

- strong linguistic connotations, inevitably suggests to many readers something like the notion of analyticity.
16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, translated by Denise Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1974, §§38–41.
  17. *Ibid.*, §515.
  18. *Ibid.*, §517.
  19. See note 10 above for references.
  20. The way I expressed this in 'It Ain't Necessarily So', using the example of Euclidean geometry, was to say that prior to the construction of an alternative geometry plus physics, the statement 'There are only finitely many places to get to, travel as you will' did not express anything we could conceive.
  21. Cited by Cora Diamond in *The Realistic Spirit*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994. Readers of that book will see how much my thinking has been influenced by Diamond's brilliant papers on Frege and Wittgenstein.
  22. But cf. Davidson on 'passing theories' in 'A Nice Derangement of Epithaphs', in Ernest Lepore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 446.
  23. In *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979), Stanley Cavell often speaks of not knowing 'the spirit' in which something is said, where I might say (using the terminology I have employed in the present essay) of not knowing the 'sense' in which what was said was meant. Cavell's terminology has the merit of avoiding the confusion with not knowing the literal meaning (not knowing which is the relevant entry in the dictionary).

## 8

## Transcendental Self-consciousness

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## I

In *The Bounds of Sense*, Peter Strawson presents a fascinating defence of Kant's thesis that there is a conceptual connection between the idea that diverse experiences belong to or are united in a single consciousness (the unity of consciousness) and the idea that those experiences collectively constitute a temporally extended experience of a world of objects which are distinct from particular states of awareness of them (the objectivity condition). According to Strawson, the connection between the unity of consciousness and the objectivity condition is that 'for a series of diverse experiences to belong to a single consciousness it is necessary that they should be so connected as to constitute a temporally extended experience of a unified objective world'.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will outline Strawson's argument for the thesis that unity of consciousness requires experience of objects and will suggest that the argument is unsuccessful. The key to the argument is the notion of transcendental self-consciousness, but this notion cannot generate the objectivity condition in the way that Strawson's argument requires.

Kant claimed not only that unity requires objectivity but also that objectivity requires unity.<sup>2</sup> For experiences to count as experiences of independent objects they must belong to a unified consciousness. In Section III I will sketch a defence of this claim and will suggest that seeing the force of the thesis that objectivity requires unity enables one to explain the failure of Strawson's



objectivity argument. If objectivity requires unity of consciousness, transcendental self-consciousness cannot be what generates the objectivity condition. What is more, Kant's argument from objectivity to unity forms the basis of a telling response to Hume's bundle theory of the self. This telling response would be seriously undermined if it were possible to detach transcendental from *personal* self-consciousness in the way that Strawson's argument requires. So the surprising upshot of the present discussion, given Strawson's own opposition to the bundle theory,<sup>3</sup> is that the failure of the central argument of *The Bounds of Sense* is a *consequence* of accepting Kant's anti-Humean argument.

## II

Kant attempted to explain the ownership of experiences by a single subject in terms of the possible self-ascription of those experiences by a single subject. As Strawson puts it, on behalf of Kant, 'The condition under which diverse representations may be said to be united in a single consciousness is precisely the condition, whatever that may be, under which a subject of experiences may ascribe different experiences to himself, conscious of the identity of that to which those experiences, at different times, belong.'<sup>4</sup> The self-ascription of experiences lies at the heart of what Strawson calls *personal* self-consciousness,<sup>5</sup> and this might suggest that the argument from unity to objectivity is the argument from personal self-consciousness to objectivity. The argument would be that the self-ascription of experiences, and hence personal self-consciousness, requires that there be empirically applicable criteria of identity for subjects of experience. Subjects of experience can only be properly individuated if they are thought of as physical objects in a world of such objects. So the full conditions of the possibility of self-ascription of experiences—including the availability of criteria of identity for subjects—require the satisfaction of the objectivity condition. Henceforth, this argument will be referred to as the 'personal self-consciousness (PSC) route to objectivity'.

Although Strawson does not object to the PSC route, it is not one which he can find in Kant, whose own argument abstracts from the fact that the subject is a physical thing located in a common world. Instead, Strawson proposes a somewhat differ-

ent line of argument on behalf of Kant. What underlies the objectivity requirement is 'something less than, though entailed by the full conditions of the possibility of empirical self-ascription of experiences'.<sup>6</sup> What underlies the objectivity requirement is the necessary *self-reflexiveness* of experience, which constitutes the essential core of personal self-consciousness.

What is meant by the necessary self-reflexiveness of a possible experience in general could be otherwise expressed by saying that experience must be such as to provide room for the thought of experience itself. It provides room, on the one hand, for 'Thus and so is how things objectively are' and, on the other, for 'This is how things are experienced as being'; and it provides room for the second thought *because* it provides room for the first.<sup>7</sup>

Strawson equates the notion of the self-reflexiveness of experience with Kant's concept of transcendental self-consciousness, so what is being proposed might be characterized as constituting a 'transcendental self-consciousness' (TSC) route to objectivity. Personal self-consciousness entails transcendental self-consciousness and the latter entails objectivity. The fulfillment of the objectivity condition is not sufficient on its own to provide for the self-ascription of experiences, and so it is not introduced *as* making personal self-consciousness possible.

