

Thomas Reid on Mind, Knowledge, and Value

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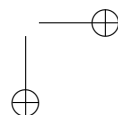
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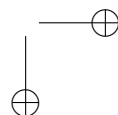
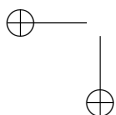
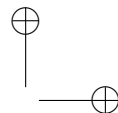
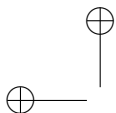
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List of Abbreviations for Works by Thomas Reid

- EAP *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, ed. Knud Haakonssen and James A. Harris. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- EIP *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek R. Brookes, with annotations by Derek R. Brookes and Knud Haakonssen. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002.
- IHM *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.
- LNT *Lectures on Natural Theology*, ed. Elmer Duncan. Washington: University Press of America, 1981.
- LRF *Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric, and the Fine Arts*, ed. Alexander Broadie. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- OP “Of Power.” *Philosophical Quarterly* 51(202): 3–12.

The above are cited by book, chapter, and section where appropriate. Page numbers refer to these volumes.



Notes on Contributors

TODD BURAS is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Baylor University.

REBECCA COPENHAVER is Professor of Philosophy at Lewis & Clark College.

TERENCE CUNEO is Marsh Chair of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at the University of Vermont.

MARINA FOLESCU is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Missouri.

LAURENT JAFFRO is Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the Panthéon-Sorbonne University in Paris, France.

CHRIS LINDSAY is a University Teacher in Philosophy at the University of Glasgow.

GREGORY S. POORE is Assistant Professor of Liberal Arts at Shorter University.

LEWIS POWELL is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Buffalo.

PATRICK RYSIEW is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Victoria in Canada.

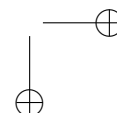
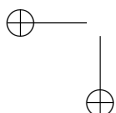
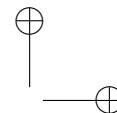
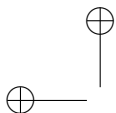
ANGÉLIQUE THÉBERT is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Lycée Livet, Nantes, France.

LUCAS THORPE is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Bogzaici University in Istanbul, Turkey.

JAMES VAN CLEVE is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California.

GIDEON YAFFE is Professor of Law and Professor of Philosophy, and Professor of Psychology at Yale University.

RACHEL ZUCKERT is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Northwestern University.



Introduction

Todd Buras and Rebecca Copenhaver

1 Reid in His Time and Ours

In a quiet village on a tributary of the river Dee between Scotland's Grampian mountains and the North Sea, Thomas Reid was born in the spring of 1710. Some 20 miles and 300 years downstream, dozens of scholars from across Europe and North America, and from as far away as Tasmania and Japan, convened at a busy modern university for an academic conference commemorating the occasion.

A great deal happened in between to explain this remarkable turn of events. However the story is told, though, the central episode is that Reid formulated some interesting philosophical ideas and bequeathed them to posterity in three main works: *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), *Essays on the Intellectual* (1785), and *Active Powers of Man* (1788). The ideas expressed in these works commanded the attention of a wide range of thinkers in Reid's day and continue to do so in our own. The problems he addressed, the approach he took, and the positions he defended are very much alive and well. This can be said truly of only a small portion of works in the history of philosophy, and has not always been true of Reid's work. The papers collected here assess Reid's central ideas on the occasion of his 300th birthday.

A lot goes into the assessment of a philosopher's legacy across three centuries. The conference which inspired this collection—*Reid in his time and ours*—took much fuller measure of the moment. With the support of the British Society for the History of Philosophy and the Mind Association, the conference organizers, Alexander Broadie of the University of Glasgow and Cairns Craig of the University of Aberdeen, put together a wide-ranging program. Over fifty papers by scholars in a variety of disciplines addressed all aspects of Reid's work, together with its relation to the flowering culture from which it emerged as well as its influence abroad. The chapters in this volume tell only part of the story worth telling about Reid's significance in his time and ours. Not only do they engage only some of Reid's main contributions, the concern throughout is with the contemporary significance of Reid's thought. By focusing on the contemporary significance of some of Reid's main contributions, however, the papers

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collected here do demonstrate some of the most important ways in which, after 300 years, Reid is very much still with us.

