

Lecture 2: Are transcendental arguments committed to verificationism?

Stroud's doubts about Strawson's transcendental argument

- I. Strawson's argument that objects continue to exist unperceived, again.
 1. We think of the world as containing particulars that are numerically the same as particulars we perceived earlier.
 2. That would be impossible, unless there were "satisfiable and commonly satisfied criteria" for the reidentification of particulars (Strawson, 1959, 35)
 - C. Some objects continue to exist unperceived.

- II. Stroud's doubts about the validity of Strawson's argument (Stroud, 1968).

Premises 1 and 2 do not entail C – Our criteria for verifying whether p being satisfied do not entail that 'p' is true – think of 16th and 17th Century criteria for identifying witches.

- III. How to make Strawson's argument valid – by adding a verificationist premise.

We need to add the following into our argument to get C:

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

And so we could have instead the following modification to premise 2:

- 2ⁱ. It would be impossible to think of the world as containing particulars that continue exist unperceived, unless we had satisfiable and commonly satisfied criteria of reidentification, and if we have such a criteria then we can sometimes know that objects continue to exist unperceived.

Stroud calls this modified premise the "*verification principle*" because it involves the claim that if it's possible to meaningfully think that p, then it's possible to confirm that p is true.

- IV. A commitment to verificationism makes transcendental arguments useless against the sceptic.

Verificationism: 'p' is meaningful only if it's possible to confirm or disconfirm that p

Stroud: This provides an answer to the sceptic on it's own: "If the sceptic'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." (247)

So if Strawson's transcendental argument is committed to verificationism, that answers the sceptic by itself. The transcendental argument adds nothing more.

And what's more, Stroud claims that every transcendental argument must be similarly committed to verificationism.

Does verificationism answer the sceptic on its own?

Verificationism: 'p' is meaningful only if it's possible to confirm or disconfirm that p

The sceptic claims that we can never confirm that objects exist unperceived – Does verificationism answer this sceptic?

- I. Problems even if we accept that 'objects exist unperceived' is meaningful.

Even if we assume 'objects exist unperceived' is meaningful, it could be meaningful because we can *disconfirm* it.

- II. But what if 'objects exist unperceived' is not meaningful?

What if the sceptic uses verificationism to argue the other way round:

1. 'Objects exist unperceived' can never be confirmed or disconfirmed.
2. If we can never confirm or disconfirm that p, then p is meaningless.
- C. 'Objects exist unperceived' is meaningless.

This plays into the hands of the sceptic.

Are transcendental arguments committed to a general verificationism?

- I. What about the very general conclusions transcendental arguments have?

Transcendental arguments had very general conclusions: 'some objects exist unperceived'; 'there are some causal relations'; 'there is an external world'.

They admit we might be wrong about particular matters of fact.

This doesn't seem possible if they are committed to a general verificationism.

Are transcendental arguments committed to verificationism at all?

- I. What about transcendental arguments that start with premises about experience?

Verificationism is a claim about what sentences are meaningful.

If a transcendental argument starts with the fact that we can meaningfully *think* or *utter* something, and then tries to make conclusions about how the world is, then it might be committed to a limited verificationism.

But Kant's transcendental arguments start with premises about *experience*.

Maybe Stroud's concern with verificationism is just an artifact of the fact that he is responding to Strawson's argument, which mentions 'criteria for reidentification'.

But Stroud wasn't all wrong

I. The problem of the bridging the gap between appearance and reality

1. We have thought/language.
2. That would be impossible, unless the world were a certain way.
- C. The world is that way

Stroud: The sceptic can insist that the following bridge premise is sufficient to explain how thought or language are possible:

- 2ⁱⁱ. That would be impossible, unless we believed the world were a certain way

Which only gets us the following conclusion:

- Cii. We believe that the world is a certain way.

And this is an argument that does apply to transcendental arguments about experience. Consider the sceptic's version of Kant's argument against Hume:

1. We have experience of objective successions.
2. That would be impossible, unless there seemed to be some causal relations.
- C. There seem to be some causal relations.

Stroud thinks that the only way to bridge this gap between appearance and reality is to adopt a form of verificationism. That was his mistake.

Reading:

Strawson, P. F. *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Methuen, 1952. pp. 31-38.

Stroud, B. "Transcendental Arguments." *The Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 9 (1968): 241–256.

For next week:

Stern, R. "On Kant's Response to Hume: The Second Analogy as Transcendental Argument." In *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, edited by R. Stern, 47–66. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.