

## Replies to Pini and Greco

Following the advice of Aristotle, I believe I should begin my reply with things that are familiar to us. And what is more familiar to us nowadays than television? So, let me begin my reply with reference to the boob-tube.

We all know what makes the difference between a live broadcast and a taped report. Still, this difference may not be recognizable by merely looking at the pictures shown on the screen. Indeed, the exact same-looking pictures shown once are part of a live broadcast of actual events, and then, shown later, are just recordings of a past event. The images shown on the screen may be pixel-by-pixel the same; still, the same picture cannot be a live broadcast, unless it is an actual representation of an actual event that actually generates the picture on the screen through the relevant causal mechanisms. If the picture is generated by something else, say, by a videotape, or if it is some computer-generated imagery, no matter how realistic, then it is not a live broadcast. Indeed, the computer-generated picture on the screen may be pixel-by-pixel the same as that generated by a live broadcast, still, since it is not the product of a “live feed”, it is not part of a live broadcast. So, it is *essential* for a live broadcast to be generated by its actually represented object. But, then, if it is really *essential* for a live broadcast to be generated by its actually represented object, then it cannot be brought into existence by any power without its represented object, for nothing can be brought into and sustained in existence without what is essential to it, since positing a thing in existence without its complete essence involves both affirming and implicitly denying its existence. So if the present existence of its represented object is essential to a live broadcast, then its existence logically entails the existence of its object.

Whoever subscribes to this line of reasoning (accepting its essentialist underpinnings in metaphysics) is a *strong externalist* regarding the representation we call a live broadcast. It is this type of strong externalism that I have attributed in the paper to Aquinas. I take it that the analogy of a live broadcast to perception, the taped recording to memory, and the computer-generated imagery to hallucination is clear. The significance of the foregoing trivial observations concerning the three essentially different types of images we can see on our TV screens is that even if these three different types of representation may be absolutely indistinguishable in terms of their internal features, they are still radically different. They may be patterns on the screen that are pixel-by-pixel the same, still, they are essentially different on account of the different relationships they bear to their actual, past, or merely putative objects. Indeed, according to this strongly externalist conception these relationships constitute their very essence: even if you may have the exact same looking picture on the screen, whether that picture is in fact part of a live broadcast, or of a taped recording, or of some CGI show is dependent on whether the objects represented by that picture are actually generating that picture through the appropriate causal mechanisms, i.e., whether those pictures carry actual information actually transferred from these objects, or whether they carry information transferred from those objects in the past, or they just represent the merely imaginary objects of the CGI artist’s imagination.

What is important about the essentiality of these relations of representations to their objects is that it is precisely this essentiality that validates the inference from the existence of the representation to the existence of its object in the case of a representation like a live broadcast or an act of sense perception. Therefore, whoever denies the validity of this inference has to deny this strongly externalist conception. One of the historical claims of my paper was that the denial of the validity of this inference became possible precisely on account of abandoning this strongly externalist conception that was part and parcel of an earlier model of mental representation. In this model, the strong externalist account of mental representation was based on the Aristotelian metaphysical doctrine of the formal unity of the knower and the known, directly leading to the epistemological claim of the *infallibility* of *some* cognitive acts concerning their simple, *per se* objects, although, *pace* John's relevant comment, *not* concerning *all* objects. However, besides this strong externalism, the earlier model also involved Aristotelian "empiricism", i.e., the doctrine that all our mental contents derive from original sensory input, without which the mind would be just like a blank slate. But then, abandoning the externalist component while keeping the empiricist component of this model, directly leads at least to the logical possibility of the sort of complete cognitive isolation of a cognitive subject that is characteristic of modern "Demon" skepticism, the idea of which first emerged in Nicholas Autrecourt, or rather, Bernard of Arezzo, and, just as importantly, in Adam Wodeham.

One possible reaction to this type of skepticism is Buridan-style reliabilism, which keeps empiricism, abandons the strong, logical externalism based on formal unity, and argues for a less strict externalism based on mere natural, but not logical necessity, along with arguing for different standards and degrees of certainty and evidence. Another possible reaction is that of Descartes, who abandons empiricism, and reaches back to Augustinian exemplarism and innatism to get out of the cognitive isolation produced by Demon-skepticism. But this naturally provokes Locke's criticism of innatism, and the revival of empiricism, which again reproduces the problems of empiricism without strong, Aristotelian externalism. And this situation again reproduces the Autrecourt-like skepticism in Berkeley and Hume, and the Buridan-like reliabilist reaction in Reid, this time, however, in a conceptual framework in which the Aristotelian-Thomistic idea of formal unity is regarded as just one of those scholastic obscurities that we are better off without.