2 Mind, Knowledge, and Value

In the dedication to his *Inquiry*, Reid tells how his philosophical work began by questioning the received wisdom about the nature of perception. The main themes of Reid's philosophy are a testament to the far-reaching implications of his philosophy of perception and the methodological commitments on which it is based. An account of perception requires an understanding of our most basic mental operations, such as sensation, conception, and belief. An account of perception therefore has implications for the nature and scope of human knowledge, given its relation to these operations. And given the role knowledge plays in the management and assessment of human activity, the ramifications reach further still. Reid's three main published works unfold along this trajectory. The essays collected here follow this trajectory, probing the outlines of Reid's reflections on mind, knowledge, and value. Reid has more often been thought of as an interesting philosophical critic than as an important systematic thinker. The essays presented here bring the systematic thinker more clearly into view.

Reid was indeed a philosophical critic of what he called *the theory of ideas*. According to his genealogy, this theory has ancient roots, but grows into a system he finds everywhere among his contemporaries. His concern is with the philosophical results of this theory: skepticism, idealism, subjectivism, sentimentalism, and necessitarianism. In Reid's genealogy, the theory begins by positing theoretical entities—ideas—in order to explain the powers of the human mind, from perception to belief to moral experience. The explanation is causal and mechanistic; mental powers are explained by the workings of these ideas—their relations, and the mind's ability to make them objects of reflection. This first step is a methodological error, according to Reid, who holds that natural philosophers ought to proceed like Bacon and Newton, searching not for causes but for laws. The natural philosopher ought not posit entities for which there is not adequate evidence—ideas—in order to explain phenomena that are regular and reliable, and as such may be explained by increasingly general laws.

The second, fatal step in the theory is Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which Reid interprets as a distinction between qualities that are in bodies and qualities that are in minds only. Reid's famous distinction between sensation and perception allows him to resist this fatal step. In the *Inquiry* Reid insists that smell, taste, heat, and other so-called secondary qualities are real qualities in bodies: the smell is in the tuberose, the sensation enjoyed upon smelling the tuberose is a feeling in the mind. We respond to properties in the world by enjoying sensations, feelings, emotions, and other affective states, but the properties themselves do not depend on our response. Next, Berkeley takes advantage of the instability in Locke's distinction, showing that the primary qualities too are mere modifications

of mind. At this point in Reid's story, the theory of ideas gains an inevitable and terrible momentum, which Hume captured: beauty and grandeur are no longer in the world but in the eye of the beholder; the beholder, too, is a construct of ideas; beliefs are simply lively felt states; goodness, malice, justice, and magnanimity are not real properties but mere sentiments; perception reaches only as far as sensations, caused by we know not what. By making ideas the primary *unit* of mental activity and the primary *object* of that activity, the theory of ideas first turns the mind away from the world, then builds a new world within it: a pale copy of the real world, denuded of power, beauty, and moral value.

Like most philosophical genealogies, Reid's is wildly inaccurate. As a history, it is careless. As an interpretation, it is unfair to key figures. Reid's story tells us much about his philosophical motivations, and thankfully he was motivated by the consequences of the theory of ideas to present an alternative. It is for this alternative that he has become once again a central figure in the history of eighteenth-century philosophy and an inspiration for current philosophers who, like him, are interested in understanding the relationship between mind and world. It is on this alternative that the essays in the present volume concentrate.

The *Inquiry* and *Essays* present an account of the nature of our most basic mental states and operations. It is an account of an active mind: a mind that acts in and responds to the world. According to Reid, laws of nature govern the human mind and the world in which it acts. The laws are contingent on God's will: God could have willed that the laws were otherwise than they are. Particular mental operations are governed by such laws, which make those operations reliable—though not infallible. Because perception, memory, consciousness, and other basic mental operations are basically reliable processes, the beliefs we form on the basis of such operations are *prima facie* trustworthy. Finally, because the laws integrating the human mind into the natural order endow humans with active as well as speculative powers, humans have the power to use the world and our minds as instruments of power to do what we will.

The centerpiece of Reid's account of mind is his theory of perception. According to Reid the mind is directed, in the first instance, to the world: to ordinary material objects and their properties. A law of the mind ensures that immediately upon enjoying particular sensations, a properly functioning human will experience objects in their environment as having very basic properties, such as hardness, extension, and figure. These *original* perceptions are unlearned: they are formed immediately upon experience. The sensations that occasion perceptions are distinct from them: sensations are felt states that are in themselves uninformative about the world. But because they are connected to perceptions—which are about objects and their properties—sensations have a kind of derived significance, which is why Reid calls them *signs*. Though sensations are signs, it is not by attending to them that we perceive objects as hard, or red, or moving. Rather, perception itself is the most basic form of world-directed experience. Sensations suggest perceptions, by a law of the mind,

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and because they do, they are signs of that which we perceive. Original perception requires no previous experience. But experience itself provides a basis for expanding, refining, and enlarging our perceptual powers. For example, as was common in his day, Reid holds that we do not originally see three-dimensional figure or depth. However, according to Reid, properly functioning humans nevertheless develop that capacity. This is an example of *acquired* perception. Through experience, we become increasingly attuned to a wider range of features in the world than the basic features given in perception originally. We develop from infants who see color and light, feel hardness and shape, to adults who experience a rich and unified world of ordinary objects. The development of these capacities is as law-governed as original perception: a properly functioning human will acquire the ability to identify and recognize the variety of features in her environment, particularly those features that play a role in her practical life.