There are two crucial steps in Strawson's argument, the transition from PSC to TSC and the transition from TSC to objectivity. Both steps are set out in the following passage:

For 'This is how things are (have been) experienced *by me* as being' (PSC) presupposes 'This is how things are (have been) *experienced* as being' (TSC); and the latter in turn presupposes a distinction, though not (usually) an opposition between 'This is how things are experienced as being' and 'Thus and so is how things are'.<sup>8</sup>

The first step of this argument will not be in question here, but the claim that TSC requires objectivity is very much open to question. Surprisingly, little is said in defence of this claim. At one point, it is suggested that all experience involves the recognition of particular items *as* falling under concepts, that is, a component of recognition which is distinct from the item recognized. The necessity of providing room, in experience, for the thought of experience itself is said to be identical with the necessity of saving the recognitional component in an experi-



ence from absorption into the item recognized,<sup>9</sup> but neither way of stating the case is immediately convincing.

The most natural reading of the argument would be to see it as claiming that the ability to think of experience as experience requires possession of the concept of experience, and that this in turn requires one to have a conception of objects which are capable of being experienced, but not dependent upon experience for their existence. Even this much might be disputed, but it would certainly not follow that experience must be, or even be believed to be, of independent objects. There are, in fact, at least three senses in which objectivity might be thought to be a consequence of self-reflexiveness. The strongest requirement—and the one which Strawson's argument purports to establish—would be that experience must *actually* be of independent objects if it is to be such as to provide room for the thought of experience itself. A more modest objectivity requirement, suggested by Barry Stroud's well-known discussion of transcendental arguments,<sup>10</sup> would be that experience must at least be *believed* to be of an objective world, even if it is not actually of such a world. The weakest objectivity requirement merely states that for experience to be self-reflexive one must at least *understand* the hypothesis of experience of objects capable of existing unperceived, even if one does not believe that one's experience is of such objects. It is this requirement which the argument has the best chance of establishing.

In a recent discussion of transcendental arguments,<sup>11</sup> Strawson has conceded, in effect, the inability of such arguments to deliver anything as strong as the strongest objectivity requirement. He claims that both sceptical and anti-sceptical arguments are equally idle, and sees transcendental arguments as having a connective role, establishing conceptual connections between various capacities and beliefs.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in the present context, it has not even been shown that a capacity to think of experience as experience rests upon a belief that experience is of an objective world. There is also a question about the *basis* of the weakest objectivity requirement, however tempting it might seem to insist upon such a requirement. In other words, for all that has been said so far, it has yet to be shown that the argument of *The Bounds of Sense* establishes even the most that the dis-

cussion in *Skepticism and Naturalism* regards a transcendental argument as capable of establishing.

One way of vindicating the weak objectivity requirement would be to observe that our perceptual experience presents itself as experience of independent objects. Our experience is thoroughly permeated with concepts of objects in the sense that they are indispensable to the veridical characterization of sensible experience.<sup>13</sup> If experience presents itself as experience of independent objects, is it not entirely plausible to suppose that thinking of experience as experience will involve grasp of concepts of such objects? It might be replied that this argument misses the point. Even if Strawson is right about the actual character of our experience, his target in *The Bounds of Sense* is supposed to be the hypothesis of a pure sense-datum experience, that is, experience which is, and which presents itself as being of 'a succession of items such that there was no distinction to be drawn between the order and arrangement of the objects (and of their particular features and characteristics) and the order and arrangement of the subject's experiences of awareness of them'.<sup>14</sup> Someone who endorses the hypothesis of a pure sense-datum experience will say that, at best, providing room in experience for the thought of experience itself merely requires that one should grasp concepts of the *subjective* objects of experience. So one would not even need to understand what it would be for perceived objects to be capable of existing unperceived, for concepts of such *objective* objects would not need to figure in a veridical characterization of a pure sense-datum experience.

This response to Strawson's argument is suggested by Hume's discussion of the origins of the belief in the continued and distinct existence of objects.<sup>15</sup> Hume's starting-point is the familiar empiricist assumption that the immediate objects of perceptual awareness are *mental* items. He thought there was little room for argument over the claim that nothing is ever really present to the mind but its perceptions or impressions. He also held that the contents of the mind are, as one might put it, ontologically transparent, for 'since all notions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are and be what they



appear. Everything that enters the mind being in reality a perception, 'tis impossible that anything should to *feeling* appear different'.<sup>16</sup> In other words, not only is it the case that everything that enters the mind is a perception, it is also being claimed that the perceptions which enter the mind present themselves as perceptions, as internal and perishing existences. As Hume puts it in a discussion of internal and external impressions, 'whatever other differences we observe among them, they appear all of them, in their true colours, as impressions or perceptions'.<sup>17</sup> On this conception of experience, it is difficult to see how the self-reflexiveness requirement could lead to the weak objectivity condition.

