

TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS AND REALISM

Thomas Grundmann & Catrin Misselhorn (Tübingen)

It almost amounts to a platitude that realism and transcendental arguments do not go well together. To see why, let us briefly rehearse the characteristics of transcendental arguments¹: (i) their premises have to be justified independently of any experience about the external world, i.e. they must be justified introspectively or a priori. (ii) The premises cannot be rejected by the skeptic. (iii) Transcendental arguments uncover necessary conditions of thought and experience. (iv) The conclusion of the argument entails truths about the external world.² But as Barry Stroud has emphasized since the late sixties,³ the premises of transcendental arguments seem to have only psychological status. They, therefore, do not warrant any inferences about the external world. In this manner, Stroud forces the proponent of transcendental arguments to answer the following question: “How can we proceed ‘deductively’, or by necessity, from premises only about our thinking in certain ways to conclusions about the independent world which we thereby think about?”⁴

In order to meet this challenge, a defender of transcendental arguments has in principle three strategies to choose from⁵: First, one could opt for idealism. This is, basically, the Kantian strategy. It validates the inference from “inner” evidence to the external world, by supposing that the external world is somehow dependent on epistemic conditions. However, this strategy compromises the objectivity of our knowledge.

The second option is to weaken the conclusion. Instead of arguing that the external world has to be structured in a certain way, one may just strive to establish certain conceptual connections. In his book “Skepticism and Naturalism” (1985) Strawson defends this kind of transcendental argument. Following Stroud let us call it a *modest* transcendental argument.⁶ The aim of such an argument, as Strawson describes it, is to establish “a certain sort of interdependence of conceptual capacities and beliefs: e.g. (...) in order for self-conscious thought and experience to be possible, we must take it, or believe, that we have knowledge of external physical objects (...).”⁷ Accordingly, certain beliefs are invulnerable because they are conceptually necessary conditions of the skeptical challenge. In contrast to Strawson, who no longer believes that transcendental arguments can refute the skeptic, Stroud shows more optimism about the anti-skeptical impact of this argument.⁸ Yet, it leaves hard core realists dissatisfied, since the invulnerability of certain beliefs does neither imply their truth nor their justifiability. It is hard to see how this could answer the skeptic.⁹

The third possibility is to introduce a stronger premise. Only if (at least) one premise functions as a bridge principle that establishes a relation between the “inner” evidence and the independent world may we deduce a truth about the world. Although Strawson does not any longer approve this kind of argument, he characterises it accurately:

A philosopher who advances such an argument may begin with a premise which the skeptic does not challenge, viz. the occurrence of self-conscious thought and experience; and then proceed to argue that a necessary condition of the possibility of such experience is, say, knowledge of the existence of external objects (...).¹⁰

Stroud is rather pessimistic about the prospects of such an *ambitious* transcendental argument,¹¹ and currently the great majority of philosophers is with him.

The aim of this paper is to find out whether, given realism, ambitious transcendental arguments can still be defended. The argument we propose concerns perceptual knowledge about the external world. It is supposed to establish that beliefs about the external world, which rely on perception - perceptual beliefs -, are justified. As will turn out, there is a bridge principle connecting mind and world. It relies on content externalism, i.e. the claim that the content of our perceptual beliefs depends somehow on the objects in the external world, which these beliefs represent. In this way, the link between our having certain perceptual beliefs and the external world can be established.

Yet, how is content externalism supposed to be justified? The challenge is to show that the skeptic cannot consistently deny the justification of semantic externalism. Our argument for this claim will proceed as follows: Firstly, we will spell out the structure of our antiskeptical argument, and discuss the problem of the bridge principle’s justification. The second step is to show that the skeptic has to accept modal intuitions as a reliable method for the justification of modal claims, otherwise his position becomes epistemically inconsistent. If this is correct, the skeptic cannot undermine the justification of our perceptual beliefs any more, as will be argued. Thirdly, we want to set out in some more detail how content externalism is supported by modal intuitions, and how the bridge principle follows from it. Moreover, we are going to discuss some skeptical objections. Finally, it has to be examined whether our line of argument satisfies the conditions of an ambitious transcendental argument.

