and not by others. In contrast, the notion of truth is *prima facie* absolute: a proposition is true, period. Therefore, there is no way of proving the *truth* of a proposition by means of the application of *criteria of verification* of the same proposition.

140 Still, everything here hinges on *which truth* the skeptic calls into question. For example, of the skeptical adversary of Kant's Refutation is a global skeptic who raises the suspicion that most of our beliefs might turn out to be false, Kant's Refutation is ineffective. From the simple fact that I am aware of my own existence in time it does not follow that most of my beliefs must be true. Be that it may, this is not the external-world skeptic of Cartesian inspiration that both Stroud and Kant have in mind. This skeptic idealist only challenges us to lay down a proof that we are aware of the existence of a world external to our own consciousness. Now, Kant's Refutation meet this external-world challenge quite successfully.

141 That said, a first important observation is the following. In almost all the discussion about the failure or success of transcendental arguments there is little concern to properly qualify who this "skeptical" opponent of the Kantian would like. As we have seen, in Strawson (1959) the skeptic is nothing but a Straw figure, conceived only to give the transcendental argument a dialectical dynamic. The exceptions to this rule are both Stroud and Kant: both take the "skeptical" as some

external-world skeptic of Cartesian inspiration, the “skeptical idealist.”

142 A final remark is in order. One may reasonably wonder which kind of knowledge/awareness is involved in the claim that we are directly aware of the mind-independent existence of outside things. To be sure, this knowledge is minimal and restricted to what he calls noumena in the *negative sense*, meaning things as may exist in themselves independently of our representation of them:

143 Nevertheless, the concept of a *noumenon*, taken merely problematically remains not only admissible, but even unavoidable, as a concept setting to sensibility. But in that case, it is not a special **intelligible object** for our understanding; rather an understanding to which it would belong is itself a problem, namely, that of cognizing its object not discursively through categories but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition, the possibility of which we cannot in the least represent. Now in this way our understanding acquires a negative expansion, i.e., it is not limited by sensibility, but rather limits it calling things in themselves (not considered as appearances) *noumena*. But it also immediately sets boundaries for itself, not cognizing these things through categories, hence merely thinking them under the name of an unknown something (A256/B311-312, original emphasis in bold and in cursive).

144 We do not know how things are in themselves, *positively* speaking, therefore, whether they are in themselves as they appear to us. *Still, we do know that they must exist as the ultimate nature of what appears to us.* Given this, however minimal this knowledge may be, it is all that is required to support the claim that more *than merely belief* we do know of the existence of mind-independent outside things in transcendental sense. Given this, Kant’s Refutation is a successful world-directed transcendental argument against some external-world skeptic of Cartesian inspiration.

Remarks:

1. Actually, Strawson was not the first. Austin was the one who introduced the binominal in 1939.
2. Strawson never revealed his motivations. Probably, as everyone at that time, he must have found Moore (1903) direct proof of the external world completely unsatisfactory. Yet, one may wonder why Strawson calls such strategy “transcendental?” My hypothesis is that Strawson has taken up the old spirit of Kant’s Refutation: turning the game against the skeptic, by showing that what he questions is a condition for the formulation of his very questioning (B276).
3. Kant’s most important proofs in both editions of in the first *Critique* are “transcendental” in this sense precise sense, for example, the transcendental exposition of concept of space (A25/B40), the transcendental exposition of the concept of time (A32/B48); the transcendental A-deduction (A95), the transcendental B-deduction (B129), the *Axioms of Intuition* (A162/B202), the *Anticipations of Perception* (A166/B207), the *Analogies of Experience* (A176/B218), and *The postulates of empirical thinking in general* (A218/B265).
4. See Ameriks 1978. Aschenberg has tried to connect Kant’s method of proof with Strawson’s transcendental argument, by arguing that “possible experience” in Kant could also mean “possible perception,” that is some subjective experience. However, his attempt failed for exegetical reasons: for Kant “possible experience” always means possible experience of objects. See Aschenberg 1982.
5. Considering only what was published in the twenty-first century, the literature is huge. See Bardon 2005, 2006; Bell 1999; Callanan 2006, 2011; Caranti 2017; Cassam 2007; Chang 2008; Dicker, 2008; D’Oro 2019; Finnis 2011; Franks 2005; Giladi 2016; Glock 2003; Grundmann, and Misselhorn 2003; Houlgate, 2015; Illies 2003; Lockie 2018; McDowell 2006; Mizrahi 2012; Rähme 2017; Rockmore and D. Breazeale (eds.) 2014; Russell and Reynolds 2011; Stapleford 2008; Stern 2016; Vahid 2011; Wang 2012; Westphal 2004.
6. Peacocke was the first to introduce this expression: “For our purposes a transcendental argument will be any argument with a certain kind of premise and a certain kind of conclusion. The premise must state that experiences, perhaps of specified type, occur. *The conclusion must entail some proposition whose truth does not require the existence of experiences at all.* The more modest transcendental arguments have as their conclusion certain propositions about a mind-independent world. *I call these ‘truth-directed.’*” (1989, p. 4, emphasis added). Even Stroud shows sympathies with Strawson’s modest transcendental argument (1994, p. 242). Stern also adheres to the same idea (1999, p. 4).
7. Strawson himself was the first that came out with the idea of “modest” transcendental arguments (see Strawson 1984). He was followed by Peacocke (see Peacocke 1988), and even Stroud (see Stroud 1994, 1999) and Stern (see Stern 1999). The idea of modest belief-directed transcendental argument becomes by large the dominant view: see Grundmann & Misselhorn 2003, Grayling 1985, Callanan 2011, Doron 2018, Wang 2011, 2017, Scott 2017, Giladi 2016, Mizrahi 2012, Stern 2007, etc.). Perhaps the only dissenting voice was Brueckner (1996).
8. I cautiously say “some” Cartesian skeptic because, first, Stroud was not a proper scholar in history of Cartesian philosophy and, second, because his reading of the Cartesian *First Meditation* is quite superficial and debatable (see Stroud

1984, first chapter).

9. Now, if Strawson is struggling with some unqualified skeptic, it is hard to understand why Stroud describes his conceptual scheme as containing “objective” particulars.

10. We will be back to this controversial point in next section.

11. This first objection gives rise to a key misconception of the structure of the transcendental argument as a special case of *modus ponens*. According to Sacks (2015), for instance, transcendental argument assumes the simple logical structure of a *modus ponens*, whose antecedent of the conditional is not a contingent, but rather a transcendental proposition.

12. Needless to say, but that nothing could be more un-Kantian than Strawson’s signification principle. Kant has never claimed that without sensible intuitions our concepts would be meaningless. Instead, what he claims is only that without sensible intuitions our concepts are empty.

13. Of course, Stroud was not the first to speak of “verificationism” as a form of anti-realist reductionism of the notion of truth. Consider this: “(...) *the verificationist also needs a notion of truth* in order to be able to say that the content of an assertion is that the sentence asserted is true. As already indicated, Dummett is right in saying that the intuitionist is able to explain from his point of view the conditions for the assertion of mathematical sentences in terms of the proof conditions alone without invoking any notion of truth” (Wansing, 2015, p. 46, emphasis added).

14. Moreover, that is the way that Stroud’s “verificationism” was received in the literature by Bennett (1979) and more recently by Stern (1999). But the reader may wonder: why I do care about Stroud’s mistake? For one thing, Stroud’s criticism has launched a meaningless debate in the literature that still persists in the twenty-first century. For example, in his reply to Stroud, Strawson concedes his arguments either “rely on an unacceptably *simple verificationism* or the most they can establish is a certain sort of interdependence of conceptual capacities and beliefs” (1985, p. 21, emphasis added). Another example, Rorty draws the hasty conclusion that a transcendental argument can be at most an argument for the “parasitism” of one set of concepts on another (1971, pp. 3-4). Westphal has recently claimed that Kant’s “transcendental proofs can justify conclusions much stronger than Richard Rorty recognizes” (2005, p32. note). In the same vein Nielsen claims: “Thomson and Stroud are right in seeing verificationism underlying the employment of transcendental arguments against scepticism, but wrong in thinking this a mistaken move in philosophy” (1972, p. 358). Hacker (1972), in contrast, rejects Stroud’s verificationist charge: “we need not follow the *verificationist in claiming simply that the falsity of the skeptic’s claims is a necessary condition for their meaningfulness*” (1972, p. 84, emphasis added). Yet, the misunderstanding reached this century. Bardon, for example, claims: “Stroud claimed that no TA [transcendental argument] can succeed in showing that a proposition questioned by the skeptic is true without presupposing some sort of verificationism-derived principle stating that to hold a belief we must be in a position to determine its truth or falsity. But such a principle is implausible and would make the TA it underlies redundant” (2005, p. 77).

