

There are three arguments associated with the narrative denials of foundationalism: (1) that both the skeptical question and its foundationalist response are now irrelevant and unimportant, since we have learned that we can live without rational certainty as well as the certainty of traditional authority; (2) that all human thinking is historically conditioned; and (3) that, in part for just this reason, all human thought is fallible.

Ad (1) By itself, the claim that both skepticism and the foundationalist response to it are irrelevant and unimportant to our time is no argument against foundationalism, since the claim about relevance and importance can be evaluated only after one has settled the claim about the credibility of transcendental thought, which the claim about its relevance and importance neither does nor can settle. Whether or not the attempt to answer skepticism is relevant or important depends upon whether or not the attempt can succeed because there are, in truth, necessary or transcendental conditions of rational subjectivity, and thus of all belief and action. If there are such conditions, then, the non- or antifoundationalist programs are simply the rationally arbitrary--and false--escalation of a historically specific form of reasoning.

Ad (2) The undeniable historicity of every human individual and community does not in itself constitute a reason to reject transcendental thought, i.e., the attempt to clarify the necessary presuppositions of any instance or act of valid cognition or understanding, or of rational subjectivity as such. Why? Well, because it is one thing to say that all human understanding is conditioned by its specific time and place and another thing to say that only historically specific conditions can be the objects of such understanding. To show that the second is true one has to refute the claim that all historically variable understandings include or exemplify

historically invariable conditions of subjectivity; and to show this requires an argument other than and distinct from any argument to the effect that all human understanding is historically conditioned. In sum, the appeal to historicity as such either does not support the argument against foundationalism or else begs the question.

Ad (3) On the face of it, transcendental thought may indeed appear to involve "a quest for certainty," since the claims concerning a priori, or transcendental, conditions that it seeks to clarify are distinct from factual or logically contingent claims precisely in being logically necessary and, in this sense, invariable or certain. But it is arguable that this logical certainty is distinct from the epistemological certainty whose achievement would indeed be inconsistent with human fallibility. One can hold, indeed, that the distinction between logically contingent and logically necessary claims is a distinction within the realm of fallible thought and that transcendental claims are no more true simply because someone makes them than empirical claims are. If this contention is valid, then this argument, also, has to assume the conclusion for which it affects to argue.

There are other arguments that can be called philosophical denials of foundationalism. One such argument seeks to show that the use of language precludes the notion of logical certainty. Human understanding cannot escape the particular system of discourse within which it occurs. In this sense, not only is all inquiry tradition-constituted inquiry, but all human understanding is language-constituted understanding. Foundationalism by its very nature seeks to escape this constitution and, therefore, is incredible.

Since, according to this argument, there is no nonlinguistic or prelinguistic understanding of reality, the meaning and truth of what we say

cannot consist in its correspondence to nonlinguistic reality, with which we could never compare it to see whether such a correspondence obtains, so as then to judge the meaningfulness or meaninglessness, the truth or the falsity, of our statements. The meaning and truth of our statements have to be identified intralinguistically, by their compatibility with other claims or propositions taken to be true. Because this is so, the skeptical question is senseless, as must be the foundationalist attempt to answer it. We require no foundations to secure belief and action because it is impossible for all of our beliefs and proposals for action to be invalid. Because truth is intralinguistic, we can sensibly ask about the validity of any given truth claim only within the context of other claims the validity of which is not being questioned at the same time. But if we do not need foundations, because not all of our linguistically constituted understandings can possibly be false, it is also true that none of our beliefs can be logically necessary or transcendental. We can consistently deny any claim given only the willingness to alter our system of discourse so as also to deny the other propositions entailed by the first. True, some of our body of beliefs may be harder to give up than others, and, in fact, they may be so pervasively connected with other beliefs that they may be regarded as relatively fundamental within our system of discourse. But this relative distinction is not the misguided distinction between logically necessary and logically contingent truths about the world. There is no logical obligation to accept our relatively more fundamental beliefs, and it is always possible for us to alter our system of beliefs in a fundamental way. No claim is immune from the continuing test of its consequences in our lives, and so no claim is logically immune from falsification by unacceptable results. By contrast, transcendental thought is

held to deny the intralinguistic character of meaning and truth, because it purports to make logically certain or necessary claims that cannot be consistently denied or falsified by consequences.

But does the fact that all human understanding is linguistically constituted require the adoption of such empirical pragmatism and the rejection of transcendental reflection? If the claim that, because all understanding is constituted linguistically, meaning and truth can be determined only intralinguistically means that there can be no claims that are true because they express or correspond to the reality of human understanding as such, it in fact begs the question, because it assumes that valid transcendental claims are impossible. Why? Well, because the fact that all human understanding is constituted linguistically is not incompatible with the claim that any use of language and, therefore, any human understanding necessarily displays certain necessary characteristics. Of course, this claim itself is constituted within a linguistic system. But this in no way makes the claim false. One claims within one given language system that any other system of language necessarily presupposes the same conditions of the use of language.