I

Let us now turn towards the proposed *argument for perceptual knowledge about the external world*. It proceeds as following:

- (1) I am having perceptual beliefs about the external world. /premise
- (2) Necessarily, perceptual beliefs about the external world are largely true (bridge principle). /premise
- (3) Necessarily, my perceptual beliefs about the external world are largely true. /from (1) & (2)
- (4) Iff perceptual beliefs about the external world are by and large true, then perception is a reliable epistemic method. /premise
- (5) Reliable epistemic methods prima facie justify the beliefs supported by them. /premise
- (6) Necessarily, my perceptual beliefs about the external world are prima facie justified. /conclusion

Some of these premises are have to be accepted even by the sceptic, since they are justified in a manner that cannot be challenged by him. This is true of premises (1), (4) and (5). They are justified by two methods which are not put into question by the skeptic. Premise (1) is justified introspectively, (4) and (5) are analytic. (4) is analytic, because the reliability of a method is defined by its producing mostly true beliefs.¹² Similarly, (5) is analytic, since the reliability of a method defines justification. The aim of justification just is to get at the truth, or, technically put, justification has to be truth conducive. As we said, a reliable method of justification is producing mostly true beliefs. Therefore, reliability is a defining characteristic of justification.¹³

Why are these premises immune from the sceptical challenge? The sceptic utilises skeptical hypotheses in order to undermine our methods of justifying our beliefs in light of certain evidence. Skeptical hypotheses offer some causal explanation of our evidence that renders the beliefs supported by the evidence vastly false. Yet, it is not enough for such an explanation just to *say* that most of our beliefs could be false. Rather, the skeptic has to provide a scenario which makes this claim plausible. The examples of such scenarios are well known: we could be brains in a vat hooked up to a computer by a mad scientist, or we could be deceived by an evil demon. In both cases, most of our beliefs about the external world would be false, and, for this reason, our justification procedures would be unreliable. Skeptical hypotheses, however, do not apply to analytic truths and introspective knowledge.

In contrast to (1), (4) and (5), the justification of (2) is challenged by skeptical hypotheses. The attempt to face this challenge even leads to a dilemma: Either (2) is analytic

or it is synthetic. Suppose first, that premise (2) is analytic, then the justification of this premise would be unproblematic. However, there are good reasons not to follow this line of reasoning. Firstly, in case of the analyticity of (2), skeptical hypotheses would be logically inconsistent. However, it would be rather surprising, if all those who found skeptical hypotheses plausible had not noticed this contradiction. In this respect we agree with McGinn's analysis of the situation:

We should not, I think, rush into accepting any philosophical theory that makes scepticism go quickly away, counting it a merit of the theory that it shows the sceptic as a sophist and a dim wit. Rather, we should view with considerable reserve any theory that has such immediately anti-sceptical consequences, for it is liable to have underestimated the problematic nature of our true epistemological predicament. And especially so if the theory offers no convincing story about how scepticism could have seemed so convincing in the first place.¹⁴

Moreover, is it not counterintuitive to think that we are able to learn something about the external world just by considering introspective evidence and its conceptual entailments?¹⁵

Yet, there is another more important objection: if (2) were analytic, it would not be compatible with a realist conception of truth, or, respectively, a fallibilist conception of justification. According to realism truth is a nonepistemic notion; as Michael Williams puts it „thinking does not make it so.“¹⁶ Understood this way, realism entails logical fallibilism, i.e. the claim that there is no logical connection between evidence and truth.¹⁷ In other words, if truth is not an epistemic notion, our evidence cannot logically guarantee the truth of the beliefs it supports. Therefore, premise (2) which concerns the relation between evidence and truth cannot be analytic. This is the first horn of the dilemma.

Let us now turn to the second horn, which arises if (2) is synthetic. In this case, it can be justified in two ways: empirically or a priori. Yet, both kinds of justification seem to be undermined by the possibility of skeptical hypotheses. If (2) is empirically justified, the argument becomes epistemically circular. An argument is epistemically circular iff the justification of the premises presupposes the truth of the conclusion.¹⁸ Suppose we try to justify empirically the claim that most of our perceptual beliefs are true. Since empirical justification depends on perception, this attempt could only be successful, if perception were a reliable method of justification. The empirical justification of premise (2) would, therefore, presuppose the truth of the argument's conclusion. But this is just, what skeptical hypotheses put into question.