15. Of course, Stroud was not the first to speak of “verificationism” as a form of anti-realist reductionism of the notion of truth to notion of verification. Indeed, in the intuitionist view of philosophy of mathematics, the claim is commonplace. Prawitz is the best example. Consider this: “(...) *the verificationist also needs a notion of truth* in order to be able to say that the content of an assertion is that the sentence asserted is true. As already indicated, Dummett is right in saying that the intuitionist is able to explain from his point of view the conditions for the assertion of mathematical sentences in terms of the proof conditions alone without invoking any notion of truth” (Wansing, 2015, p. 46, emphasis added).

16. I will be back to this quotation in the next section.

17. Since the turn of the twentieth century, a vast amount of secondary literature on the Refutation of has emerged. See Aquila 1979, Ameriks 2003, Bader 2012, Bardon 2006, Chignell 2010, Dicker 2004 and 2008, Guyer 1987 and 2006, Hanna 2000, Longuenesse 2008, Van Cleve 1999, Vogel 1993, and Westphal 2004.

18. We also saw that this reading was championed by Guyer in the last century (1987). Yet, this reading traces back to a long tradition of scholars such as Vaihinger (1883, 1884), Smith (2003) Adickes (1924).

19. See Paton 1970, Prauss 1974 and Allison 2004. This is the so-called two-aspect view, according to which, the transcendental divide is not a metaphysical one that opposes two realms of reality, the phenomenal and the noumenal. Instead, the divide opposes different perspectives on the same reality. According to the two-aspect view, *mundus sensibilis* and *mundus intelligibilis* are the only two ways of considering the existing world, that of the human and that of the absolute, God’s perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*. From the human perspective, the world takes the form of appearances (*Erscheinungen*) as the objects of our sensible representation, while, from the God’s-eye-view perspective, the same world takes the form of things in themselves.

20. Ameriks (2006) and Dicker (2004, 2008) endorse the same view.

21. To my knowledge, Pritchard (1909) was the first contemporary Kantian scholar (early 20th century) to hold the transcendental reading of the Refutation. According to him, the argument of the Refutation can only be accepted if we consider permanent substances as things in themselves. Yet, since Guyer (1987), numerous scholars have come to the same transcendental reading. According to Bader (2012), for example, if successful, the Refutation establishes the existence of phenomena, which would license us to infer the existence of noumena as the ultimate foundation of phenomena. Chignell (2011) endorses causal inference of the phenomenon of the thing in itself on the basis of Guyer’s reading (1987, p. 2006).

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Rejecting the Plea for Modesty. Kant's Truth-Directed Transcendental Argument Based on Self-Consciousness of Our Own Existence

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Аннотация

Recent developments of transcendental arguments reflect the struggle to accommodate Stroud's devastating objection by giving up of failed expectations in providing a proof of what the external-world skeptic calls into question: knowledge of the existence of the outside world. Since Strawson capitulation in 1984, the truth-direct transcendental arguments gave way to modest belief-direct transcendental arguments that concedes that truth-direct transcendental arguments are doomed to fail to establish ambitious conclusions about reality, but at the same time hold that they can nonetheless successfully establish modest conceptual connection between the major beliefs within our conceptual scheme. This article seeks the "reactionary" rehabilitation of the old hubris: a new defense of the truth-direct transcendental argument. I set forth a new reconstruction of Kant's Refutation as successful truth-directed transcendental argument that meets Stroud's objection. As several papers and books about the theme, this article is of a systematic and of a historical nature by connecting the contemporary debate about transcendental argument with Kant's philosophy.

Ключевые слова: Transcendental Argument, Kant's Refutation of Idealism, Strawson, Stroud

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