

## **PERFORMATIVE TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

'Performative' transcendental arguments exploit the status of a subcategory of self-falsifying propositions in showing that some form of skepticism is unsustainable. The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between performatively inconsistent propositions and transcendental arguments, and then to compare performative transcendental arguments to modest transcendental arguments that seek only to establish the indispensability of some belief or conceptual framework. Re-conceptualizing transcendental arguments as performative helps focus the intended dilemma for the skeptic: performative transcendental arguments directly confront the skeptic with the choice of abandoning either skepticism or some other deep theoretical commitment.

Many philosophers, from Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to Jaakko Hintikka, C.I. Lewis, and Bernard Lonergan, have claimed that some skeptical propositions regarding knowledge, reason, and/or morality can be shown to be self-defeating; that is to say, they have claimed that the very upholding of some skeptical position is in some way incompatible with the position being upheld, or with the implied, broader dialectical position of the skeptic in question. Statements or propositions alleged to have this characteristic also sometimes are called 'self-falsifying,' 'self-refuting,' 'self-stultifying,' 'self-destructive,' or 'pointless.' However, proponents of the strategy of showing skepticism to be self-defeating have not in general adequately distinguished between two types of self-defeating proposition: self-falsifying and self-stultifying. In the first part of this paper I distinguish between self-falsifying and

self-stultifying propositions, and introduce the notion of performative self-falsification. In the second part I discuss classical transcendental arguments, ‘modest’ transcendental arguments, and objections to each. In the third part I introduce two types of transcendental argument—each labeled “performative”—corresponding to two types of performatively self-falsifying proposition, and I compare them to modest transcendental arguments.

## I

Particularly important to understanding performative transcendental arguments are self-referential statements and propositions. A ‘statement’ can refer to an act (in the sense of a stating), in which one expresses a proposition with *prima facie* fact-stating intent.<sup>1</sup> Such affirmative acts are carried out in a variety of ways, including by speaking, writing, and thinking. ‘Statement’ can also refer to the product of a stating: namely, the claim thereby made (given what is stated plus the context of the stating). It is in this latter sense that statements are ascribed truth values, depending on whether the claim in question is true or false. A ‘proposition’ is the content of the statement: it is that which is affirmed via the statement, independently of context. The result of someone uttering (or writing, etc.) the sentence “Roses are red” with the intention of sincerely affirming that fact is, then, the making of a statement; the proposition thereby affirmed is that roses are red.

Statements and, by extension, propositions can be self-referential. As Joseph Boyle, Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen explain in their discussion of self-referential arguments, “a statement is self-referential if and only if the proposition which is affirmed refers to some aspect of the statement—that is, either to the sentence, or to the performance of affirming or uttering, or to the proposition itself.”<sup>2</sup> In the case of self-referential statements, there may be ways for the same proposition to be stated that would not involve self-reference. Propositions also can be called self-referential: Boyle *et al* continue, “certain propositions are self-referential in any possible stating of them. Such propositions inevitably refer to themselves or to the performances of their statements

or to the sentences by which they are expressed.”<sup>3</sup> They give as examples the proposition that all statements can be made in English, and the proposition that all propositions are either true or false.

Self-referential statements can be performatively self-verifying or self-falsifying. That is to say, some aspect of their affirmation itself may verify or falsify what is affirmed. Hintikka famously put forth “cogito” and “sum” as examples of self-verifying statements.<sup>4</sup> A statement is performatively self-verifying if some aspect of its being stated verifies the proposition it affirms. “I exist” could be thought to be self-verifying insofar as the fact that **a** thinks that **P** entails that **a** exists.<sup>5</sup> If this is right, then, conversely, the denial that one exists is self-falsifying. What is distinctive about statements like “I do not exist,” or “nothing can be asserted,” is that they are self-falsifying not because they are internally logically inconsistent or imply their own falsity (as with “All statements are false” and “It is raining and it is not raining”), but because what they assert is in some way inconsistent with their being asserted. Thus they are ‘performatively’ self-falsifying. A wide variety of statements might be thought to be performatively self-falsifying, depending on other background assumptions one holds. Take, for example, the statement “I have had no contact with material objects,” which certainly is not obviously self-falsifying. Yet Kant argues that the possibility of organizing one’s thought sequentially depends on the application of the concept of alteration to one’s own mental states.<sup>6</sup> And alteration (he further claims) must be exhibited in the sensory intuition of objective alteration.<sup>7</sup> This experience can be no mere inference on the basis of a pattern of sensation, since the recognition of any such pattern depends on the organization of one’s experiences sequentially. Thus an experience of objective alteration must have taken place, or else the skeptic would have been unable to organize her own thoughts in time. Though Kant does not explicitly take this further step, it is a short step to the following: since the organization of one’s own thoughts in time is, obviously, a necessary condition of any complex, conscious act of affirmation, including the act of making the claim that one has had no contact with material objects, then any such statement is performatively self-falsifying.<sup>8</sup>

Performatively self-falsifying statements suggest more general performatively self-falsifying propositions. For example, the putative status of the statement “I do not exist” as self-falsifying suggests a kind of self-falsifying status for the proposition that no one exists: any attempt to affirm this proposition will produce a self-falsifying statement. Similarly, if the statement “I have had no contact with material objects” is self-falsifying as Kant’s views would imply, then the proposition that no one has had any contact with material objects is also self-falsifying.<sup>9</sup> The conditions of the meaningful affirmation of a self-falsifying proposition cannot be satisfied unless the proposition is false; to affirm such a proposition involves one in a kind of performative inconsistency, because the truth of the proposition affirmed is inconsistent with its actually being affirmed.