Still worse, skeptical hypotheses do not only undermine empirical justification. They destroy a priori justification, as well. Even if it were possible to justify the reliability of perception a priori, the skeptic could still attack the reliability of a priori justification itself. It is (at least prima facie) possible that all our a priori evidence about necessary truths might be

false. (Imagine the evil demon makes us hold a host of things necessarily true which in fact are not.¹⁹)

For this reason, the prospects of the ambitious transcendental argument do not seem to be very promising. There is no way of justifying the crucial premise (2) without falling prey to skepticism. If (2) were analytic, its justification would be unproblematic. However, such an understanding does not correspond to our realist conception of the objectivity of knowledge. If (2) were, on the other hand, synthetic, no justification seems possible. Nevertheless, we are going to argue, the situation is not as hopeless as it appears.

II

Our argument will amount to the following: despite appearances, the skeptic cannot consistently deny the justification of premise (2), which we will propose. Rather, he himself has to justify his skeptical challenge in the same manner, because he can maintain the metaphysical possibility of skeptical hypotheses only with the help of modal intuitions. Our modal intuitions, however, support premise (2) rather than the skeptical hypotheses, as will be shown. Let us, thus, first understand why the skeptic has to fall back on modal intuitions. Modal intuitions tell us, which worlds are metaphysically possible, where metaphysically possible worlds are worlds which could be actual.

The crucial question is: why should the skeptic claim that his hypotheses are metaphysically possible? Would their logical consistency not be sufficient to undermine the justification of (2)? The logical consistency of skeptical hypotheses, however, can hardly be denied, if one wants to hold on to a realist conception of truth and a fallibilist conception of justification, as we have argued above. Yet, this is not sufficient for raising the skeptical challenge. The logical possibility of skeptical hypotheses implies only that the evidence cannot logically guarantee the truth of the beliefs in question. This claim alone is not capable of undermining the justification of (2). It is just a conceptual consequence of a fallibilist conception of justification. To put it the other way round: if the logical consistency of skeptical hypotheses were sufficient to undermine justification, fallibilism about justification would be a logically inconsistent position. There could not be any fallible justification.

This amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is generally accepted that fallibilism is not sufficient to generate skepticism. Here is Stroud as a representative voice on the matter:

It is often said that traditional epistemology is generated by nothing more than a misguided 'quest for certainty', (...) and that once we abandon such a will-o'-the-wisp we will no longer be threatened by skepticism (...). But that diagnosis seems wrong to me (...).²⁰

Therefore, the skeptic has to claim more than that skeptical hypotheses are logically possible. In order to undermine the justification of (2) he has to be justified in believing that skeptical hypotheses are metaphysically possible. The justification of metaphysical possibilities, however, has to rely on modal intuitions. Finally, the skeptic cannot attack the justification of (2) in an epistemically consistent way. The epistemic inconsistency of his position arises, since the truth of the skeptical hypotheses with respect to modal intuitions would undermine their own justification.²¹ If the skeptic claims that modal intuitions are unreliable, skeptical hypotheses could not be justified. For this reason, the skeptic must grant the reliability of modal intuitions as a method of justification.²² Yet, as will emerge below, modal intuitions are speaking in favour of (2) rather than supporting skeptical hypotheses. Once more we agree with Strawson on the diagnosis: “It is only because the solution is possible that the problem exists. So with all transcendental arguments.”²³

III

So far, we have learnt that the skeptic cannot deny the reliability of modal intuitions without undermining his own justification. We now will go on to argue that modal intuitions are apt to justify the bridge principle in our argument for perceptual knowledge about the external world. We will establish this claim in two steps. First, we will argue that content externalism can be defended as a metaphysically necessary truth by our modal intuitions. Second, we will demonstrate that the necessary truth of content externalism entails the truth of our bridge principle, namely that necessarily, perceptual beliefs about the external world are by and large true.²⁴

Let us start with some reflections on the epistemology of modality. In our claims about metaphysical possibilities or necessities we rely on modal intuitions. Or, to speak more accurately, our evidence for the modal belief that p is possible consists in finding p conceivable; and our evidence for the modal belief that p is necessary consists in finding not-p inconceivable. Whenever we find p conceivable, we thereby represent p as being possible.²⁵ Since we are realists we do not believe that metaphysical modality is the same as conceivability. However, we do believe that conceivability is a reliable guide to modality. And, as we have seen before, this cannot even be disputed by the skeptic. Now, our main argument relies heavily on the difference between being a logically consistent set of propositions and being a metaphysically possible world. For this reason we should better be able to give a list of additional methodological constraints on conceivability over and above

