The Aristotelian Prescription:
Skepticism, Retortion, and Transcendental Arguments

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ABSTRACT:

From a number of quarters have come attempts to answer some form of skepticism—about knowledge of the external world, freedom of the will, or moral reasons—by showing it to be performatively self-defeating. Examples of this strategy are subject to a number of criticisms, in particular the criticism that they fail to shift the burden of proof from the anti-skeptical position, and so fail to establish the epistemic entitlement they seek. To these approaches I contrast one way of understanding Kant's core anti-skeptical arguments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's goal is the more modest one of showing the applicability of the concepts of substance and cause to experience, against those who might call such application incoherent, or a category mistake. I explain why this goal makes Kant's approach more promising than those of neo-Kantian practitioners of otherwise structurally-similar strategies.

In his book *Insight*, Bernard Lonergan purports to demonstrate that certain forms of skepticism are self-defeating. He calls the strategy exemplified by his arguments the "Aristotelian prescription" for dealing with skepticism, after Aristotle's discussion, in Book Γ of his *Metaphysics*, of the impossibility of maintaining that the principle of non-contradiction is false. According to this strategy, if some form of skepticism is performatively self-defeating, the prescription for dealing with it lies in "getting the skeptic to talk": in articulating his skepticism the skeptic refutes himself.[1] The trick, of course, is showing that the target skepticism really is self-defeating.

In this paper I contrast two approaches to filling the Aristotelian prescription. Practitioners of the first approach include Lonergan, C.I. Lewis, Joseph Boyle, Germain Grisez,

Olaf Tollefsen, and Hugo Meynell. The aim of this approach is to prove propositions questioned under some particular variety of skepticism, or to show the beliefs attacked by that skeptic to be justified, by showing that form of skepticism to be self-defeating. I begin by briefly describing and critiquing four representative arguments employing this strategy. To this strategy I then contrast one way of understanding Kant's anti-skeptical transcendental argument strategy. Contrary to some readings, Kant's intention in several key passages is neither to establish the *truth* of some particular propositions nor to establish that we are *justified* in believing some propositions. Rather, he seeks to demonstrate that certain concepts embodied in external-world propositions are coherently *applicable* to the world. Although his strategy is structurally similar to that of the above followers of the Aristotelian strategy, his more modest goal places him in a superior dialectical position.

Transcendental Thomism is an intellectual movement traceable to Belgian theologian Joseph Maréchal, in which Kantian methods of assessing the a priori contribution of understanding or intellect to experience are brought to bear in support of Thomistic metaphysics.[2] Karl Rahner, Michael Polanyi, and Bernard Lonergan are all associated with this tradition. In the context of Transcendental Thomism, the strategy of proving a proposition (or otherwise validating our assent to it) by showing that the attempt to deny it is self-referentially inconsistent is called "retortion."[3] Inspired by Kant and Maréchal, Lonergan sought the refutation of skepticism in the very cognitive structures and epistemological presuppositions employed by the skeptic in the very act of articulating and justifying the skeptical position itself. He argues, for example, that attempting to deny that one knows anything, or that what is real is unknowable, involves one in a self-referential inconsistency, since the act of asserting anything implies that one does know something, or that the real can be known.[4]

The kind of inconsistency Lonergan relies on is pragmatic, rather than logical, inconsistency. In addition to the logical implications of what is expressed in a statement, the act of affirming itself can carry implications. A pragmatic contradiction is a contradiction between the content of a statement and something pragmatically implied by the act of stating it. The classic example of pragmatic contradiction is the statement "I believe it is raining, and it is not raining." Note that this statement does not involve a logical contradiction, as "it is raining and it is not raining" would. I shall call an inconsistency "performative" when there is a pragmatic inconsistency between the statement and some necessary conditions of the statement being true, meaningful and/or epistemically defensible. Thus a performative inconsistency is a species of pragmatic inconsistency, in which the inconsistency involves what a statement implies about one's ability to truthfully, meaningfully, and/or justifiably affirm that very statement. The verification principle of meaning, for example, says something like "No proposition is meaningful if it is neither a tautology nor empirically verifiable."[5] But this proposition does not meet its own criterion of meaningfulness. Thus the attempt to affirm it is self-defeating because it involves one in a performative inconsistency. I am concerned in this paper with anti-skeptical arguments that turn on identifying a performative inconsistency in the very expression of a given type of skepticism.