Reid's developmental approach is also seen in his account of our faculty of taste. Infants take instinctive delight in bright colors and shiny objects. Instinctive judgments of taste draw attention to the aesthetic qualities of the things that surround us. As we develop, we recognize why and how the things in which we take delight are beautiful and grand: we see the beauty and grandeur of things as an expression of the skills of the craftsmen. The beauty of arts and crafts expresses the virtues of the minds that created them; the grandeur of nature expresses the greatness of the divine craftsman. Rational judgments of taste are judgments about the expressive significance of aesthetic properties. We are originally attuned to aesthetic properties, but aesthetic literacy requires experience and maturity. Equipped with rudimentary aesthetic instincts, humans develop and exercise the capacity to notice and attend to instances of beauty and grandeur in their environments and to understand the significance of those instances as expressions of mind, increasing the power and refinement of our faculty of taste.

On Reid's account of perception, the laws of nature reach one step further into the process than on many alternatives. Everyone allows that the laws of nature ensure that certain physical events lead to the stimulation of nerve endings, and that the stimulation of nerve endings occasions sensations. But the theories Reid reacted against require the step from sensation to perception to be made by inference. The fact that Reid relies on the laws of nature to ensure that perceptions follow sensations shapes the epistemic evaluation of perceptual beliefs in a variety of ways. For one thing, it reorients discussion about the epistemic status of our fundamental beliefs about the external world away from the strength of fraught inferences and towards the proper functioning of belief-forming mechanisms. For another thing, it broadens the range of beliefs to which Reid is willing to grant non-inferential justification. Disparate epistemic treatment of perceptual beliefs and the products of other belief-forming faculties—like consciousness, memory, and reasoning—looks objectionably discriminatory in Reid's system. All are equally a product of our nature, and all liable to error. None or all should be trusted. Finally, the impossibility of

distrusting the deliverances of all our faculties provides Reid with a framework for responding to skepticism, and for understanding the justification of our basic beliefs.

The laws of nature integrating the human mind into the natural order on Reid's system shape his understanding of human agency as well. The laws themselves are the effects of an agent: the Author of Nature. Far from being inconsistent with liberty, the laws of nature that are contingent on God's will are used by humans in the proper direction of their wills. Humans use the law-governed material world as a tool or instrument of power. Most immediately, we use our own bodies, which are subject to mechanical laws. Humans also use the law-governed operations of our minds as tools or instruments. Managing our powers requires using our bodies, our minds, and the material world, all of which are governed by natural laws, to execute what we will. The central notion in Reid's account of human agency is self-government: using the means at our disposal to alter and increase what is in our power to do. Each of us is born with feeble intellectual and moral powers with which we could accomplish very little. But society, family, culture, and education allow us to practice exerting our will in ways that improve our original powers and allow us to acquire new ones. Human powers are directed towards ends, from simple ends such as nutrition to more complicated ends such as a harmonious society. Human power, then, is not indifferent—it is aimed at ends, and its direction is supplied by what Reid calls "principles of action." These principles dispose or incline humans to act. Much of the *Essays on the Active Powers* is taken up with a rich taxonomy of these principles. This taxonomy is part of Reid's science of human nature: understanding the principles of action illuminates the ends for which the Author of Nature intended human life and the standards by which human life is to be measured. Managing and regulating the principles that dispose us to act makes our powers more useful, reliable, and fit for pursuing ends.

Though humans act according to mechanical and animal principles, our practical agency rests in our ability to deliberate according to two rational principles of action: our good on the whole, and the principle of duty. Both rational principles motivate action, for Reid, though the principle of duty is prior to considerations about one's good on the whole. In addition, the principle of duty itself comprehends a number of self-evident, mutually irreducible "first principles" of morality. These first principles describe the most general standards by which human life is to be measured; they are not, in typical agents, the source of moral judgments or the objects of beliefs about fundamental moral concepts. We come by those concepts, as well as ordinary moral judgments, by the moral sense. The moral sense, like external sense perception, responds to and engages with the environment by forming particular judgments in particular circumstances. As with external sense perception, the moral sense is a reliable source of beliefs—beliefs that are themselves as such *prima facie* trustworthy. Our ability to judge what is right and what is wrong is like our ability to judge the colors and contours of objects: both sorts of judgment are the result of an original power of our constitution by which we successfully navigate the world.

