ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH:
STRAWSON'S ANTI-SCEPTICAL VIEW

MARCO ANTONIO FRANCIOTTI
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Abstract. In this article, I am intent on rehabilitating Strawson's overall anti-sceptical strategy. First, I focus on his earlier attempt, which ignited the debate about the adequacy of transcendental arguments against the sceptic. I present Stroud's main reservation that Strawson's viewpoint is unworkable because it does not take into consideration the view of the external world upon which the sceptic is based in order to challenge our knowledge claims. I then focus on Strawson's later attempt, which is based upon a Humean-like naturalistic strategy. I show that his naturalism is intractable for two reasons: first because it reproduces the proof structure of transcendental arguments and ends up employing a rational proof to counter rational proofs; and second, because it matches the sceptic's advice that we should live according to our natural inclinations without ever trying to justify our beliefs. In the last section, I claim that it is possible to rehabilitate transcendental arguments as sound anti-sceptical proofs if we argue for the senselessness of the idea of thing in itself completely apart from our powers of conceptualisation.

Keywords: Scepticism, certainty, knowledge, proof, realism.

1. Walker and Stroud on Strawson

In *Individuals*, Strawson counters the sceptic by means of an argument that he calls transcendental (cf. Strawson 1959, 41–2). The sceptic's refusal to accept the truth of propositions about some beliefs implies the denial of that which he takes for granted from the very beginning, i.e., that he has experience. Transcendental arguments can thus be said to show "not that a proposition is true, but that it must be taken to be true if some indispensable sphere of thought or experience is to be possible" (cf. Griffiths 1969, 167). In that way, the problem of the justification of our empirical knowledge, for example, would be disentangled not by proceeding from a given premise in order to reach a certain conclusion that solves the initial problem, i.e., by deductively drawing certain conclusion from premises already known to be true, but by proceeding in the opposite direction: given that we have experience or thought, it is asked what it is that makes experience possible. If we can prove that the beliefs we entertain about the external world serve as pre-conditions experience or thought, the sceptical challenge will backfire, for very supposition raised by the sceptic would lead

us to renounce intelligible thought, which is to say, that sceptical doubts themselves loose their significance and strength.

Over the last few decades several arguments have been classified as transcendental, regardless of the topic in dispute (as is stated by Förster 1989, 9, and Harrison 1982, 211–2). Some interpreters claim that Wittgenstein employs the transcendental strategy in his celebrated 'private language argument' (cf. Wittgenstein 1953): the thought of a language only its user and nobody else could understand undermines the very idea of a meaningful language and, therefore, not even its solitary user would be able to comprehend. But if its user can follow the rules of the alleged private language, then in principle anyone else can. Davidson as well contends that a sentient being cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of others. Asking whether it is possible to possess thought but not speech, he claims that thoughts are dependent upon the identification of large patterns of public beliefs entertained by the speaker. The possession of a belief, however, is linked with the possibility of being mistaken and, as a consequence, of knowing how to differentiate truth and falsity. Such a possibility, then, is said to emerge only within an interpretation. Hence it is senseless to affirm that someone has thoughts without being an interpreter of the speech of others (cf. Davidson 1984). Malcolm, in turn, tries to prove that a deterministic view of mind could not hold fast. He does so by arguing that, if determinism were true, then intentional behavior would be impossible. But if this were the case, thought and speech themselves would be impossible and hence determinism (or any other intelligible hypothesis for that matter) could not be asserted at all (cf. Malcolm 1968). Finally, Putnam claims to solve the problem of scepticism about the external world by drawing unbearable consequences from the 'brains in a vat' hypothesis (cf. Putnam 1981).

