

**From:** [GRECO@FORDHAM.EDU](mailto:GRECO@FORDHAM.EDU)  
**To:** [Gyula Klima](#);  
**CC:**  
**Subject:** RE: your paper  
**Date:** Friday, September 02, 2005 7:17:18 AM  
**Attachments:**

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Dear Gyula,

I have re-read your replies to my comments. Perhaps the best way to proceed is for me to stick to the following points, which you can then address in your replies as you see fit. I will make the points by putting up the “No Good Inference Argument” of my book for the audience to see, and then commenting on that. I will talk through the comments rather than read them, but the substance will be as follows.

1. Your treatment of the No Good Inference argument focuses on a demand for a valid inference, of the sort that absolute certainty would require. But I don't see the argument as demanding either. It says that there is no adequate inference from appearance to reality. It does not say that adequacy requires formal or logical validity, or that it must yield absolute certainty. The way I interpret the argument is that there is no good inference, not even an inductive one, from appearance to reality. Another gloss is that there is no non-circular inference. But then logical validity and absolute certainty are not the issue.
2. You then characterize my view as “an epistemology of lowered expectations.” But that is not my response. I don't diagnose the argument as making overly stringent demands for knowledge and so I don't reply by weakening the demands. Rather, I challenge the move from premises 1 and 2 to 3. Put another way, I reject the implicit assumption that perception requires an inference from appearance to reality. I then defend a reliabilist theory of evidence to explain how perceptual evidence can be both non-inferential and adequate.
3. The approach you attribute to Aquinas is related to contemporary semantic externalist responses to skepticism, a la Putnam and Davidson. The idea is that the semantic value of our terms and the reference of our concepts are not independent of actual relations to the objects denoted. In short, it would be impossible to have the sort of radical deception that skeptical scenarios propose, since the content of our thoughts would be different than what they are when caused by real things in the real world. Different objects, different thoughts.

4. My response is that this sort of semantic externalism is neither necessary nor sufficient for answering the most interesting skeptical arguments, such as the NGI argument.

a. Its not necessary because we can make the move I make without it. For example, it isn't necessary for Aquinas, since he holds a non-inferential theory of perceptual knowledge, and that is enough to reject the move from 1 and 2 to 3.

b. The response is not sufficient because skeptical arguments do not require the sort of radical hypotheses that you mention and that semantic externalism makes impossible. As I explain in my book, what is needed is the possibility of error and a distinction between appearance and reality. Much less radical error possibilities (the sort that any plausible semantic externalism must allow) will serve to run the NGI argument and other skeptical arguments. Perhaps this is an important point that needs more attention. Specifically: any semantic externalism, in order to be minimally plausible, must allow that sometimes things are not as they appear. For example, the externalisms of Putnam, Davidson and McDowell all allow that different realities can be phenomenally indistinguishable. Put another way, any minimally plausible externalism must be able to explain error as well as successful representation.

5. A major theme of the book is that skeptical arguments have a methodological place—they serve to highlight plausible but mistaken assumptions about the nature of knowledge and evidence. So addressing skeptical arguments can teach us important philosophical lessons. It seems to me that you agree with that. On the other hand, you disagree with me about what the lessons are and where they are learned. I say epistemology, whereas you say metaphysics or semantics. Does this work for you? Let me know.

This should be interesting and fun. I suspect you will have a lot of sympathizers, from different philosophical persuasions.

Yours,

John

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