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A just system of the mind, Reid tells us in the introduction to his *Inquiry*, is an enumeration of the original powers and laws of our constitution. The system probed in these essays presents a picture of developing agents in a rich world of objects and values, agents with intellectual and active powers whose regularity is productive. Though such agents are equipped at first with rudimentary abilities, those abilities are responsive. Our powers consist in a fundamental and ongoing engagement with the world, a world that calls on us to be flexible, sensitive, astute, and ultimately, practical.

3 Tercentenary Essays

The centerpiece of Reid's philosophical system is an account of the nature of our most basic mental states, especially perception. In different ways, the first eight essays collected here present and address challenges to Reid's fundamental commitments about the nature and scope of perception. They all probe Reid's system; in some cases they find it wanting, in need of refinement or correction, while in other cases they find it more resourceful than many think.

In his own *Enquiry* Hume outlines a fundamental challenge to his principles. He invites would-be dissenters to produce an idea, whose content appears not to be ultimately derived or copied from impressions. Under pressure from such a challenge, Hume recognizes that he must show how the questionable idea, despite appearances, could be copied from impressions after all. Reid took up precisely this gauntlet, arguing at length that the content of certain conceptions of the primary qualities cannot be derived from sensations. In Chapter 1, "Thomas Reid's *Experimentum Crucis*," Todd Buras analyzes Reid's central challenge to Hume and defends the challenge against recent attempts to show that the recalcitrant contents are indeed derivable from sensations. Buras argues that it is not enough for the defenders of Hume to produce a conception of the qualities in question; the task is to produce *our* conception. The latter proves a much more difficult project for reasons that Reid himself emphasized.

The stand Reid takes against Hume regarding what can be copied from sensations depends crucially on Reid's understanding of the content of sensations. Chris Lindsay's essay, "Thomas Reid on Instinctive Exertions and the Spatial Content of Sensations" (Chapter 2), addresses recent criticisms of Reid's views concerning the content of sensations. Reid holds that sensations do not themselves possess spatial contents, but merely serve as signs of qualities with spatial properties. Reid's critics emphasize how far Reid departs on this point from his commitment to careful observation of one's own mental life. After all, sensations are normally experienced as located in relation to bodies, especially one's own (e.g., the headache is in the head, the taste on the tongue, and so forth). The challenge is for Reid to explain how sensations, while originally devoid of spatial content, can ground our knowledge of the spatial properties of bodies (including our own). Reid himself has little to say. At one point, he seems to be content simply to describe the process by which the human mind "ripens" from simple sensations to the mental life of mature adults as a lost "treasure of natural history."

Lindsay's essay draws on Reid's account of instinctive exertions and the origins of our conceptions of power to show that Reid has a richer story to tell than would first appear.

Where the first two chapters in this section advertise the resilience of Reid's system, the third issues a less sanguine assessment. In "Perceptual and Imaginative Conception: The Distinction Reid Missed," Marina Folescu charges Reid with an error which surely would have gotten his attention. In the parlance of eighteenth-century philosophy, Folescu charges Reid with "confounding" mental states. Reid holds that the deepest flaws of the theory of ideas resulted from just such an error. He accuses his opponents of confounding sensation and perception, in failing to attend carefully to the differences between fundamentally different mental states. Folescu argues that a failure to distinguish imagination from the act of conception involved in perception invites Reid and his interpreters to errors of their own. For principled reasons, Reid refrains from giving proper definitions of the simplest mental operations, like conception. Yet, when he explicates the term, he treats it as a synonym for imagination. Treating the act of conception involved in perception as an instance of imagination, Folescu argues, leads to a fundamentally mistaken account of perception. The root of the problem is that imagination seems to be a high-level cognitive activity, requiring a sophisticated repertoire of concepts. Yet cognitively unsophisticated creatures perceive. Reid himself attributes perception to animals and small children as well as mature human beings. If animals and small children perceive, and if perception requires conception, animals and small children must be able to perform the required acts of conception. But because animals and small children lack a sophisticated repertoire of concepts, the required sort of conception cannot be equated with imagination. By suggesting otherwise, Reid confounds imagination and perceptual conception, and inadvertently invites an overly intellectualized understanding of perception.