This kind of argument pops up in a variety of contexts. In their book *Free Choice*, Boyle, Grisez, and Tollefsen attempt to improve upon Epicurus' argument that skepticism about freedom of the will is self-defeating. According to Epicurus, if there is no free will, then there can be no reason to believe any thesis, including the thesis that there is no free will. The intended consequence seems to be that the non-existence of free will cannot be rationally asserted. Boyle *et al* argue that the rationality norm implicitly appealed to in the denial of free choice entails that

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there must be at least two open alternatives—meaning that the alternative choices must be physically and psychologically possible.[6] Thus, if the proposition that there is no free choice can be rationally affirmed, then it is not true; if true, it cannot be rationally affirmed.

Hugo Meynell's concern is radical skepticism about the possibility of rational justification. He focuses on statements like "I never have good reason for the statements I make," and "I never propound justified or true judgments."[7] Statements like these would follow from statements like "all beliefs are groundless." He points out that these statements are self-defeating, and so the real or hypothetical radical skeptic is on the horns of a dilemma: either justified judgments are possible, or there can be no good reason to claim that they are not. This dilemma, Meynell argues, entitles us to disregard any such skeptical position.

Lonergan deploys a similar strategy against Cartesian external-world skepticism. The following is William Rehg's reconstruction of his central argument:

(1) The real is in principle unknowable. [~K]

(2) A description of the skeptic's performance of a serious doubt (or denial) to the effect that ~K.

(3) The condition of possibility for this performance of doubt, as described, is that:

  (a) the doubt is motivated by a pure, unrestricted desire to know which aims at a correct judgment after intelligent inquiry and critical reflection;

  (b) the real is the objective of a pure, unrestricted desire to know.

(4) If 3(a) and 3(b), then the real (if it is to be known) is to be known in a correct judgment.

(5) If the real is to be known in a correct judgment, then the real is in principle knowable.

(6) Therefore, the skeptic can perform a serious doubt only if the real is in principle knowable.

(7) K & ~K.

(8) Therefore, the real is in principle knowable.[8]

The point seems to be that the skeptic, in doubting, accepts by implication the feasibility of inquiry. In accepting the feasibility of inquiry, the skeptic further implies the knowability of the real, for inquiry is not feasible unless the real can in principle be known. So the skeptic is inconsistent in denying the knowability of the real. This argument, Rehg says, is directed at a Cartesian skepticism claiming "we cannot know whether real objects exist as we perceive them."[9]

Setting aside some other concerns about this argument's validity, the glaring problem with this line of reasoning is that it equivocates on "the real." Since this argument is directed at a Cartesian skeptic who denies that external reality is knowable, then "the real" in line (1) must refer to external reality. But "the real" in line 3(b) is being used to mean something like "the truth." The Cartesian skeptic does not deny that we can ever know the truth. The skeptic who is the intended target of the argument accepts the possibility of knowledge as the result of inquiry, while denying that we can be certain about external reality.

Boyle, Grisez, and Tollefsen have similar problems. They argue that skepticism about free choice is self-defeating, because the rationality norms accepted by implication in the affirmation of a statement like "there is no free choice" entail the possibility of free choice. Their view is that rational affirmation involves a choice between two logically possible and coherent alternatives. The essence of their claim rests on the view that a rationality norm must prescribe, and that there can be no prescription without genuine alternatives. Since the assertion that there

is no free choice denies such alternatives, the attempt to affirm that there is no free choice is thus, in their terms, "pointless," and the position of the skeptic either false or self-defeating.

Unfortunately, this argument is question-begging against the compatibilist. There is a perfectly coherent sense of "rationality norm" that is *descriptive*, rather than prescriptive, and such a norm is all a determinist needs to affirm something rationally. Norms (as Kenneth Konyndyk explains) can be understood as rules for guidance of actions or as rules for judging actions.[10] According to compatibilism, all rationality demands is that one choose the most reasonable alternative, and this is consistent with one's being determined to choose it.[11] To claim that persons who are determined to choose the most reasonable of available options are not acting rationally begs the question against the determinist. Just as Lonergan succeeds by equivocating on "the real," Boyle *et al* succeed only by equivocating on the notion of a rationality norm.

Even more telling is a type of attack that has been directed against Meynell's anti-skeptical argument. Meynell argues for a strategy focusing on "adverting to propositions whose contradictories entail statements which are self-destructive," and "attending to the general form of justification implicit in the vindication of such propositions." Against the radical skeptic who questions reason itself he argues that statements like "no grounded beliefs are possible" are "self-destructive," and must themselves be either false or groundless. John Kekes replies that "the logic of the sceptical challenge is *reductio ad absurdum*: it is to assume for the sake of argument the rationalist's standards and show, in their own terms, that they are arbitrary."[12] Meynell's radical skeptic thus need not commit himself to any standards of justification. Corbin Fowler adds that Meynell himself relies on, for example, the law of the excluded middle in framing the dilemma for the skeptic.[13] The skeptic can frame his argument purely negatively, as in "where is

the proof (or adequate justification for believing) that the law of non-contradiction is true, or that there are enduring independent substances?" By framing the question negatively, the skeptic can avoid commitments that can be the basis for accusations of inconsistency.