Generally speaking, transcendental arguments show the pointlessness or idleness of taking some beliefs as false by arguing that they are *conditio sine quibus non* for other undisputed beliefs to be true. The former are mandatory: to reject them implies to renounce the conditions by which alone intelligible thought or any other non-negotiable belief is possible in the first place (cf. Strawson 1985, 21–3). Clearly, the proof structure of transcendental arguments consists of a *reductio ad absurdum* that goes as follows:

> suppose a standpoint is true (scepticism, private language, determinism about mind, etc). Then draw undesired or unpalatable conclusions from it (the impossibility of intelligible thought, or language, or intentional behavior, etc.). Now, those conclusions will not do. *Ergo*, the initial standpoint *cannot* be the case. (Strawson 1985, 21–3)

On that score, transcendental arguments connect two classes of beliefs: one that is, as it were, *sub juris*, like the existence of the external world, and another, which is

unquestionable, like the fact that I perceive myself in time, as Kant puts it, or that I think, as Descartes asserts. If a logical connection can be established between those two classes of beliefs to the effect that, in order to entertain one of them — e.g., self-perception — I cannot help but accept the truth of the other — e.g., that there are objects outside me —, then we are bound to chase away any misgivings directed to that class of beliefs under fire, since it makes the unquestionable class of beliefs possible — as in a *without whom not* clause.

In *The Bounds of Sense*, Strawson makes it clear that the *Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*, one of the most obscure passages in the history of philosophy, is meant to do precisely the job just described (cf. Strawson 1966). But although Kant is unsuccessful there, he reaches reasonable success in the *Refutation of Idealism*. Kant himself countenances such a viewpoint. "It is absolutely impossible", he says, "to prove from inner perception that the ground of representation is not in me. But if I say, suppose it is always in me, then no temporal determination of my being is possible" (Ak. XX, 367). In explaining the achievements of the *Refutation*, Strawson says:

> to ... give any content to the idea of the *subject's awareness of himself as having* such-and-such an experience at such-and-such a time... we need, at least, the idea of a system of temporal relations which comprehends more than those experiences themselves. But there is, for the subject himself, *no access* to this wider system of temporal relations, except through his own experiences. Those experiences, therefore, or some of them, *must be taken* by him to be experiences of things (other than the experiences themselves) which possess among themselves the temporal relations of this wider system. (Strawson 1966, 126–7; last italics mine)

If the temporally ordered system encompassing non-experiential elements is not accessible, the knowing subject himself cannot help but depend on his own experiences. There is no way out of our conceptual scheme, within which alone can we suppose that things are independent of our experience of them (cf. Strawson 1966, 127, n.1). But there has to be a distinction between "what things are" and "what we experience them to be" (1996, 127). Hence, for the sake of the subject's own awareness, we must take some experiences to be experience of things "which possess among themselves temporal relations independent of the order in which they are actually experienced" (1996, 127). This means that we cannot help but *assume* some experiences to be of things ordered in a different way than our representations are ordered, for every representation is ultimately dependent upon our subjective temporal order. The former order *has to be* acknowledged as corresponding to a system that we cannot perceive in itself; in a word, a necessary enduring framework of things in themselves (1996, 125).

The point that merits full treatment in this context is that Strawson introduces

the idea of a mind-independent domain of things constituted and already made com-
pletely apart from our awareness. At first glance, he seems to be misreading Kant,
since the transcendental idealist viewpoint of the world that lies at the heart of Kant's
theoretical philosophy prevents us from embracing a standpoint whereby the world
is not constituted by our sensitive and conceptual constraints. However, Strawson
is not only aware of this; according to him, transcendental idealism is flawed, but
this should not preclude us from singling out some philosophical contributions made
by Kant in the first *Critique*. More precisely, it is possible to take account of Kant's
overall strategy against the sceptic without having to commit ourselves to some un-
palatable doctrines of transcendental idealism.

As a result, Strawson can be viewed as claiming that transcendental arguments
can defuse sceptical doubts regardless of the metaphysical standpoint against which
they can be employed. But if this were the case, Strawson would only have proven
that certain beliefs we entertain *must be taken* to be true for the sake of other beliefs
to hold fast. All we have, then, is a strategy about ourselves and our beliefs, not
about the world. That is what Walker argues for. He claims that we might, for exam-
ple, perceive tiny flashes of colored light, located at various places within our visual
field and displaying a regular pattern. If we change the field of our vision, we can
have grounds "for thinking things had gone in the usual way during our absence".
We could come to have grounds for drawing a distinction between objective patterns
of flashings lights and objective experiences of these patters. We should then incor-
porate within our conceptual scheme the concepts "objective" and "subjective", and
we might also incorporate concepts like "body" and "objects". But so far we have
only certain concepts and a stable pattern of flashings lights. Strawson wishes to
use transcendental arguments to show what is presupposed as a condition of hu-
man experience. All that is presupposed, says Walker, are certain truths about the
human mind, e.g., that it perceives stable patterns of representations and draws cer-
tain distinctions based upon these patterns using concepts like "independent objects"
.(Walker 1978, 120 ff).