The next two chapters also address the issue at the heart of Folescu's project—Reid's understanding of the act of conception that partly constitutes perception—but they approach it from a different angle. Reid recognizes that we conceive different objects and qualities in very different ways. Restrictions on the sort of conception required for perception may thus imply restrictions on the range of qualities and objects we perceive. One way of exploring the type of conception required for perception, then, is to examine the range of qualities Reid thinks we perceive, paying special attention to the sort of conception he thinks we have of these qualities. But this path quickly leads to a philosophical and textual thicket, centering on Reid's notion of acquired perception. For if Reid means to count acquired perception as genuine perception, then the range of qualities he thinks we perceive is quite expansive indeed, and the conceptual requirement on perception must be fairly lax. On the other hand, if Reid does not intend to count acquired perception as genuine perception, the range of qualities we perceive is narrowed considerably, and a more restrictive interpretation of the conceptual requirement on perception is more plausible. The essays by James Van Cleve and Lucas Thorpe explore this set of interconnected textual and philosophical issues.

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In “Four Questions about Acquired Perception” (Chapter 4), Van Cleve defends the more restrictive interpretation. He offers several lucid arguments for the conclusion that acquired perceptions are not genuine perceptions for Reid, and develops an understanding of Reid’s views across a variety of related topics from this starting point. The interpretation that emerges places an acquaintance requirement on perceptual conception. Genuine perception is circumscribed by acquaintance with properties and objects. While Van Cleve makes it clear that this interpretation has much to recommend it, he also identifies a serious textual problem for the view. According to Reid, we genuinely perceive secondary qualities, but our conception of secondary qualities does not rise to the acquaintance standard.

Lucas Thorpe’s essay, “Seeing White and Wrong” (Chapter 5), advocates a more liberal approach to the objects of perception. He begins from the assumption that the perception of secondary qualities is genuine perception, and builds an account of the type of conception required for perception from that starting point. An account of perceptual conception that is sufficiently flexible to count the secondary qualities among the genuine objects of perception supports an expansive interpretation of the objects of genuine perception. Reid quite famously thinks we have very imperfect conceptions of the secondary qualities, understanding them only as the unknown causes of known sensations. Thorpe’s main aim is to show that Reid is consistent in claiming that the secondary qualities are nonetheless perceived, indeed perceived immediately. The crucial part of Thorpe’s explanation is Reid’s suggestion that perceiving requires only a “more or less distinct” conception of the object perceived. He expounds Reid’s understanding of distinctness in Lockean terms: a conception is distinct to the degree that it enables one to differentiate an object or quality from others. This understanding of perceptual conception allows us to perceive anything we can differentiate to some degree from other things. Such an expansive account brings not only the secondary qualities but also all sorts of other qualities—most notably those discerned in acquired perceptions—into the scope of the perceptible.

The web of issues concerning the conceptual requirements on, and ultimate scope of, genuine perception ensnares Reid’s understanding of taste as well. Taste is Reid’s name for the power of the mind to discern and relish beauties, and his account of taste builds on an extended analogy with perception. Just how close we take the similarity between taste and perception to be depends in part upon how liberally we interpret the scope of genuine perception (and vice versa). Liberal interpretations of the permissible objects of perception make it possible to treat taste as very like perception, indeed—that is, as a mode of perception, differing from sense perception only with respect to the sort of feelings involved and judgments rendered. More restrictive approaches take the differences to run deeper, treating taste (like acquired perception) as a perception-like process, which fails to meet the standards of genuine perception. Regardless of how this debate is resolved, the analogy is the centerpiece of Reid’s “Essay on Taste,” and a common theme of the three essays devoted to the last of Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*.

The analogy itself is the subject of Rebecca Copenhaver's contribution, "Thomas Reid on Aesthetic Perception" (Chapter 6). Copenhaver argues that the parallels between taste and perception explain aspects of Reid's approach to beauty that have perplexed many interpreters. For Copenhaver, the most instructive parallels hold between taste and acquired perceptions. Liberal and restrictive approaches alike grant that, at least broadly speaking, the perceptible is not limited to what is originally given to the senses. The expansiveness of acquired perception provides Copenhaver with a model for understanding how original beauty—which Reid understands in terms of the excellences of minds—can be discerned through the objects of sense. Similarly, the parallel with acquired perception helps Copenhaver integrate variation in judgments of beauty across cultures and times into Reid's realist framework. Reid's understanding of acquired perception predicts variation in acquired perceptual sensitivity according to variation in perceptual circumstance. Copenhaver shows as well how the acquired perception parallel can make sense of the possibility of errors about beauty, which Reid himself never considered. Acquired perceptions rely on general associations between property types. When circumstances conspire against us, these associations produce false acquired perceptual belief—a point counterfeiters of all sorts exploit. In just this way, Copenhaver suggests, we might be mistaken about the beauty of an object: acquired sensitivity to features typically indicative of excellence in minds may be triggered where there are none.