Each of the above kinds of response is applicable to C.I. Lewis' retortive argument for the existence of moral imperatives. Lewis claims that the denial that there are moral imperatives is self-defeating.[14] He agrees with Kant that moral imperatives are rational imperatives. The denier of moral norms on his view is committed to denying all "valid imperatives of right doing," including any norms (i.e., pertaining to inference and warrant) that would govern assent to claims about moral norms. The skeptic thus cannot escape inconsistency, and so can be ignored as failing to proffer a coherent alternative world-view.

But this argument can only succeed if moral imperatives are rational imperatives, and if denying moral imperatives means denying all rational imperatives—including all norms governing justification. But even if all moral imperatives are rational imperatives, the reverse is not the case. So Lewis' argument depends on a kind of equivocation on the notion of an imperative.

Further, the skeptic can just throw the burden of proof back onto Lewis by demanding a justification for the claim that there are valid rational imperatives of right doing. Any reasoned defense of such a notion is unavoidably question-begging.

An assessment of the prospects for retortive argument requires a better understanding of the goals of such argument. What does the method of answering skepticism by accusing the skeptic of inconsistency hope to achieve? There are at least two types of retortive argument, corresponding to two ways in which a statement or proposition can be performatively inconsistent. Some performatively inconsistent statements are actually self-falsifying, in that

what they assert is inconsistent with their being asserted. "I do not exist" and "nothing can be asserted" are examples of putatively self-falsifying statements.[15] The verification principle appears self-falsifying as well: if I am able meaningfully to affirm the verification principle, then it cannot be true. By contrast, other performatively inconsistent statements are merely self-stultifying. A self-stultifying statement or proposition denies or implies the denial of some condition of one's being epistemically entitled to affirm it. "I never have good reason for the statements I make" expresses a proposition that is either false or unjustified. Similarly for "The principle of non-contradiction is false." Epicurus' argument amounts to an argument that "there is no free choice" is self-stultifying. The claim that there is no synthetic a priori knowledge is also self-stultifying: since this claim is neither analytic nor a posteriori, it is either false or unwarranted by its own lights, and thus cannot be rationally upheld.[16]

What is supposed to follow if some form of skepticism can be shown to be self-defeating? If the skeptic is shown to be incapable of consistently maintaining his skeptical position, then the skeptic, as Eric Dayton puts it, "either repents and becomes a reformed person, or he is a fool. *Qua* fool his remarks carry no more weight than the wind; the transparently inconsistent is unbelievable and hence unassertable."[17] Such an argument would not disprove the skeptic's claim so much as warrant us in ignoring that claim, since the claim cannot be made consistently.

The question is, would this result warrant us in believing the contrary of the skeptical position? If we succeed, say, in showing that the verification principle is self-falsifying, does it follow that it is false? If we establish that the proposition that there is no free choice is self-stultifying, can we infer that we have free choice? If some proposition ~P is self-falsifying or self-stultifying, does P follow?

Unfortunately, it seems that a consistent position questioning P will generally be available to the skeptic. As we have seen, Kekes and Fowler each explain how the skeptic can avoid self-defeat by sticking to a stance that places the burden of proof on the proponent of knowledge, free choice, or moral value. The skeptic can ask for proof of the legitimacy of rational inference, or proof of the existence of open alternatives. But then the burden is on the proponent to avoid equivocation or circularity. How is the proponent of rational inference going to prove its legitimacy without relying on such inference, and how is the proponent of the existence of open alternatives going to prove their existence without assuming norms (as Boyle *et al* claim any argument does) that themselves presume open alternatives? By merely questioning, the skeptic avoids inconsistency, even if inconsistency is inherent in any assertion of non-freedom or non-knowability.

Are the proponents of the above anti-skeptical strategy at an impasse? I think that these proponents, despite citing Kant as an ally and inspiration, tend to overlook his primary anti-skeptical goal, and, in the process, overlook a potentially fruitful variation on their own strategy.