Depending on one’s background assumptions, a wide range of propositions could count as performatively inconsistent (some of these, perhaps, more controversially than others). Following are some familiar propositions that are candidates for performative self-falsification, in that they each turn out (in the context of certain background assumptions) to be performatively self-falsifying:<sup>10</sup>

- *It is impossible to affirm anything.*
- *Everything is in flux.* If so, no reference to things in the world or their qualities (including that of being in flux) would be possible. [Plato, *Theatetus*]
- *No thinking thing (or thought) exists.* [Descartes, *Second Meditation*]
- *There is no supreme being.* The thought of a supreme being would be impossible unless a supreme being were the ultimate origin of the reality contained objectively in the idea of such a being. Thus any expression of doubt about the existence of a supreme being proves the existence of such a being. [Descartes, *Third Meditation*]
- *No one has had any contact with material objects.* [Kant]
- *No proposition is meaningful if it is neither a tautology nor empirically verifiable.* If true, then this proposition would be meaningless. So if it can be (meaningfully) affirmed, then it is false. [Grisez<sup>11</sup>]

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- *All persons are and always have been brains in vats.* If true, given content-externalism, no one could refer to brains and vats. So this proposition would be inexpressible.<sup>12</sup> Given externalist commitments with regard to reference, then, this proposition, if genuinely expressible, is false. [Putnam]
- *True and false descriptions cannot be distinguished.* If not, then language has no descriptive use, and this proposition could not be meaningfully affirmed. [Kekes<sup>13</sup>]
- *Our belief-forming practices are not reliable.* If not, then most of what we say is false, and so our utterances could not be part of a public language. But then none of our utterances, including any attempt to affirm this proposition, would be meaningful. [Davidson<sup>14</sup>]
- *The passage of time is an illusion.* P.J. Zwart claims that any act of thinking or asserting requires succession. If so, any affirmation of this proposition would demonstrate its falsity.<sup>15</sup>

Again, note that all of the above propositions are self-falsifying only given certain theoretical background assumptions. The above propositions fall into two rough categories: several self-referentially apply to the act of thinking or uttering them, and several to their own meaningfulness or to their own successful acts of referring or denoting.

It has sometimes been the case that performatively self-falsifying propositions have been inappropriately lumped together with another kind of proposition under a single description. For example, Hugo Meynell includes “I never have good reason for the statements I make” on his list of “self-destructive” statements.<sup>16</sup> By virtue of this status, he says, such statements cannot be true, so their contraries must be true. But he is wrong to represent that statement as self-falsifying: “I never have good reason for the statements I make” is not necessarily false; rather, it is either false or without epistemic warrant. This proposition is neither self-falsifying nor performatively inconsistent. Unlike a self-falsifying proposition, the proposition itself does not imply that its own affirmation should be impossible, and the affirmation of this proposition does not itself demonstrate that it is false. Rather, what the proposition says or implies is inconsistent with one’s being epistemically entitled to affirm

it.<sup>17</sup> By way of further illustrating this contrast class, it is interesting to note a number of propositions discussed by familiar figures that meet this description, given other background presuppositions implied by their views:

- *The principle of non-contradiction is false.* If true, there would be no reason to believe any thesis, including this one. So, whenever affirmed, this proposition is either false or irrational. [Aristotle, *Metaphysics*  $\neg^{18}$ ]
- *There is no free choice.* If true, belief or non-belief is inevitable, so there could be no question of being justified in believing any thesis. So there could be no rational assent to any proposition, including this one. [Epicurus<sup>19</sup>]
- *No human knowledge is immune to revision.* This is a proposition any affirmation of which must presuppose its own immunity to revision. [Loneragan<sup>20</sup>]
- *There are no valid imperatives of right doing.* Any affirmation, if it is to be justified, must obey constraints on justified affirmation. But this proposition denies any constraints on any kind of action, including affirmation. [Lewis<sup>21</sup>]
- *There can be no synthetic a priori knowledge.* The affirmation of this proposition— itself neither analytic nor a posteriori— implies a claim to synthetic a priori knowledge. [Grisez<sup>22</sup>]
- *No grounded beliefs are possible.* [Meynell]
- *Eliminative materialism [EM] can be articulated and defended.* If EM is true, then there are no beliefs, and if there are no beliefs, then a belief in EM cannot be defended (i.e., made worthy of belief). So either EM is false or the affirmation of EM is indefensible. [Swinburne<sup>23</sup>]

We could call propositions of this sort ‘self-stultifying.’ Such propositions are to be distinguished from performatively self-falsifying propositions. In short, if a performatively self-falsifying proposition is affirmable, it is not true; if a self-stultifying proposition is true, it is not rationally defensible. It is inconsistent to affirm a self-stultifying proposition because that

one is justified in making a claim is a pragmatic implication of making that claim. This inconsistency is not performative, however: sincerely affirming such a proposition means only that one is implicitly committed to its being false, not that it is. The very fact of the performance of the proposition—as opposed to the content of the proposition itself—says nothing about whether it is justified.<sup>24</sup>

Affirmations of genuinely performatively inconsistent propositions involve the speaker (or writer or thinker, etc.) in a species of self-referential contradiction. A proposition can undermine itself other than logically in a number of ways. In his discussion of the alleged self-referential inconsistency of eliminative materialism, Andrew Cling distinguishes between the justificatory, semantic, and pragmatic presuppositions of theories.<sup>25</sup> “The **justificatory** presuppositions of a theory T,” he explains, “are the necessary conditions of ‘T is justified,’ the **semantic** presuppositions of T are the necessary conditions of ‘T is meaningful,’ and the **pragmatic** presuppositions of T are the necessary conditions of ‘T is asserted.’”<sup>26</sup> In addition to a theory being logically self-referentially inconsistent, a theory can be inconsistent by virtue of itself denying or implying the contrary of one of its justificatory, semantic, or pragmatic presuppositions. Performative inconsistency derives from the self-referential denial of semantic or pragmatic presuppositions—in other words, a performatively self-falsifying proposition denies a necessary condition if its being meaningfully affirmed.<sup>27</sup> (The affirmation of a self-stultifying proposition, by contrast, denies one of its justificatory presuppositions.) This is what renders the performance of the proposition via affirmation inconsistent, because any such successful performance is proof of the meaningful affirmability of the proposition. As the distinction between semantic and pragmatic presupposition suggests, we can further divide performatively self-falsifying propositions into two categories: those that imply that they cannot be meaningfully asserted, and those that imply that the act of asserting them is impossible, independently of any questions about meaning or reference.