Walker does not stop here: he not only argues that Strawson's transcendental
arguments show only the necessity of concepts and beliefs; he believes that Kant
also makes this mistake. Kant's position, Walker points out, is that these arguments
"provide conclusions about our concepts and beliefs — about the world of appear-
ances and not about things in themselves" (1978, 127). I believe, however, that
Walker's viewpoint is misleading. I have argued elsewhere, in tune with Allison,
that this view of transcendental idealism must be impugned, for it ends up turning
Kant into a proponent of metaphysical realism (Franciotti 1995, 1997). The scep-
tic Kant is concerned with should not be seen as demanding an account of Kantian
things in themselves. Actually, assertions about them cannot possess a definite truth-
value, for the simple reason that their referents are not subjected to the conditions

of possible experience. According to Kant, sceptical doubts can only be raised in connection with knowable, spatio-temporal objects, our knowledge of which must be validated. Scepticism forces us to investigate our basis under which alone our knowledge claims are the case. It challenges us to elaborate a proof to the effect that our conception of the world cannot be otherwise, or that we are not under the spell of an evil demon — as in the Cartesian hypothesis of the *malin génie* —, or a mad scientist — as in Putnam's hypothesis that we may be brains in a vat. Summing this all up, the sceptic wonders whether such a proof can ever be elaborated. According to him, our certainties about the world may never find a safe ground and it may well be the case that our knowledge is thoroughly unfounded.

Thus, a successful anti-sceptical proof should be indeed about spatio-temporal, mind independent objects, *pace* Walker. That is precisely what Barry Stroud contends. Focusing his account on *Individuals*, Stroud challenges Strawson to justify the belief that objects exist unperceived. Strawson claims the sceptic must know what he means in expressing such a doubt. This requires him to employ a conceptual scheme wherein the idea of objective particulars cannot be questioned. The claim is to the effect that meaningfulness in general, including that of sceptical doubt, requires that the conceptual scheme in question may be granted for the sake of argument. The question, Stroud contends, is whether it follows from the nature of this conceptual scheme that scepticism must be false in order to be meaningful. The problem, as Stroud sees it, is that this requires Strawson to show that "a statement about the way things are follows from ... a statement about how we think about the world", and adds, "how could such an inference ever be justified?" (Stroud 1968, 245–7).

Stroud stretches out his objection by acknowledging that either transcendental arguments are restricted to a proof of our beliefs and concepts — which is just Walker's standpoint —, or they must be based on a version of the *verification principle*. He interprets Strawson as arguing that the necessity for thinking of the world as containing objective particulars entails an ability to identify and reidentify these particulars, which in turn entails the possibility of possessing satisfiable criteria for reidentifications. Nonetheless, Stroud contends, we can only get the conclusion that objects continue to exist unperceived by way of following a suppressed premise: if we know that reidentification-criteria have been satisfied, we know that objects continue to exist unperceived. It is this premise that justifies the inference from the way we must think to the way things are: generalised, it amounts to the verification principle, i.e., to the principle that the talk of unperceived objects is meaningful only if we have access to them. Without this principle, Stroud concludes, Strawson's argument does not succeed; but if he has the principle, he does not need transcendental arguments.

Unlike Walker, Stroud correctly takes Kant to be arguing not for the necessity of concepts and beliefs, but rather for the requirement of objects in space. "Kant

thought", Stroud says, "that he could argue from the necessary conditions of thought and experience to the falsity of "problematic idealism" and so to the actual existence of the external world of material objects, and not merely to the fact that we believe there is such a world, or that as far we can tell there is" (Stroud 1968, 256). For that reason, it is not surprising to see Stroud advocating that Kant's general argument against scepticism, i.e., the *Refutation of Idealism*, depends fundamentally upon transcendental idealism. It is Kant's major task to demonstrate that we have an immediate perception and direct knowledge of things around us in space. Stroud then writes:

> to avoid sceptical idealism and thereby explain how noninferential knowledge of things around us is possible, we must view 'all our perceptions, whether we call them inner or outer, as a consciousness only of what is dependent on our sensibility'... And to adopt that view is to adopt a form of idealism. It says that the objects we perceive around us in space are dependent on our sensibility and our understanding. It is only because that is true that we can perceive those objects directly and therefore can be no inferentially certain of their reality. (Stroud 1968, 256)

Stroud interprets Kant's anti-sceptical strategy as having to show that our knowledge of objects in space is immediate and direct. Anything different from this will allow the sceptic to contend that our knowledge of objects is inferred and then to raise doubts about the justification of this knowledge. A transcendental realist has no choice but to assume that knowledge of objects is inferred. This is one of the reasons why Kant insists that transcendental realism leads to scepticism (cf. A 369). In the *Refutation*, Stroud says, Kant is intent on showing that mind independent objects in space and time are the pre-condition of self-knowledge, and not that certain beliefs about the world are somehow connected with certain beliefs about us.

The way I see it, though, Stroud's account of the *Refutation*, as well as of any other anti-sceptical attempt, attributes too much on its intentions in order to prove that it delivers too little. Stroud does seem correct in singling out the main characteristics that a successful anti-sceptical argument must possess: our knowledge claims can only be validated if statements about objects in space are established as certain once and for all. Now, this can only be done if their truth is irretrievably connected to the undisputable, non-negotiable truth about self-knowledge. I can only have the latter if I have the former. I have thoughts about myself as an empirical being in the flow of time on the ground that spatial, mind independent objects lie outside me. Now, although Stroud is correct in pointing out the hardcore of the *Refutation* — namely, that spatio-temporal objects have to be established as true if self-awareness is possible —, he ends up misinterpreting the notion of mind independence in Kant. The background against which such a notion has to be understood is transcendental idealism, the only viewpoint that can avoid both transcendental re-

alism and phenomenalism. Although very different in kind, Kant believes that those two standpoints share the same flaw, namely, the view that mind independent objects are conceived of as already made apart from us and therefore not constructed by our cognitive faculties. The problem of those two doctrines is that they were not subjected to the so called *Copernican Revolution*. According to both transcendental realist and phenomenalist, mind independent objects — things in themselves and sensory data, respectively — are not or can never be transcendentally constituted. In Kant's terms, our sensible (intuition) and conceptual (categories) conditions logically precede and actually make our objective knowledge possible, not the other way round. In order to establish this thesis, which is central to his transcendental idealism, Kant devises several proofs to that end in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*.

Stroud believes that the transcendental strategy does not defeat scepticism because he places sceptical doubts within the transcendental or metaphysical realist domain. I have indeed no quarrel with him on this point. In fact, I totally agree that, against such a background, no anti-sceptical proof can ever be successful, for the gap between the way we think the world is — according to our subjective conditions — and the way the world really is — independently of those conditions — is unbridgeable. But Kant is well aware of the impasse at which we arrive once transcendental realism is brought back in our epistemological scenario. That is why he struggles to squeeze us in the transcendental idealist field. Stroud, however, misinterprets it in a way that is pretty much in accordance with what Allison calls the 'standard picture' of Kantian epistemology. Thus, while Strawson does away with transcendental idealism, Stroud acknowledges its indispensability in countering the sceptic, but he ends up misinterpreting Kant's idealism, living it more liable to succumb to sceptical doubts. I shall show in section 3, pace Stroud, how it is possible to rehabilitate Strawson's overall strategy without having to go back to transcendental idealism. Before doing so, however, I shall present Strawson second anti-sceptical attempt.

2. Strawson's New Version of his Anti-sceptical Strategy: Naturalism

In more recent years, Strawson tried to rehabilitate his anti-sceptical strategy. He acquiesces in Stroud's overall criticism to the effect that transcendental arguments do not refute scepticism. But instead of devising an anti-sceptical proof, he believes we should limit ourselves to emphasizing the inescapable feature of our belief in an external world. According to him, we cannot help but believe in a world inhabited by objects independent of us. Such a belief is not a matter for debate; rather, it is compulsory.