Proponents of Transcendental Thomism sometimes claim to be executing a Kantian anti-skeptical strategy.[18] Some of the other proponents of retortion as an anti-skeptical strategy characterize that strategy as at least broadly Kantian.[19] A number of scholars, including Eva Schaper, Stephen Arndt, Eric Dayton, and James Skidmore, have gone so far as to characterize Kant's transcendental argument strategy as always or characteristically aimed at showing skepticism to be self-defeating.[20] This raises an old and contentious question: what sort of skepticism, exactly, is the target of Kant's anti-skeptical transcendental arguments in his *Critique of Pure Reason*?

Kant's core anti-skeptical arguments are found in the First and Second Analogies and the second edition Refutation of Idealism, which together concern the application of the concepts of substance and cause to external-world events and objects. In the First and Second Analogies he argues that the concepts of substance and cause are necessary to the representation of an event (as opposed to the representation of an unchanging object or state of affairs).[21] Kant notes that subjective experience is always constituted by a succession of states, and that temporal relations among the objects of those states cannot be read directly off that succession.[22] Any succession of subjective states consistent with the representation of a change in an object can also be taken to represent a replacement of one object with another, or a change in one's point of view on an unchanging object; any succession of subjective states consistent with the representation of an event can also be taken to represent an unchanging state of affairs viewed from different perspectives. In the First Analogy Kant claims that the representation of alteration in an object requires the supposition of an unchanging substrate enduring through the change of state. In his Second Analogy he claims that the representation of an event (as opposed to the representation of a state of affairs) is made possible by the represented irreversibility of the constituent event-parts. It is thus constitutive of the representation of an event that the parts of the event are brought together in thought in accordance with a rule necessitating their order—i.e., a causal rule. He concludes that we can only represent change (or stability) in the world by representing it as a world of enduring substances undergoing rule-governed alteration. So the supposition, in representation, of some principles describing the world in this way is a necessary condition of determining the time-order of the things and states of affairs in the world we represent. The Analogy arguments are examples of "transcendental arguments" because they rest on claims

about necessary enabling conditions of our experience, knowledge, and/or conceptual constitution.

There are several interpretations of Kant's intentions when he offers arguments like these. The principles Kant claims to have established with his argument appear as factual claims describing the world as being constituted by enduring substances subject to causal rules. From the principles to be proven, it would seem that his argument is aimed at an epistemic skeptic who questions the reality and universality of objects and their causal connections. His intention, on this reading, is to provide (as Robert Stern expresses it) a "truth-directed" argument against epistemic skepticism showing that there are underlying substances and causal rules determining changes in those substances.[23] This reading is supported by Kant's preface-note description of the "scandal" of skepticism:

> it still remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us…must be accepted on *faith*, and if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof. (Bxl n.)[24]

This passage, together with the language of some of the principles Kant claims to prove with his refutations of skepticism, has led many to believe that his intentions include proving the fact of external substances and causal relations.

Could such an argument ground the conclusion that it is true of the world that it be causal? Barry Stroud famously argued that, to any claim that the truth of some proposition is a necessary condition of some fact about our mental life, the skeptic can always reply that it would be enough for this proposition merely to appear to be true, or for us merely to believe that it is true.[25] The only way around this response, he continued, is to presume either idealism or a sort of verificationism. In the case of the Analogies, Kant is usually represented as relying on a kind of

idealism to make his argument work. Even if it is true that we must represent the world as causal in order to make objective time-order determinations, the further conclusion that the world must therefore *be* causal appears to require reducing the world to mere representation.

Paul Guyer's reconstruction of the Analogies avoids this problem. On his view, Kant's argument is that the principles allegedly demonstrated in the Analogies are not psychological preconditions of the representation of an object or event; rather, he thinks Kant tries to establish that knowledge of substances and causal rules is a necessary condition of the "*justification, verification, or confirmation* of the judgments about empirical objects we make on the basis of our representations of them."[26] According to his reconstruction, the point of the First Analogy is to show that "knowledge of *alteration in an enduring substance…*is itself the necessary condition for knowledge of *any change* at all." Correlatively, the point of the Second Analogy is to show that knowledge of events rests on knowledge of causal rules.

Why should the skeptic allow that we have knowledge (or justified belief) regarding objective time-order? The answer to that question, according to Guyer, is to be found in the Refutation of Idealism, in which the larger argument as he sees it is completed.[27] There Kant says that the possibility of knowledge of oneself as subject of successive, representational mental states depends on objective time-determination.[28] Guyer's take on this claim is that subjective time-order is not simply given in reflection any more than objective time-order. In order to justify or confirm the ordering of one's own states in time, one needs to relate those states to a known objective time-order. Justified subjective time-order determinations rest, in other words, on justified objective time-order determinations. If we have good reason to think that some of the former are justified, then we must also have good reason to think that some of the latter are as well.