Hume's argument invites two responses, a less ambitious and a more ambitious response. The less ambitious response would be to point out that Hume's account of the nature of experience is totally inadequate. The fact is that experience *does* present itself as experience of independent objects, and as long as this is so, the argument of the pure sense-datum theorist cannot even get started. If the pure sense-datum theorist were correct about what experience is actually like, then, no doubt, it would be difficult to explain the necessity for possession of concepts of independent objects, but the pure sense-datum theorist is guilty of grossly falsifying the character of our sensible experience. Indeed, if our experience is *as of* independent objects, then it is arguable that providing room for the thought of experience itself involves not only grasp of concepts of objects but also the *belief* that at least some experiences are actually of independent objects. For it might be held that for experience to be *as of* independent objects is just for one to be disposed to believe that some of one's experiences are of such objects.

Although the less ambitious response to the pure sense-datum theorist has considerable plausibility, it does not seem to be the argument proposed in *The Bounds of Sense*. For unless that response can show that experience *must* be *as of* independent objects, it does not establish a *necessary* connection between self-reflexiveness and possession of concepts of such objects. Moreover, Strawson's argument hinges on the notion of experience as such, rather than experience *as of* independent objects. The suggestion in *The Bounds of Sense* appears to be that it is the employment of the concept of experience itself, in the

judgement 'This is how things are (have been) *experienced* as being, which generates the objectivity condition.' Can anything be made of this more ambitious line of argument? Suppose that one were attempting to think of experience in the manner suggested by the sense-datum theorist. Strawson's proposal is that in such a case, where experience is exclusively of a series of subjective objects such as flashes and colour patches, one would not be able to think of experience as experience because one would necessarily lack a grasp of concepts of the subjective objects of experience. Earlier, the sense-datum theorist's proposal was that on his conception of experience, transcendental self-consciousness would not be ruled out as long as one grasped concepts of such objects, but in a pure sense-datum experience one would not be able to think of experienced items *as* experience-dependent.

One way of fleshing out Strawson's proposal would be the following. It is a familiar point that if one is to think of one's perceptions as perceptions of mind-independent objects, one must find it intelligible that perceived objects can exist unperceived. What finding this intelligible involves is grasp of a simple theory of the enabling conditions of perception. As Gareth Evans has stressed, 'the idea of existence unperceived, or rather, the idea of existence now perceived, now unperceived, is not an idea that can stand on its own, without any surrounding theory'.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, it has often been supposed that the idea of experience of mind-dependent, subjective items requires little or no background conceptual support. The assumption seems to be that if one's experience were of the pure sense-datum variety, the objects of experience would be *transparently* subjective and mind-dependent, and one would, as it were, automatically be able to think of them as such. This is the assumption that Strawson denies. His claim, in effect, is that the concept of a *seeming*, a purely *subjective* object, only makes sense in a limited range of conceptual contexts. In a pure sense-datum experience, the appropriate conceptual background required for the *concept* of a seeming or sense-datum would be unavailable, and so the pure sense-datum *subject* (as distinct from the sense-datum theorist) would not be able to think of his experience as such.

What is the appropriate conceptual background for the con-



cept of a seeming? According to Strawson, it is a contrast between 'This is how things seem' and 'Thus and so is how things objectively are'. Consider the case in which one objective judgment is corrected by another: 'what remains unaltered when the correction is made is the subjective experience, the "seeming"'.<sup>19</sup> Unless one grasps the appropriate contrasts one would not be in a position to grasp the concepts which derive their sense from the contrasts. This is the position which the pure sense-datum theorist is in. In a pure sense-datum experience, one would lack the contrast between objectively and subjectively valid judgements and so could not be able to think of experience as a pure sense-datum experience. Hence, the transcendental self-consciousness condition is violated.<sup>20</sup>

This line of argument calls for a number of comments. First, the most that the argument shows is that, as Ross Harrison puts it, 'an experienter just of sense data would not be able to do the philosophy of his own situation'.<sup>21</sup> The objection here is that it does not follow from this fact that a pure sense-datum experience would be impossible. It might follow that there could not be a pure sense-datum experience which is self-conscious, and this would be enough for Strawson's purposes. Even this is open to question, however, for it remains to be shown that grasp of the appropriate contrasts requires that experience should actually be, or even be believed to be, of independent objects. So even the more ambitious of the lines of thought in *The Bounds of Sense* seems to get *no further* than the weak objectivity requirement. Does it, however, even get *as far as* the weak requirement? Even if it is conceded that the grasp of the concept of a 'seeming' requires a grasp of some sort of is-seems distinction, it is doubtful whether it requires a grasp of the distinction between states of the subject and states of an objective world. What is required is the possibility of an experiential judgment being *mistaken*, but pure sense-datum theorists have often argued that the possibility of error has been provided for in a pure sense-datum experience as long as the experience is *patterned* and the subject can remember the previous pattern of his experience. So even if the sense-datum experienter did not *understand* what it would be to have experience of material objects, he might still have enough of a grasp of the concept of a 'seeming' to be able to do as much of the philosophy of his own situation as it is sensible to require of him.