logical consistency. This is to give flesh to the intuitive notion of conceivability. Various suggestions have been made to constrain conceivability.²⁶ Among them two constraints are especially significant for us. First, we can conceive of propositions only if we can imagine at least one fully determinate world that makes this proposition true. As long as sets of logically consistent propositions describe worlds that are in some sense or other indeterminate they do not pass this test. Consider the following example of Stephen Yablo's. At first, it seems as if we can conceive of the denial of Goldbach's conjecture since it is still unproved that every even number is obtainable as the sum of two primes. But this appearance proves to be illusory according to the above constraint. In order to imagine a world in which there is a counterexample to Goldbach's conjecture I have to imagine all the details of the proof of this counterexample; and this seems to be impossible as long as we do not actually possess such a proof.²⁷ Second, we can conceive of propositions only if we can imagine worlds making them true that are explanatorily coherent. This constraint is not completely unrelated to the first one. Think of it this way: If a world contains properties that are unintelligible, mysterious or unexplainable within this world, then this world is to a certain extent indeterminate. Explanations within other imaginable worlds need not follow the laws of our actual world, but there must be some laws or others that do the explanatory work within these worlds. Otherwise, we have no right to think of these worlds as metaphysically possible.²⁸

Let us apply these epistemological reflections to the question as to whether content externalism can be justified as necessary truth by means of our modal intuitions. A very prominent version of content externalism claims that the representational content of mental states is determined by their distal causal history.²⁹ Hence, the representational content depends on the environment in which the cognitive system has been brought up. A well-known conceivability-argument for the necessary truth of content externalism is based on Putnam's and Burge's *twin-earth thought-experiments* about water and twater-thoughts.³⁰ Although this type of argument is obviously based on modal intuitions, it is not completely convincing. First of all, it does not establish externalism for mental states in general, but only for a limited class of concepts such as indexicals or natural kind terms. Secondly, it cannot be ruled out that the modal intuitions in this case are simply generated by our semantic background theory rather than being evidence for the truth of this theory.

We think that there is a different conceivability-argument for content externalism that fares much better. It seems inconceivable that the representational content of mental states is not determined by their distal causal history, i.e. that content externalism is wrong. We cannot imagine a world in which representational content about objects in the external world is not

determined by external relations between the representations on the one hand, i.e. the mental states that possess representational content, and the objects represented by them on the other hand. Furthermore, we cannot imagine a world in which these external relations do not have a causal nature. For consider a world in which this is not true. In this world there is representational content without there being any causal relations whatsoever between representations and represented objects. Let us assume instead that representations and their objects are only similar to each other instead. This world, though logically consistent, is not a conceivable world for the simple reason that it is not explanatorily coherent. We do not understand how representational content in this world comes about. It remains a mysterious property. The similarity relation between representations and objects represented by them is neither sufficient nor is it necessary to explain representational content. In *Reason, Truth and History* Putnam presents a nice analogy that makes it obvious that similarity is not sufficient for representational content. Suppose you see an ant creeping on the sand. The line it involuntarily draws looks like a caricature of Winston Churchill. It happens to be similar to Churchill, but nobody would ever claim that this line represents Churchill.³¹ Nor is similarity a necessary condition of representational content. There is no doubt that our ideas and thoughts represent external objects. However, to assume that these ideas and thoughts are similar to their objects seems absurd. They are certainly not little images in our brain. The mental state referring to the property of blueness is probably some neural state which is anything but blue. Hence, similarity cannot explain representational content. But can't we say the following: Even if similarity does not give us the required explanation, we can imagine a world in which representational content is explained by some non-causal property - although we have no idea which property it is? Now, this may well be a logically consistent description of a world, but it does not specify an imaginable world since the description violates the constraint of determinateness. Remember that we can only imagine worlds that are completely determinate. So it proves to be true that we cannot conceive of representational content which is completely independent of any causal relations whatsoever between representations and their objects. Of course, this dependence relation needs some qualification. The connection between the representational content of mental states and their causes must not become too tight. If an actual causal relation were required for a representation to be about an object, no case of misrepresentation could occur. However, the possibility of misrepresentation seems to be the mark of representational content. Hence, externalism is only acceptable if it makes error possible. For misrepresentation to be possible, the content of tokens of a certain type of representation must be robustly determined by a

causal correlation with distal events of a certain type during the learning period. It is only the historical relation to distal causes that can explain representational content about the external world. We can conclude that the necessary truth of content externalism is justified by modal intuitions. Since perceptual beliefs belong to the class of mental states with representational content about the world, we can also conclude that the content of perceptual beliefs is determined by their distal causal history.