Rachel Zuckert's essay, "Thomas Reid's Expressivist Aesthetics" (Chapter 7), offers a charitable reconstruction of Reid's underlying account of what we ultimately discern in aesthetic perception: beauty, understood as expressions of the excellence of minds. Zuckert addresses many layers of difficulty in Reid's approach, including his basic case for a realist approach to aesthetic value, as well as the feasibility of his claim that all beauties share some one quality. Her central concern, however, is with the phenomenological adequacy of Reid's approach, and its feasibility for those who do not share Reid's confidence that the beauties of nature express the excellence of a divine mind. Zuckert takes both issues to be addressed neatly by Reid's suggestion that the experience of beauty is typically progressive, involving a transition from instinctive to rational judgments of taste. This gives the experience of beauty an elusive character (beauties point to values other than their own), and a moralizing effect (beauties prompt and sustain the exertion of our powers to understand). Zuckert takes these points to favor the phenomenological adequacy of Reid's understanding of aesthetic experience, even for those who take the beauties of nature to be, in Copenhaver's terms, counterfeit beauties—that is, misleadingly similar to actual expressions of the excellences of a mind.

Laurent Jaffro's essay, "Reid on Aesthetic Response and the Perception of Beauty" (Chapter 8), locates Reid's approach to beauty in conversation with his predecessors—especially his fellow internal sense theorists, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. In doing so, Jaffro further develops the themes touched by Copenhaver and Zuckert while addressing still further concerns that have been raised about Reid's approach. Jaffro

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takes the originality of Reid's account of taste to consist in the way he combines certain elements of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury within the context of his sign-theoretic framework. Jaffro sees homage to Hutcheson in the central role Reid assigns certain affective responses in the formation of judgments of beauty, and deference to Shaftesbury with regard to the content of the judgments formed. The beauty we ultimately judge sensible things to have is derived from their relation to the excellences of mind, a relation that Reid understands in distinctly sign-theoretic terms. The total package is not only original, but more robust than critics have recognized. As Jaffro explains, the central role played by affective response guards the account from collapsing into simple cognitivism, as has sometimes been thought. Again, contrary to some scholarly assessments, Reid's account endows sensible things themselves (e.g., human faces and sunsets) with beauty. Though invisible in itself, the original beauty of minds is visible in the sensible objects that signify it.

The broadly perceptual processes examined from a variety of angles in these first eight essays all culminate in the production of beliefs. Reid's system includes not only an account of the cognitive processes involved in the production of perceptual beliefs, but also an account of the epistemic status of the beliefs themselves. Like his analysis of perceptual processes, his account of the epistemic status of their products is driven by his common sense method, and vexed by deep and abiding questions. Reid's method leads him famously to an especially broad version of foundationalism according to which each particular doxastic output of our faculties has the status of a first principle: that is, each is properly accepted without proof or further justification. The most vexing question about this approach is whether it offers a 'third way' between the traditional options of dogmatism and skepticism—between the claim that first principles are true, though we have no good reason to think they are, and the refusal to make any claims about the truth of first principles because we have no proof of their veridicality. It is clear that Reid intended his account of the epistemic status of our basic beliefs to chart a course between these options. Reid thought that—though it could not be proved—the truth of first principles could be made evident when “placed in a proper point of view.” The three essays presented here on Reid's epistemology each explore different aspects of the point of view he had in mind.

Patrick Rysiew's contribution, “Pragmatism and Reid's ‘Third Way’” (Chapter 9), examines the pragmatic character of the justification of first principles in Reid. As Rysiew understands the matter, the heart of Reid's third way lies in his position that the truth of first principles is constitutive of our most basic epistemic practices. The justification of belief in these principles does not require an appeal to deeper considerations. There are no deeper considerations—of either an epistemic or pragmatic nature—which may be adduced for the veridicality of these practices. The very business of adducing considerations requires acceptance of the veridicality of first principles. On this interpretation, the pragmatic character of the justification for belief in first principles is deeper than Reid scholars typically recognize. It is not simply a matter of looking to pragmatic considerations to provide support for beliefs when our epistemic

reasons give out. It is rather a matter of drawing no sharp line between pragmatic and epistemic reasons in the first place. The fact that we have no reasonable alternative to thinking and acting within the framework of the principles of common sense is their epistemic justification, on Rysiew's interpretation. Reid's third way denies the need to appeal to anything deeper than or independent of the role first principles play in our epistemic practices.