As I shall discuss in the third section, there is a close connection between performatively inconsistent propositions and transcendental arguments. Further, we can identify two types of transcendental argument,

distinguished by their respective association with the two types of performatively inconsistent proposition. Before getting to that, I must introduce transcendental arguments and discuss the ‘modest’ approach to such arguments that was developed to avoid certain general worries about them.

## II

Transcendental arguments are partly non-empirical, anti-skeptical arguments focusing on necessary enabling conditions of coherent experience, or on the possession or employment of some kind of knowledge or cognitive ability, where the skeptic is not in a position to question the fact of this experience, knowledge, or cognitive ability, and where the revealed preconditions include what the skeptic questions. Such arguments take as a premise some obvious fact about our mental life—such as some aspect of our experience, knowledge, beliefs, or cognitive abilities—and add a claim that some other state of affairs is a necessary condition of the first one. Transcendental arguments most commonly have been deployed against a position denying the knowability of some extra-mental proposition, such as the existence of an external world or other minds. Such an argument centers on a claim that, for some extra-mental proposition P, the indisputable truth of some proposition Q about our mental life requires that P.<sup>28</sup> The form of an anti-skeptical transcendental argument [TA] can be outlined as follows:

- (1) Some proposition Q about our mental life, the truth of which is immediately apparent.
- (2) The truth of some extra-mental proposition P is a necessary condition of Q.
- (3) Therefore P.

For example (from Kant):

- (1a) I make judgments about the temporal order of my own mental states.
- (2a) I could not make judgments about the temporal order of my



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own mental states without having experienced enduring substances independent of me undergoing alteration.

(3a) Hence independent, enduring substances exist.

TAs have been subjected to sweeping criticisms claiming that no such argument can succeed. Barry Stroud 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 it merely to appear to be true, or for us merely to believe that it is true.<sup>29</sup> TAs, then, at best demonstrate how things must appear, not how they must be. Stroud claimed that no TA can succeed in showing that a proposition questioned by the skeptic is true without presupposing some sort of verificationism-derived principle stating that to hold a belief we must be in a position to determine its truth or falsity. But such a principle is implausible and would make the TA it underlies redundant. The only alternative, Stroud continued, is to reduce how things are to how they seem to be—in other words, to embrace idealism. But most would consider this option equally unacceptable.

Despite his criticism, Stroud remains optimistic about methodology similar to that exhibited in TAs: he now proposes the possibility of successful “modest” TAs, distinguished by their less ambitious goals. Rather than show that some belief doubted by the skeptic is true, a modest TA [MTA] seeks to show only that the belief is “invulnerable” to skepticism.<sup>30</sup> He defines an invulnerable belief as one that cannot be found to be false consistently with its being found to be held by people. One way to show that a belief is invulnerable to skepticism is by showing that it is “indispensable”: that is, by showing that it cannot be abandoned consistently with our having a conception of the world at all. For example, if P.F. Strawson was right in claiming that we cannot think of an independent world without thinking of it as containing enduring particulars, then we cannot think of people in the world as having beliefs about enduring particulars without thinking of the world as containing enduring particulars.<sup>31</sup> Doubt about the accuracy of others’ beliefs presupposes an independent world of believers holding beliefs about enduring particulars and so also presupposes enduring particulars.

Such beliefs are therefore “invulnerable” to doubt: the skeptic cannot question such beliefs without thereby committing herself to the existence of enduring particulars— if she even ascribes such beliefs to others, then she must hold that some beliefs involving the existence of enduring particulars are true. None of this demonstrates that there **are** any enduring particulars: the indispensability of a belief just means that we cannot help but believe it to be true, and its consequent *invulnerability* just means that it could never be defeated by further evidence or argument. This invulnerability would show that we cannot “take seriously the possibility that although we have all those beliefs and experiences, the world is not in fact the way we believe it to be.”<sup>32</sup>

A belief in the existence of something questioned by a skeptic may also be invulnerable, according to Stroud, if judgments regarding such things are “irreducible” to any other kind of judgment. He says that beliefs about the colors of things belong to this category. If thoughts about the colors of objects cannot be reduced to thoughts about anything else, he argues, we cannot find persons to have beliefs about colors and consistently find all those beliefs to be false.<sup>33</sup> His claim rests on establishing that, if we thought that things were not really colored, we would be unable to identify perceptions of color—that is, we could not offer a description of someone’s having a particular perception of color adequate to uniquely pick out that perception. “Color terms,” he explains, “when not used to predicate color of an object mean what they do because they are ‘holistically’ tied to the meanings they have in such predicative applications.”<sup>34</sup> That is to say, we must presuppose a causal story involving colored objects in any kind of adequate reference to color or color-perception. If our very use of the term is dependent on its use in predicative applications, then we could not consistently pick out perceptions of color, even in ourselves, if we did not think of objects as colored. As “metaphysical ‘unmaskers’” of the illusion of the existence of color in the world, we could not identify perceptions of, say, yellow as those perceptions one characteristically has when in the presence of yellow objects:

Nor could we identify perceptions of yellow as perceptions of the property that people **believe** to belong to objects that

are yellow. We would admit no objects that are yellow. It would get us no further to say that perceptions of yellow are perceptions of that property that people believe to belong to objects that they believe to be yellow. That specification is not unique. There are many properties that people believe to belong to objects they believe to be yellow....Perceptions understood as 'intentional' perceptions of something are identified and distinguished from one another only in terms of what they are perceptions of.<sup>35</sup>

Stroud goes on to argue that this is the case even if we attribute perceptions of color to others by reference to our own case: without implicit reference to the colors of things independent of ourselves, we cannot uniquely pick out our own perceptions of color either by definite description or ostension.<sup>36</sup> But if we could not consistently identify perceptions of color, then we could not consistently identify beliefs about color: "This would mean that no one could consistently reject **all** truths about the colors of objects while retaining the capacity to understand the color vocabulary we need to attribute perceptions and beliefs about color to ourselves and our fellow human beings."<sup>37</sup> Stroud further proposes that beliefs about value are similar to beliefs about color in this way.<sup>38</sup> (He goes on to suggest that evaluative beliefs may also be indispensable, since, in order to have a conception of the world rich enough for skepticism, we must see ourselves and other believers as acting in it, and making sense of agency requires the attribution of beliefs about value.)