Strawson claims that this standpoint is inspired in Hume's account, according to

which we are naturally inclined to take for granted our belief in an external world. Nature itself suffices to turn the tables on the sceptic. There is no need to build up philosophical systems to defuse sceptical doubts. Actually, they only arise as a countermeasure against the philosophical need for a justification of our knowledge claims about the external world. However, such a justification is unnecessary because the belief that our world matches our way of thinking it is naturally entrenched in our every day experience. Thus, any attempt to justify that belief is idle; therefore, skeptical doubts themselves are idle too.

There are, I take it, two kinds of reservations to be made about Strawson's naturalistic approach. First, it is worth asking what is the difference between claiming that the belief in an external world is inevitable because it is a natural inclination and claiming that we are bound to accept its truth if we are to have experience of a certain kind. Strawson's intention here seems to discredit rational proofs as a means to safeguard that belief. Nevertheless, in order to do it, he has to rely on a strategy that is very similar to that of a transcendental argumentation. A reasoning to the effect that doubts about our belief in an external world is idle for it collides with natural instincts — i.e., a reasoning the basis of which is nature and not reason — is still a rational proof. Notwithstanding the shift from reason to nature, the belief in an external world *should be taken for granted*. Strawson continues to think the sceptic still needs a rational explanation. Nature seems to be introduced as a key component in a rational, anti-sceptical proof. Conclusively, Strawson is not justified in dispensing with rational proofs. His recommendation that rational, anti-sceptical proofs are idle and therefore must be ignored does not hold fast.

The same conclusion can be reached from a different angle. Suppose that a solipsist — not a sceptic — claims that he has a proof by which he can justify his viewpoint, which is to say, he can prove that the belief in an external world is false. Obviously, Strawson would be eager to impugn such a proof, as well as any other philosopher we can think of. Strawson invites us to ignore such a proof on the grounds that the belief in an external world is a natural inclination. But this is done by means of a previous acknowledgement of the rational character of the solipsist's proof, which is to say, Strawson must be in a position to show beforehand the rational basis of a solipsist's account so as to point out its idleness and, hence, the need for it to be ignored. This is tantamount to saying that Strawson has to show, through a rational proof, that rational proofs about the belief in an external world are idle.

It may be objected, on Strawson's behalf, that his standpoint has been misconstrued. What he struggles to show is that the belief in an external world is something that lies beyond our rational acceptance; it is, as it were, naturally hard-wired in our experience, so that it is not liable to an investigation in connection to its truth or falsity. There is no point in considering arguments contrary to or in favor of it. In an inventory of all our beliefs, the belief in question is inescapably there. Nonetheless,

Strawson must be able to argue for his naturalistic approach in the face of a counterargument, solipsistic or not. Thus, he must be able to show why his viewpoint is *preferable*, or *better*, than another one. In so doing, however, he inevitably goes through a (rational) comparison of arguments in order to decide which one is more convincing than the other. Again, Strawson has to resort to a rational proof — a second order one — to argue for the idleness of rational proofs.

A slightly similar defense of Strawson has been conceived of by Wai-Hung Wong:

> It is ... irrational to have both beliefs about the external world and skeptical doubts. Since beliefs about the external world are indispensable while sceptical doubts are not, we have only two options: to have sceptical doubts and be irrational, or to ignore skepticism and live with our beliefs about the world. The second option is clearly more acceptable as far as rationality is concerned. (Wong 2002, 305)

According to him, Strawson can be seen as arguing that it is just irrational to hold our beliefs in an external world and *at the same time* to entertain skeptical doubts about it. As soon as it is proven, by means of a naturalistic account, that those beliefs are mandatory — or indispensable, as he puts it — the only option left is to get rid of scepticism once and for all in order to safeguard rationality or meaningfulness. This is a compelling account, but it ends up weakens Strawson's naturalistc turn, for it brings us back to Strawson's earlier anti-sceptic move we characterised earlier. To be more precise, it reinstates the reason-based transcendental argumentation that was so correctly criticised by Stroud. If the point is to bypass scepticism in the name of rationality, the appeal to our natural inclinations will not do, for the latter would turn out to be just a variety of a rational standpoint. Furthermore, the claim that to hold both our empirical beliefs and scepticism at the same time leads to irrationality can only be held consistently within a philosophical view wherein metaphysical realism would not be an issue. But since this view is yet to be impugned, the claim in question does not refrain the sceptic from resorting to it and shield his doubts. On that score, what we need is a (reason-based) transcendental argument by which metaphysical realism is rendered inconsistent. Wai-Hung Wong is correct in connecting rationality and empirical beliefs to rehabilitate Strawsonian transcendental arguments; his mistake, though, is to preserve Strawson's naturalistic trend as a way to overcome scepticism.