The next two essays are by no means incompatible with Rysiew's approach. But each is interested in the value Reid seems to assign to more traditional arguments for the reliability of our faculties. Neither author looks to such arguments to generate the primary justification for our belief in first principles. Each notes instead the way in which the justification for first principles can be boosted and reinforced by arguments.

In "The Defense of the First Principles of Common Sense in Reid's Epistemology" (Chapter 10), Angélique Thébert argues that track-record arguments can place first principles in the "proper point of view." Track-record arguments proceed from premises about particular instances of veridicality to a general conclusion about the veridicality of the belief-forming faculty. Due to familiar circularity concerns, Reid himself seems to be of two minds about the value of such arguments. Thébert argues that Reid's framework permits a more straightforwardly sanguine assessment. She begins with an interpretation of the relation between general principles (like "sense perception is reliable") and particular judgments (like "a coach is passing in the street"). Thébert takes the connection in Reid to be more like the relation that rules bear to their applications than the relation that premises bear to conclusions. She further models our pre-theoretical knowledge of the general principles on a certain sort of know-how. Pre-reflective knowledge of the reliability of a belief-forming faculty is simply knowing how to form appropriate judgments in response to some stimuli. Within this framework, track-record arguments are not obviously circular. Our pre-theoretical knowledge of the general principles is know-how and therefore need not be the object of an explicit propositional attitude at the outset of argument. Still, some sort of knowledge of the general principles is presupposed by knowledge of the premises of track-record arguments. To the extent that this makes the arguments circular, however, the circularity is not vicious. To the contrary, when general principles are made the conclusions of track-record arguments, they are known in a different and more reflective way (as the object of explicit propositional attitudes). Such arguments can thus serve to boost credence in the reliability of our faculties when it is called into question by skeptics.

Gregory Poore's essay, "Theism, Coherence, and Justification in Thomas Reid's Epistemology" (Chapter 11), runs a similar gambit with respect to Reid's appeal to God's veracity to vouchsafe the reliability of our faculties. The epistemic value of theistic arguments seems more dubious, since theistic arguments for the reliability of our faculties seem more obviously circular. To accept premises about the existence and beneficence of God certainly seems to require belief in the reliability of our faculties. For such reasons Reid's interpreters typically interpret his theistic appeals as viciously

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circular or pious irrelevancies. Poore argues that there are more charitable options. If one faculty delivers evidence for theism, and theism in turn is used to support the veridicality of a second faculty, then theism may offer noncircular inferential justification for the second. More interestingly, Poore notes that if positive coherence between the deliverances of our faculties has any justificatory value for Reid, then even explicitly circular theistic arguments will boost our justification in taking basic beliefs to be veridical. Poore then identifies what he takes to be “coherentist strands” in Reid’s thinking about justification, and interprets the value of Reid’s theistic appeals in light of these coherentist elements. Like Thébert, Poore argues only that such considerations boost the epistemic status of our basic beliefs, but notes that the boost may be of value in certain contexts.

Reid’s account of the nature and scope of perception and the basis of human knowledge are important in their own right. But, as with any philosophical system, part of the interest of Reid’s views on such topics inevitably comes from the connection between belief and action. Just as the ultimate product of our mental processes is the production and management of belief, so the final product of our belief-forming processes is the production and management of conduct. As our belief-life is subject to epistemic assessment, so our agency is subject to moral assessment. The final great legacy of Reid’s work is a theory of the norms that govern human action. These aspects of Reid’s system are, comparatively, a growing edge of scholarship. This volume concludes with two essays that lead the way.

Reid’s understanding of Hume has played a unique role in the traditional interpretation not only of Hume’s metaphysics and epistemology but also of his moral philosophy. As the so-called “old Hume” wanes, the importance of the question posed by Terence Cuneo’s contribution waxes: “Does Reid Have Anything to Say to (the New) Hume?” (Chapter 12). Cuneo’s answer is solidly affirmative when it comes to Hume’s moral philosophy. Proponents of both old and new interpretations of Hume’s moral philosophy agree that Hume is a sort of hedonist about intrinsic goods, and offers a rule-utilitarian account of virtues like justice. Cuneo argues that Reid’s case against these aspects of Hume’s moral philosophy poses a serious challenge to the new Hume, and brings central aspects of Reid’s moral philosophy clearly into view for further scrutiny. Reid’s criticism raises penetrating questions for Hume about whether facts about the distribution of pleasures may ground rights to certain goods, and about the relation between the grounds for the requirements of justice and the motives for action. The critique brings sharply into focus Reid’s own understanding of the network of interrelated concepts surrounding justice, as well as Reid’s commitment to a motivational test on the grounds of the requirements of justice.