Stroud admits that invulnerability "does not imply we know the things in question, and it does not imply that they are true."<sup>39</sup> It does, however, imply that "we could never see ourselves as holding the beliefs in question and being mistaken." This is not a direct reply to epistemic skepticism, but it may, he says, provide some "reassurance" against skepticism, depending on the kind of skepticism in question. Stroud's argument about enduring particulars, for example, makes explicit a conceptual connection entailing a connection between having beliefs of one sort (such as belief in an independent world) and having beliefs of another sort (such as beliefs regarding enduring particulars). The skeptic now sees what else is presupposed in raising questions about a certain kind

of belief. The skeptic is not proven wrong, but is shown to be incapable of consistently raising a particular kind of doubt. Christopher Hookway sympathetically describes the impact of MTAs on skepticism as giving us permission to “resist” skeptical doubts by showing we need not take their challenge seriously.<sup>40</sup> This result, he claims, legitimates existing confidence by preventing doubt from arising. Since I have not proven them to be true, the falsity of my beliefs remain a logical possibility. But if an MTA demonstrates the invulnerability of my belief, I cannot consistently affirm doubts about the matter—and so I need not concern myself with such doubts.

Stroud’s approach is not without its difficulties. His first MTA undermines those who ask questions like, “Are those who believe in *enduring particulars* correct in doing so?” His answer is that the skeptic who questions that belief simultaneously questions and presupposes the existence of an objective world-order. Doubts regarding belief in *enduring particulars* can be disregarded once we have demonstrated that such doubts, because they presuppose believers who are members of an independent world, presuppose *enduring particulars*. But this answer does not do the job it is supposed to do. The skeptic still could consistently ask, “Is the proposition that there are *enduring particulars* true?” This question does not presuppose an independent world of believers holding beliefs about *enduring particulars* and so also presuppose *enduring particulars*.<sup>41</sup> This just is not the right kind of argument to show that doubt about *enduring particulars* is inconsistent: at best, this argument could only show that doubt about others’ beliefs in *enduring particulars* is inconsistent. But this falls short of what we would hope for an anti-skeptical argument aimed at authorizing belief in *enduring particulars*.

This could just be a weakness in the particular line of reasoning alluded to by Stroud. Consider instead his argument about colors. It would be a consequence of his reasoning about the dependence of the meaning of color-references on predicative applications of the term that both the statement “All beliefs about color may be false” and the proposition that there are no colors in the world are inconsistent. According to his reasoning, the meaningful affirmation of any proposition concerning colors (including the denial that there are colors in the world) will be

tied to the predicative use of the concept, so any reference to color-beliefs pragmatically implies the speaker's willingness to predicate colors of some objects. So the skeptic, assuming she accepts certain background assumptions about reference, cannot consistently question the existence of color by any means. Unlike his first argument resting on the indispensability of beliefs about enduring particulars, Stroud's argument resting on the irreducibility of judgments about color at least in principle has what it takes to demonstrate an inconsistency in the relevant variety of skepticism.

Arguments relying on the relative necessity of some conceptual framework or set of beliefs, however, have been subject to a certain general objection. First, to provide some response to the epistemic skeptic, an indispensability argument would have to show that a given belief is indispensable as such, rather than just indispensable for us. And to do that, says Stephan Körner, is impossible: we can only argue for the uniqueness of a conceptual or doxastic framework on the basis of our own concepts and beliefs.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, as Robert Stern puts it, if indispensability "is weaker than infallibility in so far as it leaves open the possibility that our belief that *p* is false, how can *p* be immune from doubt?; and if it is immune from doubt though possibly false, isn't this a vice rather than a virtue?"<sup>43</sup> If the "necessity" of some set of beliefs or conceptual framework just follows from our own inability to think outside that framework, then the discovery of this necessity is just a discovery about our own limitations, rather than a discovery about the world around us.<sup>44</sup>

This concern is reflected in two challenges to Meynell's recent reiteration of the classical claim that radical skepticism about reason is self-defeating. His argument is, effectively, a modest transcendental argument. He simply points out that, in stating the impossibility of rationally supporting any statement one makes, one presupposes the possibility of rationally supporting statements. (Such a claim, then, is self-defeating in the sense of being self-stultifying, as defined above.) The framework under which we suppose that it is possible to rationally support claims is, in other words, indispensable, and the belief that it is possible to do so is invulnerable.

The skeptical stance is defended by Corbin Fowler in his response to Meynell.<sup>45</sup> Fowler essentially accuses Meynell of circularity, in that he relies on the laws of logic in presenting an argument that skepticism about reason cannot coherently be put forth. So long as knowing that P is understood to entail being able to show that we know that P, Fowler argues, the skeptic can always phrase her attack purely negatively: for example, “where is the *proof* that logical consistency is always to be valued more than logical inconsistency?”<sup>46</sup> The skeptic, in other words, can limit herself to pointing out that the believer has insufficient evidence for her beliefs. The alternative, skeptical scenario need not even be stated—so the alleged inconsistency of its affirmation need not be a problem.