A second reservation can still be made about Strawson naturalistic turn. The question arises as to whether natural inclination constitutes a satisfactory ground upon which an anti-skeptical proof can be constructed. The sceptic can remind us that he never doubts instincts; what is at issue is a justification of our knowledge claims. The point is not whether the belief in an external world should be taken for granted, but rather whether it is true or false. Sextus Empiricus makes it clear

that sceptical doubts arise only in connection to the truth of a belief (non evident) (O.P., 15). According to the sceptic, it seems that no proof of that kind can ever be valid. It is obvious that I have many beliefs about the world and my relation to it. Actually, for the sake of our own survival, it is not only advisable but mandatory that we believe that fire burns, that if I jump from a cliff I can get hurt or even die, that if I do not eat I may starve to death, etc. The sceptic lives a normal life entertaining those beliefs and would never put them into question. To live in harmony with our natural inclinations is a means to a happy life (O.P., 11). That being said, instead of countering scepticism, Strawson is actually embracing it *malgré lui*. By replacing the rationalist background and by replacing it for the naturalist one, Strawson does not neutralise scepticism; on the contrary, he just plays the game of the sceptic.

3. What does this all lead us to?

We have seen that the main objection raised by Stroud has to do with the fact that Strawson's first attempt to refute scepticism misfired because Strawson rejected the main doctrines of transcendental idealism. Since what is at stake against the sceptic is the metaphysical point of view about the world that has to underlie any anti-sceptical proof, to repel transcendental idealism means to displace the basis on which alone Kant construes his anti-sceptical position. And what is worse, it also means that the battle against scepticism ends up being fought in a metaphysical or, in Kant's terminology, in a transcendental realist territory.

We have reached, therefore, the following quandary *vis-à-vis* scepticism: we can either dismiss Strawson's transcendental strategy because it is devised in a metaphysical realist domain, where the sceptic seems to have the last word; or we embrace transcendental idealism, and in so doing, we stop the sceptic from appealing to the metaphysical background by which she entertains her doubts, but in that case we would have to deal with the limitations of Kant's idealistic view. The key to this quandary lies in the connection between metaphysical realism and scepticism, which was brought out by Stroud. The overall limitation of this sort of realism is that, by putting the real world inextricably out of our reach, there is no way of comparing it to our conceptualised world of tables and chairs so as to validate our knowledge of it. The sceptic's suggestion that the world might be quite different from the way we see it introduces an insurmountable difficulty.

But what if this suggestion were to be characterised as beside the point? In that case, the quandary would dissipate. Thus, I take it, the way out of Stroud's reservations seems to argue that even if we were in a metaphysical realist environment, transcendental arguments of some sort would hold fast and therefore Strawson would be vindicated. As I see it, transcendental arguments are powerful tools

not so much as anti-sceptical proofs that are applied straightforwardly against the 'sceptic, but rather as a means to neutralise metaphysical realism. If we can conceive of an argument whose conclusion turns the metaphysical viewpoint idle, then we would have the upper hand and scepticism would be rendered harmless.

In order to achieve this goal, let us reflect upon what it means to say that the real world can be quite different from the way we see it. No doubt it means a world that is thoroughly different from the perceptual world. A first approximation that we can think of is the world described by general relativity. Massive objects warp space, time does not go by in absolute terms, matter and energy are interchangeable, and so on and so forth. Those concepts are difficult to grasp at first glance because it goes against common sense. Our perceptual world, in principle, does not show the bending of space and our perception of the flow of time does not get entangled in twin's paradoxes and things like that. However, sophisticated experiments that resort to state of the art technology have proven relativity to hold fast. Although not immediately given to our senses, Einstein's view of the world can be related to the perceptual world. More exactly, we can represent the space-time continuum through theoretical and mathematical models that stem from our knowledge of the perceptual world; therefore, general relativity has to do with a world that is pretty much within our reach, so that it cannot be a good candidate for the 'real world' referred to by the sceptic.