Of course, if there are claims that are necessarily implied by any use of language at all, the meanings of these claims express and, in that sense, correspond to the reality of human subjectivity as such. But that this should be so is in no way incompatible with transcendental understanding itself being constituted linguistically or with transcendental claims being true because they are compatible with other propositions taken to be true. The point, rather, is that transcendental claims are true because of their compatibility with any other propositions that we take to be true or ever could take to be

true, so that the denials of these claims would be incompatible with anything that we could take to be true. We cannot speak at all without at least implicitly speaking about certain necessary conditions of any use of language.

Nor will it do to object that transcendental claims cannot be valid because the skeptical question which they seek to answer is senseless. That transcendental claims may be correctly said to answer the skeptical question does not imply that the skeptical question is sensible. On the contrary, transcendental thought takes skepticism to be self-contradictory, precisely because these are necessary conditions of using language that any use, including a skeptical use, implicitly affirms or presupposes. Thus transcendental inquiry validates the claim that our linguistic practices as a whole cannot be false in the way in which skepticism holds to be possible.

Beyond this, one may argue that empirical pragmatism itself presupposes transcendental conditions and, therefore, is self-refuting. To hold that any proposition can be consistently denied, provided one is willing to adjust one's system of discourse accordingly, is equivalent to making the transcendental claim: all claims can be pragmatically denied. Thus the empirical pragmatist holds that any use of language or any human understanding is implicitly committed to claiming that meaning and truth are only intralinguistic in the sense that there can be no transcendental claims. But this is clearly self-refuting, being itself the very kind of transcendental claim about human understanding that it denies. The denial of transcendental claims itself includes or presupposes just such a transcendental claim, so that the denial is self-contradictory.

The other main way of arguing against transcendental thought that can be called a philosophical denial of it argues that the very form of

transcendental argument is invalid. Since such argument cannot succeed without a "uniqueness demonstration," and since such a demonstration is impossible, such argument can never succeed. Such a uniqueness demonstration is impossible because what is inconceivable to me may nonetheless be possible.

The reply to this argument is that the notion of inconceivable possibilities is self-refuting. Of course, the ambiguity between logical certainty and epistemological certainty is also to be avoided here. It is indeed true that in advancing a transcendental claim, one claims to exhaust the conceivable, whereas in acknowledging one's fallibility in advancing it, one concedes that the claim is conceivably falsifiable. But the claim and concession are consistent because "conceivable" is here being used ambiguously: one claims logical necessity, one concedes epistemological uncertainty. The concession of fallibility is not a claim about the condition that one takes to be transcendental, namely, that it has an alternative (in which case, it wouldn't and couldn't be transcendental after all); rather, it is a claim about the claimer, namely, that one could be mistaken in what one takes to be transcendental. But once this possible ambiguity is avoided, the reply to the antifoundationalist is that any notion of inconceivable possibilities entails the possibility of completely negative existential statements, which are logically impossible.

But in addition to denials of transcendental thought, which prove to be self-refuting, there is the kind of neo-pragmatism that refuses either to affirm or to deny transcendental conditions of human subjectivity. For this position, foundationalism is uninteresting and impotent--pragmatically of no difference. Any belief or commitment can be questioned, but there is no interest in questioning it unless we have found some pragmatic reason to do

so, because some problem of living has arisen that challenges our beliefs or commitments. Moreover, our beliefs and commitments are justified or validated in the only interesting sense of the word when they accord with other beliefs and commitments that are not presently in question and that we take to be valid. Thus for the neopragmatist, the whole enterprise of foundationalism has not paid off, is more trouble than it's worth.

But this argument assumes the conclusion for which it affects to argue. Only if one assumes that there are no transcendental conditions for our beliefs and commitments can one convincingly argue that the effort at clarifying transcendental conditions makes no pragmatic difference. If one assumes, on the contrary, that there are such transcendental conditions, then the pragmatic difference that transcendental thought makes is to explicate what we of necessity understand implicitly--authentically or inauthentically--in believing or doing anything at all.

This argument, then, is not a valid argument. But since this is the only argument the neopragmatist offers, the neopragmatist does not argue for neopragmatism, but simply chooses to affirm it. In doing so, she or he may urge that one cannot show her or his choice to be invalid without begging the question against neopragmatism by making a similar choice for the transcendental project. But this claim that the choice between neopragmatism and transcendental thought is simply a choice can be true only if there are no transcendental conditions of thought, only if neopragmatism is true. But if the refusal of transcendental thought depends upon the truth of neopragmatism, then neopragmatism is self-contradictory. The choice for or against it cannot be simply a choice if the claim that it is simply a choice presupposes that neopragmatism is true and that transcendental thought is false. In that case,

the choice of neopragmatism is rationally required, even as the choice of transcendental thought is self-contradictory. Thus even the sheer refusal to use the vocabulary of transcendental thought is self-refuting.