But must the skeptic agree that our *subjective* time-order judgments can be justified? If the psychological preconditions of even making such determinations are not at issue, why not just say that we make such determinations without justification? If so, then there is no need to admit that our objective time-determinations are justified either.[29] The closest Guyer comes to directly addressing this concern comes in his Appendix, where he says the following:

> If one can really entertain the proposition that all of one's even subjective temporal judgments are false, of course one can do without commitment to another set of propositions which could provide evidence for these. But it is not easy to see how one could accept one's subjective time-determinations as true, acknowledge that judgments about objective time-determinations (as well as the causal and other relations of the external objects) are the sole evidence for such judgments, and yet seriously entertain that these further judgments are all, or mostly, false. Such a stance seems incoherent: It seems to collapse into that of perhaps verbally affirming one set of sentences and verbally rejecting another without actually believing anything at all, thus making no judgments at all. In such a position, of course, arguments can make no difference at all.[30]

There are two implied retortive arguments in this passage. Guyer suggests first that, if Kant is right about the epistemic dependence of subjective time-determinations on objective ones, one may not be able to "seriously entertain" the proposition that one's subjective temporal determinations are false. This claim suggests an argument that plays off the fact that any articulation of a skeptical position implies subjective time-determination, because any stringing-together of any statement or question whatsoever—including a skeptical one—requires thinking of the parts of the statement as determinately ordered in time. The very attempt to entertain the idea of the falsity of subjective time-determination implies a commitment to its possibility,

because its possibility is pragmatically implied by any attempt to think or articulate anything at all. Thus it is performatively inconsistent to articulate any concern over subjective time-determination.

If we accept that any judgment whatsoever implies acceptance of the validity of one's subjective time-determinations, and we accept that the validity of such judgments depends on the validity of some objective time-determinations, then we have a second retortive argument. The second implied claim of the above passage is that it is performatively inconsistent either to deny or to question that one can be justified with regard to some *objective* time-determination as well. For such justification is a necessary condition for subjective time-judgments to be epistemically grounded, and knowledge of subjective time-order is pragmatically implied by the skeptic's very articulation of his own position.

Note that these retortive arguments avoid the Fowler-type line of attack on anti-skeptical arguments. For the Fowler line requires that we be able to raise the question as to the non-skeptic's justification for believing something. But if the above line of reasoning is sound, then we cannot do so without committing ourselves to the possibility of the kind of knowledge in question.

But a familiar line of attack remains pertinent. A skeptic could still say that he is accepting his own subjective time-ordering for the sake of argument only, so as to raise the issue of the justification of time-ordering. He would deny that he is necessarily thereby committed to anything more than the mere possibility of such time-ordering. A Humean naturalist, for example, would deny that the mere fact of making a judgment commits one to its being justified. A naturalist typically would say of various sorts of judgments that we make such judgments not because we are justified in doing so, or even because we think we are; according to this view,

judgments regarding enduring particulars and causal relations are based on feeling and imagination rather than reason. Guyer's version of Kant's key argument begs the question against this sort of skeptic.

Guyer's interpretation of Kant thus fails to address the critical response to retortive and transcendental arguments. So neither the truth-directed nor the justification-directed versions of Kant's key anti-skeptical arguments look promising. Yet there is a solution to the problem of the apparent weakness of his strategy. The solution lies in the modesty of Kant's true primary goal. That goal is neither to show that judgments about external objects and their causal relations are true, nor to show that they are justified. The issue he was most concerned with was not the status of judgments regarding objects and causes, but rather the legitimacy of the very application of the concepts of substance and cause to experience.

Consider the legal metaphor he employs at the beginning of his Transcendental Deduction, the section that opens his defense of our use of external-world concepts. There he notes the legal distinction between "what is lawful (*quid juris*) and that which concerns the fact (*quid facti*)."[31] In the legal terminology he is referring to, the attempt to establish a legal entitlement is a "deduction." What he will now call a "transcendental" deduction of a concept is a demonstration of the "lawfulness" of our use of categorical concepts relating to objects.

This passage has puzzled many readers of Kant precisely because it may be taken to suggest that his concern about external-world concepts does not concern the fact of their instantiation, but rather some other sense in which they can be said to be used appropriately. It remains possible, however, to represent establishing the existence of substances and the reality of causal relations as the goal of such a legitimization process: after all, if the reality of substance and cause could be shown, the legitimacy of the use of these concepts would surely follow. The

legal metaphor, then, is often taken to focus on Kant's distinction between explaining the a priori origin of concepts and finding their basis in experience.