Fowler’s reply might seem a little disingenuous. Lonergan explains why in describing the situation from the point of view of the radical skeptic who refuses to accept reason’s self-justification:

Am I a knower? The answer, Yes, is coherent, for if I am a knower, I can know that fact. But the answer, No, is incoherent, for if I am not a knower, how could the question be raised and answered by me? No less, the hedging answer, I do not know, is incoherent. For if I know that I do not know, then I am a knower; and if I do not know that I do not know, then I should not answer. Am I a knower? If I am not, then I know nothing. My only course is silence. My only course is not the excused and explained silence of the sceptic, but the complete silence of the animal that offers neither excuse nor explanation for its complacent absorption in merely sensitive routines.<sup>47</sup>

In questioning the epistemic foundation of a given position, one implicitly commits oneself to the possibility of the alternative. The possibility of the state of affairs  $\sim P$ , in other words, is a pragmatic implication of questioning our belief that P obtains. But a successful performative transcendental argument [PTA] would show that the skeptic’s implied commitment to the very affirmability of her doubt is incompatible with the skeptical scenario implied by the proposition affirmed. The skeptic would have to give up either her skepticism or the very ability

to assert it.<sup>48</sup> The skeptic's silence, in other words, could not even be explained by the skeptic herself to herself; the skeptic would not stand in accusatory silence but would be taken out of epistemological contention altogether.<sup>49</sup> A well-founded modest transcendental argument would show that the skeptic cannot consistently or coherently question one's warrant for believing that P; the next, implicit step in lines of reasoning like Lonergan's is to claim that one is at least *prima facie* warranted in believing that P (especially given some other reasons for believing it) if the claim that  $\sim P$  obtains is performatively inconsistent.

The question seems to come down to whether it is fair for the skeptic, when confronted with a modest transcendental argument, to advert to a non-conceptualizable possibility. For all the questions about that move, it still looks like sleight-of-hand to announce a discovery about our conceptual framework, and then without further ado announce that concerns about that conceptual framework being reflected by reality are rendered moot. Even if one is reduced to raising this concern in the abstract, it still seems like a legitimate worry.

### III

So MTAs that aim to silence the skeptic by establishing invulnerability of belief or conceptual framework remain controversial. To get the job done decisively it seems we need a stronger sort of TA directed at establishing the truth of some proposition doubted by the skeptic. Is it true that all TAs are subject to Stroud's general criticism? And can TAs have value even if they fall short of irrefutably refuting skepticism? I will conclude by bringing out the value of TAs in general via a discussion of a class of TAs that work by implicating the skeptic in a performative inconsistency.<sup>50</sup> Consider Descartes' Cogito argument. Even as he agrees in principle with Stroud's rationale for rejecting standard TAs, Stern points out that Descartes' Cogito argument (a) can be read as a transcendental argument of standard form directed at skepticism regarding knowledge of one's own existence, and (b) the argument, even when viewed as such, is not subject to Stroud's general criticism of TAs.<sup>51</sup> Stern notes that the Cogito argument can be cast in the following way:

- (1b) I think.
- (2b) In order to think, it is necessary to exist.
- (3b) Hence, I exist.

This argument meets the criteria for a TA: it takes a fact about one's mental life as a premise, adds that some extra-mental fact is a necessary condition of the truth of that premise, and concludes that the extra-mental fact holds.<sup>52</sup> Stern acknowledges that, unlike the other standard TAs he considers, this TA does not depend on some gap-closing verificationist or idealist principle: the whole basis for this line of reasoning is that there is no gap between thought and existence, or between thinking and thinking that one is thinking, that needs closing.

On one possible reading, the Cogito argument turns on the claim that the statement, "I do not exist" (or better, the proposition that no one exists) is performatively inconsistent. This suggests a distinct category of TAs that directly advert to the performative inconsistency of the very affirmation of the skeptical position itself. I call such an argument a 'performative transcendental argument' [PTA].<sup>53</sup> Note, by contrast to PTAs, that a TA as defined above need not contain any premise that refers to the very act of affirmation of the form of skepticism to be refuted; the premises of the Kantian argument (1a)-(3a) outlined earlier, for example, do not. The PTA may or may not deserve consideration as a distinct form: we can think of PTAs as a subcategory of TAs, or we can talk in terms of being able to re-conceptualize many TAs—along with some other lines of reasoning broadly construed as anti-skeptical—as performative. Many commentators have described anti-skeptical TAs as always or characteristically having the goal of showing that some form of skepticism is self-defeating.<sup>54</sup> However, these interpretations have been clear neither about the notion of performative inconsistency nor about the relationship between performatively inconsistent propositions and transcendental arguments. Nor have these interpretations distinguished between arguments that purport to show that some form of skepticism is performatively self-falsifying and arguments that purport to show that some form of skepticism is self-stultifying.<sup>55</sup>



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PTAs resting on performative self-falsification actually break down into two subcategories, corresponding to the two subcategories of performatively self-falsifying propositions: one in which the impossibility of the **act** of affirmation of some skeptical position is implied by the proposition affirmed, and one in which the **meaninglessness** of an affirmation of some skeptical position (and thus its impossibility in a different sense) is implied by the proposition affirmed. The above argument employing Descartes' Cogito is an example of a PTA of the first kind. This argument draws on the fact that any attempt to deny that one exists is inconsistently to affirm a proposition that denies one of its own pragmatic presuppositions.

Kant's Refutation of Idealism argument, when re-conceptualized as a PTA, is also an argument of the first type: his reasoning there implies that the ability to question the existence of enduring material objects requires their existence, because any coherent thought requires subjective time-ordering, and any subjective time-ordering requires the exhibition of objective alteration. The key to the success of this argument lies in how it tackles the appearance-reality gap, in that one could reply that the mere appearance of objective alteration would be sufficient to gain the idea of alteration necessary to subjective time-determination. Kant would answer, however, that even the **appearance** of alteration is only possible given subjective time-determination: the experience of a change in a object from state A to state B requires that one thinks of one's experience of state A as occurring before that of state B. The skeptic is forced either to concede or to explain how we gain the idea of alteration without objective experience.

Zwart finds the assertion that there is no change or temporal passage self-defeating because any assertion "consists of a succession of words or thoughts, and any succession is without time simply inconceivable."<sup>6</sup> He relies on the assumption that what is change for us cannot exist in a universe without objective temporal passage; at the same time, how to account for time's apparent flow in the absence of real change is the major hurdle faced by the anti-passage theorist. Zwart's PTA focuses the discussion on the key issue in the debate about the reality of temporal

passage. Faced with this challenge, the opponent of passage must acknowledge its reality or explain away the apparent inconsistency.