Maybe quantum mechanics can do the job. All sorts of counterintuitive notions have been brought about by quantum physicists, like the wave/particle duality, causes occurring after their effects, the baffling result of the EPR experiment in which a pair of subatomic particles seems to communicate with each other instantaneously, regardless of the distance between them, etc. The subatomic world presents us with some pretty crazy things indeed. Hence, it could be a good candidate to make sense of the expression 'real world' in the sceptical challenge. Nevertheless, phenomena are measured up and explained away to a point in which we can easily detect in the perceptual world. Many gadgets we use in our every day life are proofs to that effect, like electronic sensors, remote controls, computers and even microwaves. And although it is still a matter of great controversy in theoretical physics if we can make the jump from the subatomic level of probabilities, uncertainties and dualities to the macroscopic level of tables, chairs, planets and galaxies, the main goal of quantum physicists is to determine the laws that govern *our* perceptual world inhabited by those objects we are quite familiar with in our every day lives. The 'real world' of the sceptic would have to be completely apart from it in order for the sceptic to have the upper hand.

Not even the hypothetical idea of parallel universes from recently developed string theory would do the trick here. So far, such an idea is an extrapolation from outstandingly complex mathematical models that describe our world. It is a formal

scaffolding devised to make sense of phenomena in our world, which means that, although physically speaking two alternate universes cannot be in any physical contact whatsoever, conceptually, or philosophically speaking, the sense we give to any other universe will have to subscribe to our conception of what the world is like. A universe with all embracing laws completely different from ours with objects that defy our common view, in this case, would still be a universe of objects governed by laws.

What the sceptic requires at this point is a conception of the world that takes us beyond our way of seeing and interpreting it, or rather, beyond our conceptualising. How can such a conception be made comprehensible at all? We can only conceive of a world completely apart from our perceptual world through our powers of conceptualisation. We find ourselves under siege *vis-à-vis* the sceptic because her doubts are based upon a nonsensical assumption of a world that lies beyond the scope of our comprehension. Only in so doing can she split the world and raise the suspicion that the features of the world within our reach may not conform to the features of the metaphysical, transcendent one. Just like Strawson puts it, transcendental arguments have to do with meaningfulness and intelligibility. If an idea or a viewpoint is proven to fall short of our meaningful, intelligible reasoning, it has to be dismissed. If the ground of sceptical doubts is disallowed, so must be scepticism. The sceptic can play her game as long as she wants, but at the end of the day all she can get is a reminder that the conception of a world beyond ours requires further explaining. Instead of being put under pressure to validate our knowledge claims, we challenge her to make sense of her sceptical claims. In the absence of a possible explanation, her challenge itself ends up devoid of meaningful content.

This is not meant to encourage a Berkeleyan world where our knowledge *actually* coincides with the world of appearances. There are aspects of the world that might remain unknowable because our cognitive apparatus just does not go that far down its deepest, most hidden aspects, like the subatomic world of particles and waves. However, although we cannot reach the details of the quantum world, we are able to conceptualise it by means of strong logical and mathematical reasonings combined with experiments that are guided by our powers of conceptualisation. Thus, the limitation just referred to has to be seen as stemming from within our conceptual world and not from the outside of it. The metaphysical realist standpoint plays no part here because it posits a non-conceptual world that by definition would have to drag us out of our intelligible reasoning, where logic, mathematics and theory-laden experiments have no bearing at all.

Let us pause for a moment and take stock of what we have so far. We have seen that Strawson accepts Stroud's and Walker's criticism to the effect that transcendental arguments can only prove a connection about our beliefs, not about the world. In Walker's terms, a transcendental argument can prove merely that *we are bound to*

take our beliefs about the world to be true; but what the sceptic demands is a proof that *they are indeed* true. Now, we have seen in section 2 that sceptical doubts arise when a *theoretical* account about the validity of our empirical knowledge is brought to the fore. Without it, the sceptic merely lives her life like the rest of us, believing that fire burns, water cools us down, food nourishes us, etc. Non-examined beliefs are quite welcome in the sceptical realm; theoretical ones, however, may never hold fast. Our quarrel with the sceptic is indeed about beliefs, but beliefs of a theoretical kind. Thus, when Stroud sets the record straight by claiming that a transcendental argument has to deal with objects in space, not with beliefs, he is actually referring to (our theoretical belief of) objects in space. The alternative would be to emulate Moore and raise a hand to counter the sceptic. In philosophy, all that is left for us is a proof about theoretical beliefs. Stroud's and Walker's challenge to the effect that a proof against the sceptic has to be about the world and not about our beliefs or concepts is not only untenable and unphilosophical; it is also beside the point. Its force stems from the metaphysical realist conundrum that our view of the world has to coincide somehow with a world beyond our concepts and beliefs.