We are now ready to take the second step in our argument for the bridge principle. Assume that content externalism has been established for perceptual beliefs by means of modal intuitions. Does content externalism imply that our perceptual beliefs about the world are by and large true? It is true, the content of our current perceptual beliefs is determined by the distal causes of their predecessors. Thus, there must have been some robust correspondence between our former perceptual beliefs and their causes. This amounts to saying that our former perceptual beliefs must have been true. So, externalism implies an historic connection of our perceptual beliefs with truth. Since, however, it does not make the content of these beliefs dependent on our current environment, massive error may occur in our current perceptual beliefs. Suppose a person has acquired her representations in a normal environment. Now, if we put her brain into a nutrient solution keeping it stimulated by a computer, the content of her representations does not change. It continues to be determined by the former normal causes, at least for some time. Thus, the vatted brain has mostly false perceptual beliefs about living in a normal environment. Externalism cannot rule out this kind of error. Our perceptual beliefs can be massively flawed at any time.³² But from this it does not follow that our perceptual beliefs can be by and large false in the long run. We can massively err at any time only if, in the past, we have had mostly correct beliefs. As soon as massive error extends beyond a limited period of time the content of mental states changes and, finally, readapts to the world. This seems to be sufficient to establish the truth-ratio of perceptual beliefs required by the bridge principle.

To sum up: Both steps have been taken successfully. We were able to establish the necessary truth of content externalism for perceptual beliefs; and we have demonstrated that this implies the necessary veridicality of these beliefs. If we furthermore assume for conceptual reasons that beliefs of a single epistemological kind are justified, if they are veridical in general, then we can conclude that we have perceptual knowledge about the external world, provided we introspectively know of our perceptual beliefs. Hence, our argument for perceptual knowledge about the world seems to be sound.

At this point of the argument the skeptic's patience is wearing thin. "Sure," he will admit, "*I cannot deny the reliability of modal intuitions in general. But,*" he will continue, "*there are competing modal intuitions. Maybe there is a modal intuition speaking for content externalism and the veridicality of perceptual beliefs entailed by it. But there are certainly other modal intuitions making the case against this necessary veridicality of perceptual beliefs. Among them are the skeptical hypotheses and the intuition that semantic internalism is correct. If some skeptical hypothesis is conceivable or some version of content internalism, as some semanticists believe, then we have modal evidence speaking against the necessary truth of content externalism. May be, it beats the evidence in favor of the necessary veridicality of perceptual beliefs. But at least it neutralizes this evidence.*" Or so the skeptic might argue. We cannot respond to the skeptic by simply ignoring his evidence. If we want to hold on to our claim that externalism is justified by modal intuitions, we have to explain away the skeptic's apparent counter-evidence. To begin with, we do not believe that internalism and skeptical hypotheses are independent intuitions against the necessary veridicality of our beliefs. It is nothing but the Cartesian skeptical scenario that makes internalism about representational content plausible. So, in fact we have only to deal with the skeptical hypothesis as counterevidence. Does it really rely on modal intuitions, as the skeptic suggests? Or is it simply a consequence of realism and logical fallibilism, i.e. the idea that our evidence does not logically imply the truth of the beliefs supported by it? The skeptic might argue that his scenario does not only consist in the proposition that the beliefs supported by our evidence are massively mistaken. The skeptical hypothesis is a concrete and vivid illustration of this point, dressed up and equipped with a lot of details about how the massive error is to be explained. So why shouldn't the skeptic claim that the skeptical hypothesis is conceivable as part of an imaginable world - simply because it is highly determinate? Sure, the skeptic pretends to give us an example of an imaginable world with his scenario. But it isn't. Something essential is missing. After all, the skeptical hypothesis does not describe a world that is imaginable for us since it is explanatorily incoherent and, hence, not completely determinate. The skeptical hypothesis does not explain the representational content of beliefs which it presupposes. So we succeed in explaining away the skeptic's apparent modal counterevidence. His intuition is not a case of proper modal intuitions, but a consequence of a purely logical truth.