I do not wish to enter into this debate here, for in order to take the debate any further it would be necessary to examine in detail Wittgenstein's 'private language argument'.<sup>22</sup> What needs to be stressed at this point is that without further support the anti-sceptical argument of *The Bounds of Sense* is not only a failure by its own standards (in that it fails to establish the strong objectivity requirement), it is far from clear that it is a success even on the conception of what a transcendental argument can achieve set out in *Skepticism and Naturalism*. The fundamental difficulty is the enormous amount of work which is supposed to be done in *The Bounds of Sense* by the concept of a *seeming* or of a *subjective experience*. It is doubtful whether these concepts can carry the weight placed upon them. The basic dilemma is that either the concept of a seeming is held to involve a rich subjective-objective distinction, in which case it is an implausible requirement that the sense-datum experienter should have a grasp of the rich concept, or it requires a more primitive is-seems distinction, in which case it is a concept which the sense-datum experienter may be thought to be capable of possessing. As noted earlier, in his more recent work Strawson has been inclined to press the point that the crude sense-datum theorist falsifies the character of our sensible experience, which is permeated with concepts of objects. The point is well taken, but it does render superfluous a great deal of the transcendental-argumentative machinery of *The Bounds of Sense*.

### III

Towards the end of the discussion, Strawson himself raises an important question about the viability of the TSC route to objectivity. He writes that it is an open question whether the satisfaction of the full conditions for empirical self-ascription of experiences is a necessary condition of the possibility of experience. If it is, then 'the requirement of transcendental self-consciousness is derived from the requirement of the possibility of empirical self-ascription, and ultimately derives its intelligibility from the latter'. If not, then 'the requirement of transcendental self-consciousness is derived from nothing but the thought of a possible experience in general, and is intelligible quite independently of the empirically applicable concept of the iden-



tiety of a subject of experience'.<sup>23</sup> The TSC route claims not to draw upon the full conditions of the possibility of ascribing experiences to a subject. If TSC is not ultimately intelligible independently of PSC, then the failure of the TSC route may be a reflection of its refusal to draw upon the full conditions for PSC. What this amounts to is the suggestion that the PSC route to objectivity takes precedence and that the argument from transcendental self-consciousness derives whatever force it has from the argument from personal self-consciousness. If this suggestion is correct, then the objectivity argument of *The Bounds of Sense* faces the following dilemma: If, on the one hand, transcendental self-consciousness is independently intelligible, it will not generate the objectivity condition. If, on the other hand, it is not independently intelligible, then it might generate the objectivity condition, but it would be the requirement of personal self-consciousness which would be doing the work. The first horn of the dilemma is the charge of ineffectiveness. The second horn collapses the TSC route into the PSC route.

The second horn is clearly preferable, and one way of working up to an acceptance of it would be to show that Strawson is entirely justified in his suspicion that the requirement of transcendental self-consciousness is not intelligible independently of the empirically applicable concept of a subject of experience. In an important passage Strawson writes:

If we abstract from the fact that the subject is an intuitable item in the objective world of his experience, we leave the fact that the world is an objective world; and this fact must be provided for in the nature of the subject's experience of it. This is what Kant provides for. A series of experiences satisfying the Kantian provision has a certain double aspect. On the other hand it cumulatively builds up a picture of a world in which objects and happenings are presented as possessing an objective order, an order which is logically independent of any particular experiential route through the world. On the other hand it possesses its own order as a series of experiences. . . . Not only the series as a whole, but each member of the series has a double aspect.<sup>24</sup>

It is this duplicity of aspects which is the point of connection between transcendental self-consciousness and the objectivity condition.<sup>25</sup> The notion of a single subjective experiential route through the world is an abstraction from the notion of the route through the world traced by a *person*, a physical thing to which

the diverse experiences may be ascribed, but it might be wondered whether this abstraction is really coherent.

Suppose that  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are successive perceptions of an O-type object. What is it for those perceptions to be conceptualizable as successive perceptions of one and the same object rather than a perception of one O-type object followed by a perception of a distinct O-type object? If  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are self-ascribable by a single subject S, then S's route through the world (which is itself determined on the basis of  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$  and a host of other perceptions) is what anchors those perceptions to a single object. This is the force of the claim that objectivity requires unity of consciousness. For perceptions to build up the picture of an objective world, there must be an empirically applicable distinction between perceiving the same object on different occasions and perceiving similar but distinct objects. This in turn requires the possibility of the self-ascription of those perceptions by a located subject. If we abstract from the fact that the experiences have a subject who is an intuitable item in the world, we cannot, contrary to what Strawson suggests, provide for the fact that the world is an objective world in the nature of the subject's experience of it.<sup>26</sup>

At various points in his discussion, Strawson concedes that the notion of an experiential route cannot be understood otherwise than as the route through the world traced by an embodied subject of experiences. He points out that the notion of a temporally extended point of view on the world has implications 'regarding the causal involvement of a perceiving *subject* with the objective world of his perception'.<sup>27</sup> Later, in a more explicit passage, he writes that, 'Instead of talking, dubiously, of an experiential route through the world . . . we may talk, confidently, of an undeniably persistent object, a man, who perceptibly traces a physical, spatio-temporal route through the world and to whom a series of experiences may be ascribed with no fear that there is nothing persistent to which they are being ascribed'.<sup>28</sup> This point may be seen as not only anti-Cartesian but also anti-Humean, for it suggests the indispensability both of the idea that there is a genuine subject of experiences (*contra* a crude bundle theory) and of the idea that the subject is a physical thing located in space (*contra* the Cartesian conception).