If we look at the historical picture from this perspective, then I think it can be seen why, despite Buridan's Aristotelianism, I would group him together with the moderns, including Descartes, rather than with Aquinas. For even if Buridan shares with Aquinas his Aristotelian empiricism, he more importantly shares with Descartes the abandonment of strong Aristotelian externalism, which is highlighted by allowing the possibility of having exactly the same perceptions whether or not the perceived objects exist.

So, contrary to Giorgio's claim, I don't think what made the big difference between Aquinas' and Buridan's anti-skepticism was the 1277 condemnation's emphasizing the absolute power of God. That emphasis was already there in Aquinas' thought: just think about his rebuttals of the Latin-Averroists' arguments against the absolute possibility of the existence of accidents without a subject in the Eucharist. Both parties in that debate acknowledged that God can do anything that does not involve contradiction. But Aquinas

argued that sustaining an accident without its subject would not involve a contradiction, given what sort of entity and accident is. Correspondingly, what changed between Aquinas and Buridan concerning mental representation is just what would involve a contradiction in producing mental representations, given what sort of entities mental representations are. Sustaining a genuine perception without its actual *per se* object actually generating it *would* involve a contradiction on the view I attribute to Aquinas, whereas it *would not* on the account of *anybody* who rejects the validity of the inference from a perception to its *per se* object.

Now turning briefly to John's comments, I first have to point out that demanding the validity of this inference is one thing, while claiming that this inference actually takes place (no matter how implicitly) in the process of perception is another. We all agree, and Buridan even explicitly argued, that the latter claim is just bad cognitive psychology.

[So, the version of the "No Good Inference" argument I am dealing with is really this: it is possible to have exactly the same perceptions regardless of whether their adequate objects exist or not (rejection of externalism, in post-Ockham medieval philosophy usually expressed with reference to divine omnipotence); *ergo*, there is no good inference from perception to adequate object (NGI-claim). But if the NGI-claim is true, then any and all of our perceptions can be non-veridical. And knowledge is possible only on the basis of veridical perceptions; *ergo*, knowledge may not be possible. The importance of this version is that it is independent from the inferential theory of perception.]

Accordingly, in my comparison of the two anti-skeptical strategies, John's critique of the "inferential theory of perception" has no role whatsoever. I assume that both strategies reject that theory, but I do draw their distinction in terms of whether they accept or reject the deductive validity of the inference from perception to *per se* object itself. In my view, denying the strict deductive validity of this inference (as a result of a changed conception of the identity-conditions of mental representation) coupled with empiricism (in the sense that all mental contents derive from perceptions) amounts to allowing at least the logical possibility of perfect deception, which is, therefore, actually realizable at least by divine power. The strong externalism I attribute to Aquinas validates this inference on account of the essentiality of the object of the act to the identity-conditions of the act itself. The skeptic, *à la* Autrecourt, would deny the deductive validity of this inference, and in the same breath, the sufficiency for evidence anything less than deductive validity. It is in response to this that Buridan (and I suspect Reid and John as well) would say that no, we don't need deductive validity for adequate certainty, inductive cogency is just fine. I do not want to contest this move in epistemology. Indeed, I think it has its own merit *within* the field. Rather, I want to point out that this epistemological move is radically different from the metaphysical stance that does not allow the deductive invalidity of this inference in the first place, and hence simply does not allow *any* wiggle room for the skeptic.

In my comparison of the two strategies, therefore, I merely wanted to make the point that while the Buridanian strategy is perfectly viable as far as epistemology is concerned, it is not the only possible strategy, and the other strategy, coming from an earlier paradigm, has even some extra advantages in a broader historical philosophical context. This is because the two strategies in my contrast are closely tied to radically different views on the nature of mental representation, and thus to radically different views in semantics and metaphysics.

So, in the end I agree with the conclusion of John's reply: whereas he draws his lessons from the study of skeptical arguments in epistemology, for me the comparison of the two anti-skeptical strategies yields its most valuable lessons in semantics and metaphysics, and especially at their intersection in the philosophy of mind. For example, if, by returning to the earlier model, we are justified in rejecting the possibility of Demon-skepticism, then we have a good reason to reject the Cartesian conception mind, which quite directly stems from the Demon-hypothesis through Descartes' argument for the distinction of body and mind in his *Sixth Meditation*. But I guess we'll have the best opportunity to deal with this sort of lessons themselves in connection with Bill Jaworski's upcoming lecture: "Hylomorphic Semantics and the Mind-Body Problem".