Prima facie there seems to be another objection against our transcendental argument concerning the relationship between content externalism and self-knowledge. The skeptic might argue as follows: if content externalism were correct the content of our beliefs would

be determined by the environment. Therefore, it seems as if I had to find out perceptually whether there exists an external world in the ordinary sense or one of the skeptical scenarios in order to justify that my perceptual beliefs are, indeed, *about* the external world in the ordinary sense. How else could we justify premise (1) given content externalism? But thereby we are presupposing that perceptual beliefs about the external world are justified, i.e. we must presuppose the truth of the conclusion we wanted to establish. Yet, this objection is based upon the assumption that content externalism requires a perceptual theory of self-knowledge – a claim that has been discarded by major proponents of externalism, who argued that externalism is compatible with privileged and non-empirical access to mental content.³³

Nevertheless, the skeptic could insist, that, for the externalist, self-knowledge does not come for free as within the Cartesian framework. The problem of skepticism seems to recur just one level up. Yet, we can answer this problem straightforwardly. As soon as the skeptic accepts the justification of externalism on the basis of modal intuitions, he can no longer question the justification of premise (1). Externalism implies the justification of introspective beliefs, since the same external factors determining the content of the first-order beliefs also determine the content of the introspective beliefs about them. The reliability of introspective beliefs follows directly from externalism. Therefore, a justification of premise (1) is available. For the skeptic there remains the desperate move to deny the existence of beliefs in general. But then he would fall prey to a performative contradiction. Provided the skeptic claims anything at all, he cannot consistently deny the existence of content in general. This would amount to committing cognitive suicide.

Apart from these epistemological objections the skeptic might also put forward a metaphysical challenge. In our argument we pretend to accept realism and, at the same time, rely on a bridge principle such that our having perceptual beliefs implies certain external facts in the world, namely the existence of facts that make them mostly true. To the skeptic the latter sounds like a version of idealism since, according to it, external facts seem to depend on the mind. But this is understanding it the wrong way.³⁴ As we have just seen, the truth of the bridge principle is implied by content externalism. This doctrine explains the metaphysical connection between beliefs and truth by making beliefs dependent on the world and not the other way round, as idealism would have it. Externalism, therefore, does not imply the idealistic view that the external world would not exist without any psychological reality. As it turns out, there is no real tension between our bridge principle and realism.

This brings out the weakness of the skeptic's position: In order to challenge the justification of our perceptual beliefs about the world, he needs more than purely logical

evidence. He must rely on modal intuitions. But there are no modal intuitions supporting his argument. Properly understood his skeptical intuitions are nothing but logical insights in disguise. In this sense they can be explained away. Modal intuition reveals the metaphysical truth-connection of our perceptual beliefs; and this is perfectly compatible with a realist understanding of truth.

IV

Does this mean that our argument for perceptual knowledge succeeds as a transcendental argument of the ambitious kind? To answer this question let us recall the four conditions for ambitious transcendental arguments: Such an argument must rely on premisses that are (i) justified independently of experience and (ii) resistant to the skeptical challenge. (iii) such an argument must proceed by establishing necessary conditions of thought or experience. Finally, (iv) its conclusion must entail truths about the external world. It is easy to see that our argument satisfies the conditions (iii) and (iv). Its bridge principle (2) claims something about necessary conditions of beliefs; and its conclusion entails that our perceptual beliefs are reliable, i.e. something about the beliefs' relation to the world. But what about the first condition? Are the premisses justified without relying on experience? If we assume that introspective knowledge as well as conceptual knowledge are non-experiential, then only the justification of our bridge principle (2) seems problematic. Are modal intuitions apriori rather than empirical? This seems to be a matter of controversy. In the post-Kripkean era of modal theory many philosophers calling themselves 'actualists' think that modalities depend in some way or other on the actual world. If this is true, the right way of finding out modal truths is to gain aposteriori knowledge of the actual world.³⁵ Kripke's example of water and H₂O may illustrate this point. If by means of empirical investigation we find out that water and H₂O are identical in the actual world, then we are justified to believe that they are necessarily identical. This is an aposteriori necessary truth. Now, if the actualist is right in claiming that modal intuitions rely on empirical knowledge of the actual world, then our bridge principle cannot be justified non-empirically. This would also have the interesting effect of making our argument epistemically circular. The justification of the bridge principle would presuppose the truth of the argument's conclusion, namely that the perceptual beliefs supporting our modal intuitions are justified. However, the argument would not lose its antiskeptical force since the skeptic still could not deny the reliability of modal intuitions. On the other hand, there are philosophers who defend the view that at least some modal intuitions are purely