The upshot of the anti-Humean point is a version of an 'ob-



jectivity-requires-unity-of-consciousness' argument. For experiences to build up or constitute a temporally extended point of view on an objective world, they must be the experiences of a located subject who is capable of self-ascribing them, and of thinking its own identity *as* the subject of the experiences. They must, in other words, belong to what Kant would have called a unified consciousness. This in turn has a bearing on the relationship between transcendental and personal self-consciousness. Consider the requirement that experience be such as to provide room for the thought of experience itself. It is not easy to see how this could be thought to derive from nothing but the concept of a possible experience in general, but matters are more hopeful if experience is thought of as experience of an objective world. For one way in which experience may qualify as self-reflexive is if individual experiences display the 'double-ness' which is characteristic of representations of the objective. As argued in Section II, it is difficult to show that self-reflexiveness requires objectivity, but it is plausible that objectivity requires self-reflexiveness (via personal self-consciousness). So it might be that—reversing the order of Strawson's transcendental argument—experience must be self-reflexive *because* it must be of an objective world. In that case, what would generate the objectivity condition? This is the point at which the PSC route comes into its own. If the objectivity condition derives from the requirement of a personal self-consciousness, and if the self-reflexiveness condition is a *product* of the objectivity condition, then here is a sense in which the requirement of transcendental self-consciousness *derives* from the requirement of personal self-consciousness.

There are a number of difficulties with this line of thought. The first is to flesh out the PSC route to objectivity. There is a brief discussion of the PSC route in *The Bounds of Sense*, where it is suggested that an explanation of the objectivity requirement 'would involve referring to the full condition of the possibility of self-ascription of experiences (including the existence of the subject as an intuitable object in the world); and *then* pointing out that the full conditions involve the objectivity-condition'.<sup>20</sup> Strawson does not spend time on the PSC route because he can find no suggestions of it in Kant's work, and it is certainly not the aim of the present discussion to claim success for the PSC route. What does seem clear, given the difficulties which

confront the TSC route, is that the PSC route is the only serious candidate for success. The part played by the notion of transcendental self-consciousness is, on this view, best conceived of as secondary and derivative.

Even if the PSC route can be made to look plausible, there remains a question about the basis of the requirement of personal self-consciousness. The most natural objection is that personal self-consciousness cannot be a necessary condition of the possibility of experience because many non-human animals are plausibly viewed as having experience, even if we do not suppose that they have a capacity for self-ascription. This point must be granted, so even if self-conscious experience must be of independent objects, the possibility of non-self-conscious experience limits the scope of the transcendental argument. The connection between the objectivity condition and the concept of self-conscious experience might be thought to be sufficient for Strawson's purposes, but it does raise an interesting question about the notion of a subjective experiential route. For even if an animal is not self-conscious, would it not be permissible to regard its experiences as constituting a temporally extended point of view on an objective world? To this it might be replied that even if the experiences of such an animal *actually* constitute a subjective experiential route through the world, they are not thought of as such from a standpoint *within* its experience. This response only serves to confirm the derivative status of the requirement of transcendental self-consciousness, for it is difficult to see how the demand that experiences be thought of 'from the inside' as constituting a subjective route could be intelligible other than as a consequence of the demand that experience be self-conscious. To provide room, within experience, for the thought of experience itself is necessarily to provide room for the thought of *my* experience. It is a mistake to expect the notion of transcendental self-consciousness to do any independent work in a plausible objectivity argument.

#### IV

According to the 'objectivity-requires-unity' argument, for representations to count as representations of the objective, they must belong to a unified consciousness. The recent discussion of animal experience suggests the need for caution, however, so



that it is representations which are, *and are conceptualized as being* of an objective world which must belong to a unified consciousness. There is a way of disputing this claim which might enable one to make more of the notion of transcendental self-consciousness than the recent discussion has allowed. Consider Derek Parfit's 'Reductionist' conception of the subject of experience, according to which the existence of such a subject just consists in the existence of a brain and a body, and the occurrence of a series of inter-related physical and mental events.<sup>30</sup> So far, there is nothing with which the Strawsonian is obliged to disagree. Neither is there any difficulty with the idea that the mental life of such a subject will include various perceptual experiences and self-ascriptive thoughts. There is no reason why a Parfitian subject should not determine his route through the world by ascribing some of his perceptual experiences to himself, and hence no reason why such a subject should not have the conception of his experiences as constituting a temporally extended point of view on an objective world. To the extent that the subject is a physical thing, there is, as Strawson might have put it, no question but that the conditions of self-ascription of experiences are fulfilled. Where the Strawsonian and the Reductionist part company is over the notion of the unity of consciousness. According to the Reductionist, the mental life of a subject can be completely described in *impersonal* terms, without ascribing the experiences and thoughts (including first-person thoughts) which constitute this life to a subject or person.<sup>31</sup> The unity of consciousness over time is explained not by the possibility of self-ascription—for self-ascriptive thoughts are just *more* thoughts which need to be unified—but by the fact that the thoughts and experiences are appropriately causally related to each other and to a particular brain and body.<sup>32</sup>

