

Lecture 3: Modest transcendental Arguments

The problem of bridging the gap between appearance and reality, again

I. Stroud's issues

The second analogy: Kant's argument against Hume:

1. We have experiences of objective successions.
2. That would be impossible, unless there were some causal relations.
- C. There are some causal relations.

Stroud's response: Isn't it enough to make experience possible that we *believe* there are some causal relations?

II. The two options – idealism or modesty.

Idealism:

Kant: transcendental arguments can give us conclusions about the world if we are transcendental idealists.

Thus we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity in them that we call nature, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there. (Kant 1781/87, A125)

Modesty:

Strawson – 'Only Connect'.

Transcendental arguments have the role of "investigating the connections between the major structural elements of our conceptual scheme." (Strawson 1985, 22)

How can 'modest' transcendental arguments have anti-sceptical force?

Strawson's Humean use for modest transcendental arguments

I. Sceptical doubts are idle.

"Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium ..." (Hume 1739-40, Bk. i, part iv, sect. vii)

II. Strawson: Transcendental arguments can support the claim that we are naturally predisposed to believe contrary to the sceptic doubts.

The point of transcendental arguments is "not to offer a rational justification of the belief in external objects and other minds or of the practice of induction, but to represent skeptical arguments and rational counterarguments as equally idle – not senseless, but idle – since what we have here are original natural inescapable commitments which we neither choose nor could give up." (Strawson 1985, 27-8)

III. Problem 1: Transcendental arguments seem to be idle cog.

Let's grant Hume that it is impossible not to believe the propositions the sceptic doubts – 'there is an external world', 'there are other minds', 'there are no causal relations'.

If this is true, why does it need support from transcendental arguments?

IV. Problem 2: Doesn't answer the question of justification

A Kantian point:

- We've only answered the question of *fact* – the '*quaestio facti*' (Kant 1781/87, A87/B119) – that we *in fact* believe there are causal relations, and that we are *bound by nature* to believe so.
- We haven't answer the question of *right* – 'the question *quid juris*' (Kant 1781/87, A84/B117) – that we are *entitled* to believe that there are causal relations, that our beliefs are justified.

In many cases, believing something 'by nature' results in unjustified beliefs.

Examples:

- a) Overrating one's own abilities.
- b) Faulty statistical reasoning – the feminist bank-teller:

Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations. (Tversky and Kahneman 1983, 297)

Stern's coherentist use for modest transcendental arguments

I. Epistemic scepticism and justificatory scepticism

[K]nowledge is not really the proper central concern of epistemologico-sceptical enquiry. There is not any lasting discomfort in the claim that, contrary to our preconceptions, we have no genuine knowledge in some broad area of our thought – say in the area of theoretical science. We can live with the concession that we do not, strictly, *know* some of the things we believed ourselves to know, provided we can retain the thought that we are fully justified in accepting them. ... What however, is not tolerable is the thesis that, among propositions about for instance, the material world, other minds, or the past, we never actually attain to genuinely justified opinion. (Wright, 1991, 88)

Epistemic scepticism: argues that we don't have *knowledge*.

Justificatory scepticism: argues that we are *unjustified* by our own standards of justification.

II. Stern: Transcendental arguments can answer the justificatory sceptic.

Coherentism: if *S*'s belief-set is more coherent with the belief that *p* as a member than without it or with any other alternative, then this belief is justified for *S* (Stern 1999, 54).

Stern: Kant's Second Analogy shows that our beliefs are overall more coherent with a belief in causal relations.

1. We can take our experience of 'A', followed by our experience of 'B' as evidence for the proposition 'A followed by B'.
2. That would be impossible, unless we believed there were some causal relations.
- C. We believe that there are some causal relations.

For our set of beliefs – both perceptual and theoretical – to be coherent we *must* believe that there are causal relations.

III. Problem – Is only answering justificatory sceptic alone worthwhile?

Are epistemic scepticism and justificatory scepticism as independent as Stern makes them out to be?

- If we show a belief forming method to be unreliable, it seems we thereby show that beliefs formed by that method to be unjustified.
- And the epistemic sceptic claims that our coherentist systems of belief formation are unreliable, or at least that we can't show that they're not – if the sceptical hypotheses obtain, then our coherentist systems of belief formation are unreliable, and our beliefs are, thereby, unjustified.
- And so Stern claiming that we *can* answer the *justificatory* sceptic, while admitting that we *cannot* answer the *epistemic* sceptic looks fishy.

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