But if we look at what some of Kant's most important influences had to say about such concepts, we gain a better understanding of his legitimizing intention. Kant was an avowed Leibnizian through the first half of his career, but later rejected Leibnizian metaphysics and consequent epistemology. Consider Leibniz's doctrines of substance and causation, and what they say about our attributions of physical properties and causal relationships to objects. By the time of the *Monadology* at least, he espoused a phenomenalist position according to which there are no material or corporeal substances. Matter is a mere "well-founded phenomenon," and the appearance of interaction among physical objects is the result of a pre-established harmony among monadic representations. Only minds or souls are or can be substances; causation in the sense of physical influence among material objects is useful in physics (qua phenomenal description of patterns of representation) yet strictly metaphysically incoherent.[32] Thus the concepts of substance and cause are not only false of the world as it happens to be; these concepts could not even possibly apply to the world.

Consider next Berkeley's position regarding the reality of physical objects. He is mentioned prominently by Kant in the first *Critique* as the most important proponent of "dogmatic idealism."[33] Berkeley attacked the notion of independently existing, material objects through his critique of representationalism. All we are directly acquainted with are our ideas, and there is no sense to saying that ideas resemble non-ideal material objects or their qualities.[34] Anything we can say about material objects—e.g., their texture, color, or solidity—describes an idea. We neither can conceive of mind-independent objects nor do we need them to explain the

ideas we do have. Berkeley concludes that only minds and ideas exist; talk of causally interacting mind-independent material objects is incoherent.

Finally, consider Hume's discussions of mind-independent objects and their alleged causal relations. Hume, of course, was a tremendous influence on Kant, and was cited by Kant as having awoken him from his "dogmatic slumber"; the Second Analogy is usually read as aimed specifically at Hume. Given Hume's copy principle of ideas, any ideas we have must ultimately be explained by sense-impressions. But there is no way to explain the full-fledged notion of mind-independent, enduring material objects, because we have no impression of mind-independence or unperceived endurance. The ideas of endurance and mind-independence are really ideas derived from the lively, imaginative transition of the mind between impressions exhibiting resemblance and constancy of a certain sort.[35] Neither do we have any actual experience of the kind of necessary connection implicated in the full, "philosophical" notion of causation. Our idea of cause is really an idea derived from a lively, imaginative expectation we form by virtue of a past constant conjunction of particular types of events in experience, upon the experience of one such type of event.[36] It is not, in fact, the idea of an objective relationship. Hume concludes that our ideas of objects and causal relations are really derived from relationships among impressions and ideas; we have no ideas of enduring, mind-independent material objects and their causal relations beyond this. To the extent that we insist on discussing such entities, we are incoherent.

The conclusions of Leibniz, Berkeley, and Hume regarding our ideas of material objects and their relations have one thing in common. None of these accounts is an attack on our knowledge of material objects or casual relations; each account, rather, has the consequence that any attempt even to discuss such subjects is incoherent. The sort of incoherence involved is

captured by the more recent notion of a "category mistake." A category mistake involves the attribution of properties to a thing that it cannot have: for example, "This memory is violet," or "Caesar is a prime number."[37] By contrast, I might be mistaken in saying that the Louvre is violet, or that twenty-two is a prime number, but these concepts are not applied incoherently: material objects can be colored, and numbers can be prime. Color, in this sense, is *applicable* to material things, as primeness is applicable to numbers. In their own ways, Leibniz, Berkeley, and Hume each argue that the attribution of concepts commonly associated with physicality and mind-independence to experience is really the inappropriate attribution of objective properties to minds, or to subjective ideas or feelings. Each of these philosophers, then, thinks that the application of these concepts to experience (to the extent that we can even be said to possess such concepts) represents a category mistake.