For an example of a PTA of the second kind, consider a loose derivation of Putnam's brain-in-a-vat argument against skepticism. This argument can underlie a TA that depends on the skeptic's claim being performatively inconsistent. Because of his content-externalism, Putnam holds that we cannot refer to brains and vats if we are brains in vats [BIVs] who have never actually experienced such things. So, on the premise that the skeptic does wonder about her own brain when she wonders whether she is a BIV, she cannot always have been a BIV. Given content-externalism, the proposition that all persons are and have always been BIVs is either false or—literally—not affirmable by myself or anyone. This proposition, then, denies one of its own semantic presuppositions. The problem is not an internal logical inconsistency in the thought of someone having always been a BIV; the problem arises when one tries to say something that implies that one is a BIV oneself. This observation can be the basis for a PTA:

- (1c) I am able to raise the question as to whether all persons have always been brains in vats.
- (2c) I could not refer to brains in vats unless some person (that is, myself) were acquainted with such things.
- (3c) Hence, it is not the case that all persons have always been brains in vats.

Premise (2c) reflects the alleged performative inconsistency in supposing that all persons, including oneself, might always have been BIVs. Unless the skeptic can in some other way undermine this argument, she must concede that concerns about our always having been BIVs cannot consistently be asserted. This is just the sort of silencing of the skeptic that Stroud is looking for with his MTAs. PTAs show, at the very least, that the skeptic must abandon the claim to be able to maintain her skeptical position in order to avoid having to concede its falsity on pain of inconsistency. One could look at this as another route to invulnerability: in addition to indispensability of belief and irreducibility of judgment,

one could add **performative self-falsification of (contrary) proposition** to one's list of reasons for invulnerability of belief. PTAs go further than MTAs, however: since the affirmation of the proposition in question is undeniably possible, the skeptic cannot relocate the question to the level of an abstract concern about correspondence between one's conceptual framework and reality. The skeptic is compelled to fight the conclusion on some other grounds. PTAs aim to establish truth rather than mere necessity of belief or conceptual framework; where MTAs work to the extent that some conceptual framework is indispensable, PTAs work to the extent that some theoretical commitments are irrefutable.

Of course, it is not necessarily that difficult to deny the conclusion of the Putnam-derived PTA. It is a consequence of content-externalism that reference is not transparent—that, in other words, I do not necessarily know to what I refer. So the skeptic can always admit that the first premise may not mean what we think it does, so to speak, and thus that the truth expressed by the first premise concerning our mental life is not undeniable or immediately apparent (as any TA requires).<sup>57</sup> With an MTA the skeptic is at best compelled to accept the relative necessity of a conceptual framework, but can relocate the skeptical concern to a more abstract level. With a PTA (as with classical TAs in general), if the connection between coherent experience or some other mental event or capacity and the truth of the proposition doubted by the skeptic can be established, then the skeptic is compelled to concede the point or argue for the abandonment of some central theoretical commitment. In the case of the Putnam-derived PTA, The skeptic does have at least one more option: she can take issue with content-externalism as a theory of meaning. That would allow her at least to claim she can raise the question consistently. But even if she retains this option, the argument is not without force. The real impact of this argument then would not be to establish the truth of the conclusion, but rather to 'raise the stakes' for the skeptic: this argument still demonstrates a connection between the proposition questioned by the skeptic and some other commitments the skeptic may or may not hold.<sup>58</sup> The strength of this or any similar argument will rest on the attachment one feels to those commitments

revealed by the PTA to be inconsistent with what is demonstrated by the very possibility of affirming the skeptical position.

The confrontational nature of PTAs brings out the value of the larger category of TAs. A well-founded PTA shows that the skeptic's communication of her claim demonstrates its falsity. Such conclusions can always be disputed, but to do so the skeptic may be forced to abandon some other deep theoretical commitments; PTAs have the effect of setting up this sort of dilemma in a particularly direct and poignant way. As we saw with the Cogito argument, There is no **formal** barrier to the possibility of a successful TA, in that the verification/idealism objection is only applicable on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, we have seen that a TA still can have robust (though more modest) consequences in terms of inconsistencies among theoretical commitments even if the skeptic still has room to deny its conclusion.

The claim that a given skeptical position is really performatively inconsistent must be defended; some of the putatively self-falsifying propositions mentioned above may not be. It may be the case that no PTA (or TA) is successful in refuting skepticism, but some may still put pressure on skeptics to rethink other positions. It is also interesting to note that arguments of this sort are derivable from a number of historically significant lines of reasoning not usually associated with transcendental argumentation.<sup>59</sup>

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?", *The Philosophical Review* 71 (1962), pp. 11-2 n., and Joseph Boyle, Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen, *Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 122-3. Note that

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- on this definition a recording on an answering machine would not count as a statement; nor would the event of an ant accidentally producing what looks like a sentence by walking across some sand. Minimal conditions for a proposition to be affirmed in the relevant sense would include a conscious person being involved in the act of affirmation at the time .
- <sup>2</sup> Boyle *et al.*, p. 125.
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.
  - <sup>4</sup> Hintikka. See also Douglas Walton, "Performative and Existential Self-Verifyingness," *Dialogue* 16 (1977), and Boyle *et al.*, p. 134.
  - <sup>5</sup> Lots of objections have been raised to this kind of claim. See, e.g., Bernard Williams, "The Certainty of the Cogito," *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by W. Doney (Anchor Books: Garden City, 1967) and Fred Feldman, "On the Performatory Interpretation of the Cogito," *The Philosophical Review* 82 (1973). Hintikka's claim about the statement "I exist" is not meant to imply that the reading of the Cogito argument as an inference is simply wrong: the performative self-verifyingness of the statement when thought would rest on the truth of "what thinks, exists," which in turn would be the major premise in the inferential interpretation. That what thinks, exists is established, Hintikka explains, by the existential inconsistency of trying to express that one thinks that one doesn't exist (Hintikka, "Cogito Ergo Sum as an Inference and a Performance," *The Philosophical Review* 72, p. 489).
  - <sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 327-8 (B275-7).
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336 (B292). See my "Kant's Empiricism in his Refutation of Idealism," *Kantian Review* 8 (2004), for a full explanation of Kant's reasoning. This argument can be contested on several grounds; see, for example, Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
  - <sup>8</sup> See Giovanni Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, ed. by Robert Doran and trans. by Joseph Spoerl (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 87.
  - <sup>9</sup> The contrary of a proposition that is self-falsifying seems to meet the criterion Barry Stroud gives for the self-guaranteeing "privileged class" of propositions that he describes as the central issue of TAs—namely, that it is impossible for anyone to truly deny it ("Transcendental Arguments," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968), pp. 253-5).
  - <sup>10</sup> The examples of performative self-falsifyingness drawn from Plato, Descartes' *Second Meditation* and the verification principle are discussed

by Grisez (*Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975)) and Boyle *et al.*

11 Grisez, Boyle *et al.*, and Meynell ("Skepticism Reconsidered," *Philosophy* 59 (1984) all describe the verification principle as being in some way self-referentially inconsistent. Ayer, of course, not only did not recognize this proposition as self-defeating, but would resist the claim that it is.