Strawson's notion of transcendental self-consciousness is an abstraction from the full conditions for the empirical self-ascription of experiences. The Reductionist's impersonal description is not an abstraction from the full condition for self-ascription of experiences, but from the ascription of experiences to a subject from a standpoint *outside* the life under consideration. The proposal is not that individual experiences have no subject, but rather that it is possible to view a series of experiences as building up the picture of an objective world

through which the experiences constitute one route *without*—from an external standpoint—*drawing upon* the ownership of the experiences by a subject. Even if it is not supposed that experiences can *exist* unowned, it is still possible to explain what it is for a perception to be a perception of one O-type object rather than another by appealing not to the location of the subject, but rather to the location of the *body* upon which the experience is causally dependent. So even if it is not possible to abstract transcendental *self*-consciousness as Strawson understands it, from personal self-consciousness, there is still a perspective from which experiences can be thought of as having the 'double-ness' characteristic of experiences of the objective whilst abstracting from the ownership of experiences by a subject. This might be held to be the best way of making sense of Strawson's notion of 'a temporally extended point of view abstracted from all else'.<sup>33</sup>

From a Kantian perspective, this proposal ought to be unwelcome, for it is at odds with Kant's account of the unity of consciousness. The key to Reductionism is its sharp distinction between two perspectives on the mental life of a subject, the internal and the external, but the use to which the Reductionist puts this distinction is objectionable. The Kantian ought to argue that an external, impersonal description of a mental life will not be in a position to do justice to the *contents* of the states which constitute the life. This is especially clear in the case of self-ascriptive, first-person thoughts, since, from an external perspective, it is not possible to specify the truth-condition, and hence the content of a first-person thought without ascribing it to a thinker. What underpins our capacity to conceptualize our perceptions as perceptions of independent objects is our capacity to self-ascribe the perceptions, and there is *no* perspective—internal or external—from which it is possible to regard our constitutively related perceptions and thoughts as having the contents which they have whilst abstracting from the conditions for ascribing them to a located subject.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Reductionism, but it is instructive that in attempting to make something of the notion of a temporally extended point of view abstracted from all else, one should find oneself tempted by an essentially Humean conception of the mind. This points to the dangers



inherent in Strawson's attempt to detach transcendental from personal self-consciousness, although it is true that Kant himself was guilty of neglecting the full-blooded notion of personal self-consciousness in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories. A better approach would be to insist that nothing less than personal self-consciousness will do in explaining both *what* it is for perceptions to constitute a temporally extended point of view on an objective world and *why* it is necessary that perceptions should have this character. This would provide at least the beginnings of an answer to the difficult question why much of what is to be found in the Transcendental Deduction should not be regarded as compatible with or propounding a very sophisticated version of the bundle theory of the self.<sup>34</sup>

## V

In *Skepticism and Naturalism*, Strawson endorses the Humean naturalist's rejection of sceptical and anti-sceptical arguments as equally idle. The appropriate response to scepticism is not argument but *neglect*, for sceptical doubt is unreal and powerless against our naturally implanted disposition to belief. Since *The Bounds of Sense* is an anti-sceptical work, it too may be accused of 'misunderstanding . . . the place in our intellectual economy, of those propositions or crypto-propositions which the skeptic seeks to place in doubt and his opponent in argument seeks to establish'.<sup>35</sup>

To the extent that there is a conflict between the responses to scepticism proposed in *Skepticism and Naturalism* and *The Bounds of Sense*, it is with the latter that one must side. The pursuit of anti-sceptical arguments should be viewed as an indispensable element of a distinctively philosophical enquiry into the nature of knowledge, and sceptical and anti-sceptical arguments are no less real than is the notion of such an enquiry.<sup>36</sup> Whether or not the central argument of *The Bounds of Sense* is successful, its depth and inventiveness are simply breathtaking.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

I am very much indebted to John Campbell, Naomi Eilan, Christopher Peacocke and Anthony Savile for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1. P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, Methuen, London, 1966, p. 97.
2. I have discussed Kant's argument elsewhere, in 'Transcendental Arguments, Transcendental Synthesis and Transcendental Idealism', in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 1987.
3. Strawson's argument against the 'no-ownership' doctrine in Chapter 3 of *Individuals* (Methuen, London, 1959) may be construed as an argument against bundle theories of the self. There is also a discussion of Hume's account of the self in *The Bounds of Sense*, pp. 169–70.
4. *The Bounds of Sense*, pp. 95–96.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
10. In 'Transcendental Arguments', reprinted in R.C.S. Walker (ed.), *Kant on Pure Reason*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982.
11. In *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*, Methuen, London, 1985, Chapter 1.
12. As Strawson puts, 'even if we have a tenderness for transcendental arguments, we shall be happy to accept the criticism of Stroud and others that either such arguments rely on an unacceptably simple verificationism or the most they can establish is 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 or other minds.' (*Ibid.*, p. 21.)
13. Strawson develops this point in his paper 'Perception and its Objects', in G.F. Macdonald (ed.), *Perception and Identity: Essays Presented to A.J. Ayer*, Macmillan, London, 1979.
14. *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 99.
15. In his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, second edition, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, Book I, Part IV, section II.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
17. *Ibid.*
18. 'Things Without the Mind—A Commentary upon Chapter Two of