It is to this kind of claim that Kant's reasoning in the Analogies is directed, and it is to this kind of claim that Kant is best able to provide an answer. A consequence of his reasoning in the First Analogy is that the concept of substance qua an enduring and mind-independent bearer of qualities is inextricably implicated in the very distinction between the representations of objective stability, replacement, and alteration. His argument there shows that the application of the concept of substance to objects of our representations is, in part, constitutive of the representation of alteration. And the representation of alteration, in turn, is necessary to objective time-determination. In the Second Analogy he argues that the objective application of the concept of cause is, in part, constitutive of the distinction between the representation of an event and the representation of an object; this distinction, in turn, is also necessary to objective time-determination. The Refutation of Idealism, further, is intended to show that objective time-determination is necessary to subjective time-determination. The upshot of all this, if Kant is

right, is that the application of the concepts of material endurance, material mind-independence, and objective causation to the world is involved in the most fundamental aspect of our inner mental life: the representation of our own successive mental states as determinately temporally ordered. But since all the philosophers rejecting the applicability of the concepts of substance and cause accept the representation of their own states as temporally ordered, they should not reject the applicability of these concepts.[38]

Kant's key transcendental argument against several of his most important opponents thus works similarly to a retortive argument. Even if successful, a demonstration of the dependence of the representation of one's inner states on the application of the concepts in question to a material world would not show that material things exist, or that they really exhibit causal relations. What it would show is that one cannot consistently represent one's inner states as determinately temporally ordered while denying the applicability of the concepts of substance and cause, and thus the conceptual legitimacy of the notion of a mind-independent material world. The concepts of substance and cause must be applicable to the world, because their application is constitutive of the representation of an objective—and thus a subjective—temporal order. The positions exemplified by Leibniz, Berkeley, and Hume each involve a characterization of an ordered inner mental life, and any expression at all implies a commitment to some determinate ordering of one's internal mental states. This, then, is the meaning of Kant's taking up the challenge to show the "lawfulness" of external-world concepts: his challenge was to show that they are coherently applicable to experience, in that the notion of a mind-independent world of causally-related physical objects is conceptually legitimate. This would not show that a world of enduring, rule-governed material things exists, but it would show that it

is coherent to ponder the existence of such a world; the literally unthinkable alternative is to give up the very notion that our mental states are temporally ordered.

We can now see why Kant is in a superior dialectical position to other, later proponents of retortion and transcendental argument. His goal is more modest than the goals of those who pursue truth- or justification-directed arguments. In order to establish the legitimacy of the concepts of substance and cause, all he needs to do is to show that their application is part of objective and subjective time-determination. To achieve this more limited goal he does not need to cross the barrier of the sensorium by establishing a link between mental contents and an extra-mental reality. Thus he does not face Stroud's general concern about transcendental arguments, and need not presuppose idealism or any other premise (such as the holding of justified beliefs about time-order) the skeptic should not be willing to concede. Nor does he need to equivocate on any key notion like reality. His conclusion is nevertheless substantive, and amounts to a broad refutation affecting Leibniz, Berkeley, and Hume. Kant does indeed go further than this—and into the issue of epistemic skepticism—with his transcendental idealism, but that project can be distinguished from the important and prior project of demonstrating the *quid juris* of external-world concepts.

We saw earlier that the ultimate recourse (described by Kekes) when confronted with a retortive argument is to accept for the sake of disputation what is doubted, and argue that it cannot be justified or proven. The burden of proof is in this way placed on the upholder of claims to knowledge of, say, things in the world and their relations, and the retortive argument nullified. But Kant's applicability argument does not allow for such a response. Even to employ these concepts for the sake of argument is to acknowledge that they can be so employed coherently,

thereby conceding their applicability to experience and abandoning any claim that their application to experience represents a conceptual error.

Wittgenstein discussed "framework" propositions that are indispensable in the sense that no contentful thought is possible without believing it.[39] Stern characterizes Aristotle as having the view that the principle of non-contradiction is a framework belief in this sense.[40] Wittgenstein described framework beliefs as having no foundation, but because of the necessity of their presupposition, function more like rules than like propositions that can be true or false. The price of this characterization, however, is that we cannot make knowledge-claims about such propositions.[41] This would be no answer to epistemic skepticism.

Stroud has followed this line of thought to suggest the possibility of indispensable beliefs or conceptual frameworks, such that it can be shown a priori by a transcendental argument that their presumption makes contentful thought of some sort possible. If the application of some concept is unavoidable in this way (he argues, for example, that beliefs about color-instantiation are necessary to the attribution of color perceptions), then some beliefs about its instantiation must in turn be invulnerable to doubt.[42] Stroud, however, sets a goal of providing an answer to epistemic skepticism by way of such arguments. His goal is to "silence" the epistemic skeptic, just as in other retortive arguments. But as an answer to epistemic skepticism, such an argument must fall short: the indubitability of some belief does not preclude its being false.[43] The door thus remains open to the reply that shifts the burden onto the upholder of the propositions in question.