12 Putnam claims that the *statement* "I am (and always have been) a BIV" is "self-refuting" — that is, since it refers to BIVs it falsifies itself. Cf. *Reason, Truth, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 8.

13 From John Kekes, "The Scandal of Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1972).

14 Based on Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics," and "Thought and Talk," all reprinted in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). See Robert Stern (ed.), *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 116-8 for a reconstruction of Davidson's argument.

15 P.J. Zwart, *About Time* (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1976), p. 4.

16 Meynell, "Skepticism Reconsidered."

17 I believe that Boyle *et al.* have something very close to this category in mind when they talk about performatively self-referential propositions that are also "performatively pointless" (pp. 122-38). A proposition is performatively pointless, as they define it, when the pragmatic implications of affirming it are false. A pragmatic implication of an affirmation, as they understand it, refers to facts about the context of the affirmation that are needed for the affirmation to be rational. Cf. C.K. Grant, "Pragmatic Implication," *Philosophy* 33 (1958) (also cited by Boyle *et al.*). The entries on the following list are inspired by claims made by the philosophers they are attributed to. Not all of the following propositions were originally represented by the philosophers I cite as performatively inconsistent, or even put forward as problematic propositions at all. In each case, however, it seems a short step to the claim that the proposition in question is inconsistent in the way I describe. The example from Aristotle is given as an example of a "pointless" proposition by Boyle *et al.*

18 James Skidmore argues that denying the principle of non-contradiction [NC] is in some sense performatively inconsistent because one is only capable of genuine belief if one accepts NC. This may suggest he would take the

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proposition that NC is false to be, in my terms, performatively self-falsifying. He thinks this shows not that NC is true, however, but rather just that it is a “valid principle of theoretical reason.” (He argues similarly for the principle that we “take the necessary means to the ends we set.”) These claims raise a lot of issues that go beyond the scope of the present paper, but we could ask (a) to what extent a successful believer needs to know what NC is in order to ‘accept’ it, (b) what it means to say that NC is “valid,” if not that applications of it are genuinely truth-preserving (and thus the principle is true), (c) whether having to accept a principle of theoretical reasoning in order to be a believer means that the principle is “valid,” in whatever sense, and so on. (“Skepticism about Practical Reason: Transcendental Arguments and their Limits,” *Philosophical Studies* 109 (2002)).

- <sup>19</sup> Boyle *et al* attempt to flesh out Epicurus’ reasoning by arguing that the assertion that there is no free choice implies acceptance of rationality norms that themselves presuppose free choice; this attempt, unfortunately, is question-begging, since Boyle *et al* simply ignore a compatibilist understanding of the applicability of rationality norms. See Kenneth Konyndyk, “Rational Affirmation and Free Choice: A Study of *Free Choice*,” *New Scholasticism* 53 (1979), Jeffrey Cobb, “Determinism, Affirmation, and Free Choice,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986), and Jennifer Herdt, “Free Choice, Self-Referential Arguments, and the New Natural Law,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998).
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970), p. 336.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. C.I. Lewis, *Values and Imperatives*, ed. by J. Lange (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 66-7. This line of reasoning is then echoed in Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 17.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. *Beyond the New Theism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 118.
- <sup>23</sup> Andrew Cling interprets Richard Swinburne as having argued this way. Cf. Richard Swinburne, review of *Scientific Realism and the Plasticity of Mind*, by Paul Churchland, in *Philosophy* 55 (1980), and Cling, “Eliminative Materialism and Self-Referential Inconsistency,” *Philosophical Studies* 56 (1989), pp. 58-9.
- <sup>24</sup> As should be clear by now, performative inconsistency need not involve one of J.L. Austin’s “performative utterances.” Austin addresses how such utterances can go wrong; some of those failures seem to come close to falling under the category of performative inconsistency discussed here.

See *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. by J.O. Urmson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>25</sup> Cling, pp. 55-6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> The reader should be aware that I will not be using “pragmatic presupposition” as it is sometimes defined—namely, as referring to those beliefs of the speaker and those beliefs of the hearers taken for granted by the speaker in making a statement. Cf. Rod Bertolet, “Presupposition,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> There is controversy over whether Q would have to be a proposition about some general cognitive capacity of ours (as opposed to a specific one) for the argument it appears in to count as a transcendental argument. For the purposes of this paper at least, I am embracing the more permissive definition.

<sup>29</sup> Barry Stroud, “Transcendental Arguments,” p. 255.

<sup>30</sup> Stroud, “Kantian Argument, Conceptual Capacities, and Invulnerability,” in Paolo Parrini (ed.), *Kant and Contemporary Epistemology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), and “The Goal of Transcendental Arguments,” in Stern.

<sup>31</sup> Stroud, “The Goal of Transcendental Arguments,” p. 165. Stroud is referring to an argument to this effect presented in Strawson’s *Individuals* (New York: Methuen, 1959). For a similar line of reasoning, see J. Donceel, “Transcendental Thomism,” *The Monist* 58 (1974), p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> Stroud, “Kantian Argument,” p. 249. Cf. also Eckart Förster, “How Transcendental Arguments Are Possible,” in *Reading Kant*, ed. by Schaper and Vossenkuhl (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). Stroud connects the notion of invulnerability in this case to that of pragmatic contradiction: he sees the denial of an invulnerable belief as “structurally similar to what is expressed by the apparently paradoxical sentence ‘I believe that it is raining, and it is not raining’” (Ibid., p. 245).