- Strawson's *Individuals*, in Zak van Straaten (ed.), *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P.F. Strawson*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 88.
19. *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 106.
  20. This argument echoes Strawson's remark in *Individuals* that the true solipsist (as distinct from the philosophical solipsist) 'certainly would not think that every particular which existed was himself or a state of himself for 'the true solipsist is . . . one who simply has *no use* for the distinction between himself and what is not himself.' (p. 73)
  21. 'Strawson on Outer Objects', in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 1970, p. 219.
  22. See Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, sections 242–304.
  23. *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 108.
  24. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–06.
  25. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
  26. The argument of this paragraph is developed in my 'Kant and Reductionism', in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 1989.
  27. *The Bounds of Sense*, op. cit., p. 104.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
  30. See Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986, Chapters 10–13.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
  33. *The Bounds of Sense*, op. cit., p. 104.
  34. There is more on this issue in my 'Kant and Reductionism'.
  35. See *Skepticism and Naturalism*, op. cit., p. 21.
  36. As Kant puts it, 'The sceptic is . . . the taskmaster who constrains the dogmatic reasoner to develop a sound critique of the understanding and reason. . . .' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith, Macmillan, London, 1929, A769/B797).

## 9

## Thinking of Individuals: A Prolegomenon to Any Future Theory of Thought

MICHAEL LUNTLEY

In Chapter 1 of *Individuals* Strawson pressed the case for the following claim: A conception of an object not perceptually present to a subject requires that the subject have a notion of the object as being embedded within a unitary set of relations that connects it to objects which are perceptually present.<sup>1</sup> Strawson also made plain the difficulty we have in thinking of the relevant relations as being anything other than spatial (or quasi-spatial) relations which define a unitary spatio-temporal framework. These claims were put forward as part of the business of descriptive metaphysics. My concern in this essay is not to question these claims. Rather, my interest lies in showing the way that such metaphysical enquiries provide a prolegomenon to any worthwhile theory of thought.

The relation between such metaphysical issues and a proper account of thought individuation is not universally acknowledged. But against the backdrop of diverging accounts of the proper way to go about the fundamental individuation of thought content, an appreciation of the importance of Strawson's investigations can do much to lay the groundwork for the theory of content.

A major faultline in modern work on thought and reference is marked by the question, 'Should the individuation of thought-contents be accomplished by reference to epistemic or causal modalities?' The point of that question is that it divides theorists into those who individuate thoughts via the epistemic modalities



least from my admiration and appreciation of Hilary Putnam's valuable paper.

#### 8. QUASSIM CASSAM ON TRANSCENDENTAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

It is a rare experience for a philosophical author to encounter a critique of his own work which is as profound, searching, accurate and largely convincing as I have found Quassim Cassam's paper, 'Transcendental Self-Consciousness'. In Section II of his paper, Dr Cassam demonstrates, I think convincingly, that one of the central arguments of the *Bounds of Sense* fails of its purpose. The argument in question claims to show that something less than full *personal* self-consciousness is sufficient to secure the satisfaction of the objectivity condition. This lesser thing, 'transcendental self-consciousness', requires, initially, no more than the thought of the distinction between experience itself and what is experienced; this, in its turn, is held to require a distinction, in at least some cases, between the objective, mind-independent character of what is experienced and the purely subjective character of the experience itself; and, finally, a type of experience consisting of nothing but a series of isolated sense-data, not connected under concepts of enduring objects capable of existing unperceived, is declared to be incapable of yielding any conception of the distinction required. The argument has weaknesses, of which Cassam points decisively to the major one: a 'purely sense-datum experience' could, under certain conditions, provide of itself for the initially required distinction. So, whatever its charms, the argument won't do just as it stands.

However, this is not the end of the matter, either for Dr Cassam or for me. As Cassam points out, Kant argues that the fulfilment of the objectivity condition requires unity of consciousness. If experience is to be essentially of a world which has its own objective order, independent of experience of it, then such experience must itself have the character of a single subjective experiential route through that world. But how could such experience both have this character *and* have the conception of itself as having this character (thus, incidentally, fulfilling the original

requirement for 'transcendental self-consciousness')? Cassam is strongly of the view that any such experience must necessarily be the experience of a subject who ascribes such experience to himself and is himself a spatially located object in the objective world (i.e. a person, a corporeal, self-conscious, conceptualising creature). Thus, incidentally, the Humean bundle theory of the self receives its *coup de grâce*, as does also the quasi-Humean Reductionist theory of Derek Parfit.