apriori.³⁶ We will remain neutral on this issue here. But we have to admit that the transcendental status of our argument decisively depends on this question. We also hesitate to claim that our argument's premisses are completely resistant to skeptical challenges, i.e. that the argument satisfies condition (ii). Most clearly, this is becoming a problem for our defense of the bridge principle. We did neither show that the skeptic cannot consistently deny this principle nor did we show that the skeptic cannot justifiably deny it. What we did establish is that the skeptic cannot justifiably deny the adequacy of modal intuitions as a method of justification. This permits us to claim that the skeptic cannot justifiably deny the bridge principle unless he has proper modal intuitions speaking against it, and, as we argued, the skeptic did not provide convincing modal evidence for his claim, so far. However, we cannot rule out the case that he might come up with evidence against the principle some day.

For the above two reasons one might say that it would be premature to claim that our argument can be classified as an ambitious transcendental argument. However this may be, it still seems right to us that our argument is an ambitious antiskeptical argument - a powerful weapon against skepticism about our knowledge of the external world. Any stronger claim seems negotiable.³⁷

¹ This is basically the way Barry Stroud characterizes transcendental arguments in Stroud 1994, p. 231; see also Stroud 1999. For a more comprehensive discussion of transcendental arguments compare Grundmann 1994.

² Transcendental arguments meeting these conditions are called „world-directed“ by Cassam 1999, p. 82. He distinguishes them from „self-directed“ transcendental arguments which allow only inferences from given knowledge to the nature of our cognitive faculties.

³ See already Stroud 1968.

⁴ Stroud 1994, p. 236.

⁵ Stroud 1994, p. 235ff.

⁶ Stroud 1994, p. 242.

⁷ Strawson 1985, p. 21.

⁸ Stroud 1994, p. 242

⁹ See also Hookway 1999, p. 177ff.

¹⁰ Strawson 1985, p. 8f.

¹¹ Stroud 1994, p. 241.

¹² Goldman 1979.

¹³ Goldman 1979; Alston 1993, p. 3.

¹⁴ McGinn 1989, p. 114.

¹⁵ McGinn 1989, p. 113.

¹⁶ Williams 1996, p. 228.

¹⁷ See Heil 1998, p. 70; McGinn 1989, p. 107.

¹⁸ Alston 1993, p. 15.

¹⁹ Actually, Descartes considers this case in his First Meditation, where even mathematical beliefs are affected by the skeptical hypothesis.

²⁰ Stroud 1989, p. 35.

²¹ For the general character of epistemically self-refuting arguments see Grundmann/Hofmann (forthcoming).

²² See also Misselhorn 1999.

²³ Strawson 1959, p. 40.

²⁴ Sometimes content externalism is understood as a conceptual truth. See, for instance, Davidson 1983, p. 319. We do not embrace this view, since it would not be consistent with realism, provided that content externalism entails the veridicality of our beliefs about the external world. For a metaphysical understanding of externalism see Brueckner 1992, p. 116.

²⁵ See Yablo 1993, p.7.

²⁶ See Kripke 1980, Yablo 1993, Peacocke 1994.

²⁷ Yablo 1993, p.31f.

²⁸ This is not meant to be an inference to the *best* explanation. Rather, it is sufficient for the conceivability of a possible world that there be some explanatory nexus or other among its characteristics.

²⁹ This view is defended by Putnam, Davidson, Burge etc.

³⁰ Putnam 1975; Burge 1982.

³¹ Putnam 1981, ch.1.

³² See Foley 1992, p.139, and Burge 1986, pp.122, 130f.

³³ Compare, for instance, Davidson 1987; Burge 1988.

³⁴ For a similar response see Brueckner 1996, p.273.

³⁵ See for example Kripke 1980, Peacocke 1994, Fine 1994.

³⁶ For example BonJour 1998, Misselhorn 1999.

³⁷ For helpful comments and discussion we are especially grateful to Graham Bird, Hanjo Glock, Frank Hofmann, Jürgen Pafel, Silvio Pinto, Robert Stern, Karsten Stüber, Kenneth Westphal.

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