The strategy Stroud employs avoids the quixotic enterprise of establishing a necessary connection between external reality and the contents of our minds. But while this strategy is limited to the level of conceptual connections, the goal of establishing epistemic entitlement to some external-world propositions remains the same. As Kant teaches us, Neo-Kantian

practitioners of retortive and transcendental arguments might have more success with a different, yet vital goal. Arguments directed at establishing mere conceptual legitimacy are not the answer to all forms of skepticism, but they may nevertheless provide substantive answers to some influential doctrines that call into question our way of understanding the world.

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[1] Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970), p. 329.

[2] J. Donceel, "Transcendental Thomism," *The Monist* 58 (1974): 67-85.

[3] See Donceel, p. 81 and Martin Moleski, "The Role of Retortion in the Cognitional Analyses of Lonergan and Polanyi," in *Self-Reference: Reflections on Reflexivity*, ed. by Steven Bartlett and Peter Suber (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 218. Cf. also Stephen Arndt, 'Transcendental Method and Transcendental Arguments," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1987): 43-58.

[4] Lonergan, pp. 329, 387-8.

[5] See, for example, Germain Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 110ff.

[6] Joseph Boyle, Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen, *Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).

[7] Hugo Meynell, "Skepticism Reconsidered," *Philosophy* 59 (1984): 431-42, at p. 437.

[8] William Rehg, "Lonergan's Performative Transcendental Argument against Scepticism," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 63 (1989): 257-68, at p. 259.

[9] Rehg, p. 263.

[10] Kenneth Konyndyk, "Rational Affirmation and Free Choice: A Study of *Free Choice*," *New Scholasticism* 53 (1979): 512-3.

[11] Cf. Jeffrey Cobb, "Determinism, Affirmation, and Free Choice" *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 9-17.

[12] John Kekes, "The Case for Scepticism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1975) 28-39, at p. 37. Cf. also Kekes, "Scepticism Reconsidered: A Reply to Meynell," *Philosophy* 61 (1986): 519-25, at p. 521.

[13] Corbin Fowler, "Scepticism Revisited," *Philosophy* 62 (1987): 385-88, at pp. 386-7.

[14] C.I. Lewis, *Values and Imperatives*, ed. by John Lange (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 62-82. Cf. Eric Dayton, "Pragmatic Contradiction," *Ethics* 87 (1977): 222-36, at pp. 231-2.

[15] Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?", *The Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 3-32; Hintikka, "Cogito Ergo Sum as an Inference and a Performance," *The Philosophical Review* 72 (1963): 487-96, at p. 489; and Boyle *et al*, p. 134.

[16] Germain Grisez, *Beyond the New Theism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 118.

[17] Dayton, pp. 232-3.

[18] Cf. Donceel, Moleski, and Lonergan, p. 14 n. 4.

[19] Cf. Dayton, p. 231, Lewis, and Meynell.

[20] Cf. Kekes, "The Scandal of Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1972): 512-25; Eva Schaper, "Arguing Transcendentally," *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972): 101-16; Dayton; Arndt; James Skidmore, "Skepticism about Practical Reason: Transcendental Arguments and their Limits," *Philosophical Studies* 109 (2002): 121-41.

[21] Kant, A181/B224-A210/B255.

[22] See Arthur Melnick, *Kant's Analogies of Experience* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973) and Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[23] See Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000), pp. 66-71.

[24] References to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will be from the Kemp Smith translation (Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929)), using page numbers from the two original editions (designated by "A"and "B," respectively).

[25] Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968): 241-56, at p. 255.

[26] Guyer, p. 246.

[27] Guyer, pp. 297-316.

[28] Kant, B274-9.

[29] Cf. Anthony Brueckner, "Transcendental Arguments II," *Nous* 18 (1984): 197-226, at p. 217.

[30] Guyer, p. 427.

[31] Kant, A84/B116.

[32] G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology*, in *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Texts*, ed. and trans. by R.S. Woolhouse and Richard Franks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 274-5.

[33] Kant, B274.

[34] George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. by Robert Adams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979).

[35] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 187-218.

[36] Hume, pp. 73-94.

[37] Jack Meiland, "Category Mistake," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 108.

[38] Though he does not explicitly consider the possibility of describing the application of these concepts as conceptual error or category mistake, Bruce Aune speaks of Kant's intention to demonstrate the "applicability" of the concepts of substance and cause, and also relates the applicability issue to the *quid juris* challenge: Aune, *Knowledge of the External World* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 97-8.

[39] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 39.

[40] Stern, p. 82.

[41] Stern, pp. 87-8.

[42] See Stroud, "The Goal of Transcendental Arguments," in Stern, and *The Quest for Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[43] Stern, p. 86 n. 25; see also Aune, p. 138.