As to the distinction between *being obligated to take a belief as true* and *actually holding it to be true*, it depends upon a surreptitious premise, to wit, the idea of a world beyond our ken. On such a ground, the sceptic acknowledges the former statement as being made merely from within the limits of our every day conception of the world, the validity of which has yet to be established. But since a transcendental argument can be used precisely against this premise in order to rid epistemology of metaphysical realism and therefore scepticism, there is no reason to keep Walker's and Stroud's distinction. If we are *compelled to take* a set of beliefs as true for the sake of another, indispensable one, then, for all it is worth, the former *has been proven to be true*.

It might be objected that the metaphysical realist conception of the world is not as unintelligible and nonsensical as we have depicted so far. After all, Kant himself holds a view according to which we can think of the thing in itself, although we cannot know it. More exactly, Kant claims that this notion has to do with an *object* considered apart from all the transcendental conditions of knowledge and is, therefore, completely unknowable (cf. B 312, 343). At the same time, he states that there is a sense in which we can think of the thing in itself, namely, as a non trespassing door that the sensibility and the understanding can never go through. He calls it *the negative sense* (cf. B 307, 739). The thing in itself is thereby considered as a reminder of the indispensable character of Kant's transcendental philosophy, to wit, the Copernican Revolution; without this crucial component, philosophy is irretrievably doomed to failure from start.

The question arises as to how we can actually form a conception out of it. A notion of what we cannot know has a referent that cannot be known. If the latter

cannot be known, we simply cannot say what it is or is not like. But since it does not make sense to think of something that cannot be known without knowing what this something is or is not, we are left with an intractable concept. That being the case, the negative sense can hardly be regarded as a *sense* at all. That is why Kant himself grants that "there is something strange and even nonsensical in there being a concept that must have some significance but is not capable of definition" (A 243).

On that score, it is understandable why Strawson departs from transcendental philosophy and what his motivation consists in when he decides to highlight the strategic advantages of transcendental arguments. Strawson's approach can be construed as a vote of confidence in the transcendental argumentation against the sceptic regardless of a consideration about the metaphysical background of an anti-sceptical proof. Transcendental arguments, as it were, stand on its own feet and can render both metaphysical realism and scepticism idle indeed.

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MARCO ANTONIO FRANCIOTTI
Departmento de Filosofia
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
Campus Universitário, Trindade
Florianópolis, SC
Brazil
marcofranciotti@hotmail.com
www.portalfil.ufsc.br/franciotti

Resumo. Neste artigo, pretendo reabilitar a estratégia de Strawson contra o ceticismo. Primeiro, apresento sua antiga tentativa, que gerou a polêmica sobre a adequação dos argumentos transcendentais contra o cético. Eu introduzo a principal objeção de Stroud, segundo a qual o ponto de vista de Strawson não pode funcionar porque não considera a visão do mundo exterior na qual o cético se baseia a fim de desafiar nossas alegações de conhecimento. Feito isso, eu apresento a última tentativa de Strawson, que se baseia numa estratégia naturalista de inspiração Humeana. Eu mostro que seu naturalismo é inaceitável por dois motivos: primeiro, porque reproduz a estrutura de prova dos argumentos transcendentais e acaba empregando um prova racional para neutralizar provas racionais em geral; e segundo, porque ela se ajusta à recomendação do cético de que devemos viver de acordo com nossas inclinações naturais sem jamais tentar justificar nossas crenças. Na última seção, afirmo que é possível reabilitar os argumentos transcendentais como provas anticéticas válidas se mostrarmos que não faz sentido entreter a ideia de uma coisa em si mesma completamente à parte de nossos poderes de conceitualização.

Palavras-chave: Ceticismo, certeza, conhecimento, prova, realismo.