<sup>33</sup> Stroud, “The Goal of Transcendental Arguments,” pp. 170-1. See also Stroud, *The Quest for Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 157ff. He indicates throughout these works that this reasoning is strongly linked to Wittgenstein’s notion of criteria.

<sup>34</sup> Stroud, “Unmasking and Dispositionalism: Reply to Mark Johnston,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69 (2004), p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> *The Quest for Reality*, p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-5.



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- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 168.
- <sup>38</sup> “The Goal of Transcendental Arguments,” pp. 171-2. Stroud doesn’t say much about how such an argument might go, but Charles Taylor supplies just such an argument in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 168. See also Stroud, “Kantian Argument,” p. 249.
- <sup>40</sup> Christopher Hookway, “Modest Transcendental Arguments and Sceptical Doubts: A Reply to Stroud,” in *Transcendental Arguments: Problems and Prospects*, p. 176.
- <sup>41</sup> A study session on Stroud including George Graham, Hannah Hardgrave, Dorothea Lotter, and Win-Chiat Lee was instrumental in helping me formulate the problem in this way.
- <sup>42</sup> Stephan Körner, *Categorical Frameworks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 72. Cf. Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 83.
- <sup>43</sup> Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism*, pp. 85-6.
- <sup>44</sup> See Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism*, p. 62; see also Hookway, p. 178 and Quassim Cassam, “Transcendental Arguments, Transcendental Synthesis, and Transcendental Idealism,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1987), pp. 377-8.
- <sup>45</sup> Corbin Fowler, “Skepticism Revisited,” *Philosophy* 62 (1987), pp. 385-8. Cf. also John Kekes, “Scepticism Reconsidered: A Reply to Meynell,” *Philosophy* 61 (1986).
- <sup>46</sup> “Skepticism Revisited,” p. 387.
- <sup>47</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 329. Cf. also 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), pp. 228-9.
- <sup>48</sup> Hume anticipates this point against the radical skeptic, but his conclusion is that this whole line of reasoning is inconclusive, since skepticism and reason will therefore stand or fall together in a kind of unstable standoff: the more highly we regard the skeptical argument, the more highly we must regard reason; but if the skeptical argument is viewed as successful then reason is undermined and so is the skeptical argument...but then reason has no opposition, and so on. (*Treatise* 1.4.1) His discussion is meant to show that the standard claim of pragmatic inconsistency cannot be the basis for a valid refutation of radical skepticism; however, his reasoning equally supports the futility of radical skepticism. He would probably not be adverse to this

further conclusion, since his goal is to show that “nature” decides the issue for us in the end.

- <sup>49</sup> Contrast this to Joseph Kupfer, who thinks the issue is one of utterance and so really exposes himself to Fowler’s response. Kupfer explicitly describes the skeptic as silenced re conversation with us but not really silenced in my sense (“Pragmatic Contradiction as Irrational Speech,” *The Monist* 70 (1987)).
- <sup>50</sup> Stroud himself points to the connection between transcendental arguments pertaining to the necessary conditions of language or experience in general and a hypothetical “privileged class” of self-verifying propositions. The truth of such propositions would follow “from the fact that somebody asserted it, or denied it, or said anything at all.” If we could show that some of the propositions the skeptic questions belong to this class, he says, we would have a refutation of skepticism without having to show that the propositions themselves are necessary truths. But Stroud does not see how to establish that a proposition is a member of the privileged class without assuming verificationism or idealism. Stroud, “Transcendental Arguments,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968), pp. 252-4. Cf. also Meynell.
- <sup>51</sup> Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism*, p. 58. Cf. also Putnam.
- <sup>52</sup> The first place I saw the Cogito argument referred to as a TA was in Morris Lipson’s “How Not to Understand Transcendental Arguments” (c. 1990, unpublished). Janet Broughton treats both the Cogito and the Third Meditation argument for the existence of God as “dependence arguments,” which have a similar structure, in *Descartes’ Method of Doubt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2002).
- <sup>53</sup> William Rehg used the term, “performative transcendental argument” in describing some of Lonergan’s anti-skeptical strategies: “Lonergan’s Performative Transcendental Argument against Scepticism,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 63 (1989). This is the only previous use of the term I am familiar with.
- <sup>54</sup> See Kekes, “The Scandal of Philosophy,” Eva Schaper, “Arguing Transcendentally,” *Kant-Studien* 63 (1972), Eric Dayton, “Pragmatic Contradiction,” *Ethics* 87 (1977), Stephen Arndt, “Transcendental Method and Transcendental Arguments,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1987), and Skidmore, “Skepticism about Practical Reason.”
- <sup>55</sup> Skidmore, for example, states that “the goal [of a TA] is to locate something that the skeptic must presuppose in order for her challenge to be meaningful, then to show that from this presupposition it follows that the skeptic’s challenge can be dismissed” (“Skepticism about Practical Reason,” p.

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121). He offers Putnam's BIV argument as an example. This description conflates TAs and PTAs, and only describes, as we have seen, a subcategory of PTAs.

<sup>56</sup> Zwart, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> As pointed out, for example, by Anthony Brueckner, "Brains in a Vat," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986).

<sup>58</sup> I owe the use of the phrase, "raising the stakes," in this context to George Graham. In response to my paper, Graham has also proposed a subsidiary distinction between "performance inconsistency" and "performer inconsistency," where the former involves a performance-relevant pragmatic inconsistency between the proposition and the affirmation (or act of expressing) itself, and the latter involves an inconsistency between the proposition and other deeply-held views of the actor.

<sup>59</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2004 meeting of the North Carolina Philosophical Society, and I am grateful for the comments of several of the attendees there. My thanks to George Graham and Avram Hiller for their helpful comments on a draft of this paper. My special thanks to Stavroula Glezakos, Ralph Kennedy, Win-Chiat Lee, and Christian Miller for their detailed comments during the course of several workshop sessions.