All this, too, is well and subtly argued; and with its anti-Humean and person-centred *conclusions* I am, as I have shown elsewhere, in deep and lasting agreement. But, in the present, Kantian context, I have certain tentative reservations. It is not entirely clear to me that the following concept is, *in the context of the present considerations alone*, incoherent: the concept, namely, of a located but incorporeal centre of consciousness, tracing a subjective experiential route through an objective world (consciously conceived as such), conscious of the possibility of other such routes through that world and hence capable of self-ascription of its own experience of it. There are, indeed, other and decisive objections to any such concept, but they fall outside the context of the present argument. If I am right in this, then a modified Humean version of such a 'self' may be held, in this context and to this extent, to survive; and, indeed, Kant's own conception of empirical consciousness and empirical self-consciousness does not seem at all far removed from the present conception. As Cassam remarks himself, Kant's own argument abstracts from the fact that the subject is a physical thing located in a common world; throughout the Transcendental Deduction he is 'guilty of neglecting the full-blooded notion of *personal* self-consciousness'.

This concludes my comments on the fascinating and skilfully constructed argument of Dr Cassam's paper. But I have one final comment. In his short concluding section Cassam contrasts the anti-sceptical implications of *The Bounds of Sense* with the stance that I adopted in *Skepticism and Naturalism*. He regards the latter as misguided, and cites Kant in a footnote in support of this judgement.

I respect his position, but remain, in this matter, on the side of Hume and Wittgenstein, so far apart from each other in most



respects, so paradoxically close in this. And are not both of them here, in their distinctive ways, engaged, after all, in what Kant commended—'a sound critique of the understanding and reason'?

#### 9. MICHAEL LUNTLEY ON THINKING OF INDIVIDUALS

The metaphysical substance of Dr Luntley's careful and thorough paper, including his neatly phrased insistence on the 'thoroughly indexical' character of our concept of reality, I find highly congenial; as I do the externalist nature of his account of singular thought about objects. As the general form of truth conditions of a singular thought of the form

(1) 'That  $\Phi$  is  $F$ '

Dr Luntley offers

(2) 'the world is such that there is a  $\Phi$  there which is  $F$ '; and it is indeed the case that (2) specifies a condition which is necessary and sufficient for the truth of (1). Anyone who judges (1) to be true must, at least implicitly, believe (2).

But what of someone whose belief that (2) is false; and false because there is no  $\Phi$  there at all, nor any plausible stand-in (mistaken for a  $\Phi$ ), as an object of an intended reference either? The subject may indeed, as Luntley happily expresses it, have *assayed* a singular thought of the form of (1), may even, in all sincerity, have uttered a sentence of that form; for, as Luntley implies, there is no good reason to think that the world must always supply an object when a subject *assays* a singular thought. But to essay such a thought is one thing; to achieve it is another. And here I revert, perhaps unsurprisingly, to an earlier position of mine; and hold that anyone who voiced such a sentence in such a situation would have failed to express a proposition, true or false, though he would indeed *believe* a false one. It is not for the sake of an elegant semantic theory that I hold, or have ever held, this position. Existential thoughts, true or false, even though indexically directed, do not automatically generate singular thoughts, true or false.

I feel a certain ungraciousness in thus dissenting from the final position of one with whose general approach I am in such

sympathy. But, in philosophy, even close allies usually find ample room for disagreement.

#### 10. AKEEL BILGRAMI ON SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND RESENTMENT

I read with great and natural pleasure Professor Bilgrami's extremely interesting and original paper on self-knowledge. He reminds us of two standard accounts of the source of our grasp of mental terms and of the problems to which each gives rise. The account which locates the source of such grasp in introspection, in each person's awareness of his own subjective experience, leads to insoluble problems about other minds, indeed about the very sense of the terms in question. The account which locates the source entirely in observation of behaviour has obviously false consequences concerning self-knowledge. He calls the first account Cartesian, the second Rylean. It is tempting to try to resolve the problem by acknowledging, on the one hand, that knowledge of the mental states of *others* is based on listening to what they say and observing what they do, and declaring, on the other hand, that knowledge of one's own is not in general either Cartesian or Rylean, though it may, on occasions, be one or the other. Bilgrami thinks, as I do, that this is correct, but adds, surely rightly, that the bare declaration is hardly sufficient by itself. It would obviously be absurd to deny that there is any such thing as self-knowledge. But if the paradigms (models) of observation, inner or outer, or observation and inference, are rejected, how can there be such a thing? We take it for granted that there is. But what justification have we for doing so?

It is to this question that Professor Bilgrami produces a quite original answer. He refers to the range of reactions and attitudes associated with the attribution, and acknowledgement, of moral responsibility, pointing out the depth of their entrenchment in our whole conception of what it is to be human. But the attribution, or acknowledgement, of moral responsibility carries with it (in general presupposes) the recognition that the responsible person knows what he is doing, i.e., in general, has knowledge of the relevant beliefs, desires and intentions he has in acting as he does. So the *fact* of self-knowledge is as undeniable