Where Cuneo argues that, in certain respects, Reid’s engagement of Hume’s account of justice scores a hit, Lewis Powell and Gideon Yaffe argue that in other respects it misses its mark. Their essay, “Reid on Favors, Injuries, and the Natural Virtue of Justice” (Chapter 13), argues that part of Reid’s criticism depends on background commitments in the philosophy of mind and action that Hume independently rejects.

Hume's account classifies justice as an artificial, rather than a natural, virtue—meaning that just acts would not be worthy of approval independently of social conventions. Yet Hume acknowledges that some deeds merit gratitude and resentment independently of social conventions. Because of the tight conceptual connections between feelings of gratitude and resentment, and recognition of what justice requires, Reid thinks that the naturalness of the former implies the naturalness of the latter. Powell and Yaffe doubt that Hume need concede the point. Perhaps, they argue, conceiving of something as undue—as we do when feeling both gratitude and resentment—need not require conceiving of anything as due. Reid thinks that conceiving of one member of a pair of contradictories requires conceiving of the other; but they show that the issue is surprisingly more complicated in Hume. But even more fundamentally, Reid is assuming that differential emotional responses entail different conceptions of the qualities to which we are responding. This assumption, they note, is deeply embedded in Reid's understanding of rational motives and the principles governing human behavior, which Hume rejects in its entirety.

4 Concluding Remarks

We wish to thank the contributors to this volume, as well as the Mind Association, for their patience. Our contributors presented their essays with great alacrity, and the Mind Association was very helpful in keeping us on task. We wish to extend special thanks to M. A. Stewart, who was patient with our delays, and all the delays were ours.

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1

Thomas Reid's *Experimentum Crucis*

Todd Buras

1 Introduction

In a remarkable and well-known passage, Reid asks readers to judge the entire complicated project of his *Inquiry* on a single issue.

This I would therefore humbly propose as an *experimentum crucis*, by which the ideal system must stand or fall; and it brings the matter to a short issue: Extension, figure, motion, may, any one, or all of them, be taken for the subject of this experiment. Either they are ideas of sensation, or they are not. If any one of them can be shown to be an idea of sensation, or to have the least resemblance to any sensation, I lay my hand upon my mouth, and give up all pretense to reconcile reason to common sense in this matter, and must suffer the ideal skepticism to triumph. But if, on the other hand, they are not ideas of sensation, nor like to any sensation, then the ideal system is a rope of sand, and all the labored arguments of the skeptical philosophy against a material world, and against the existence of every thing but impressions and ideas, proceed from a false hypothesis. (IHM V v, 70)

Recent interpreters have questioned the wisdom of Reid's gambit in this passage. This essay speaks up for Reid's *experimentum crucis*. Properly interpreted, the central argument of Reid's *Inquiry* not only avoids recent criticisms; it successfully motivates a position of abiding philosophical significance. After briefly identifying the target of Reid's challenge, I offer an interpretation of Reid's reasoning in this passage and answer the recent criticisms.

2 Reid's Target

The particular aspect of the "ideal system" Reid challenges in the *experimentum* is the linchpin of a uniquely threatening skeptical argument. John Greco dubbed the relevant form of argument "no possible conception" skepticism, since this form of skepticism concludes that we cannot form, and therefore do not have, any conception of mind-independent bodies and qualities (Greco 1995, esp. 286–388). Conceptual

skepticism is uniquely threatening in that it purports to put the world of mind-independent bodies and their qualities altogether beyond our cognitive reach. Such skepticism also ramifies: where there are no conceptions, there is no belief; therefore no justified belief; therefore no knowledge; indeed, no (discursive) thought of any kind.

To prosecute this form of argument, the conceptual skeptic must invoke a general principle about what conceptions we can form. Reid's *experimentum crucis* aims to refute a principle of this sort. The passage itself only alludes to the relevant principle, and space does not permit a careful reconstruction and explication of the principle from the context. A brief sketch must therefore suffice.

The principle appears to be something like this: all our conceptions (of the objects of perception) are ideas of sensation, or, at very least, like sensations. Conception is Reid's name for our most basic mental ability, the ability to direct thought at things and to characterize the things at which our thought is directed (EIP IV i, 295–6). To classify a conception as an idea of sensation is to say something about its origin, how it was acquired. In Reid's context, it is to say specifically that the conception is “copied” or “collected from” sensations, or constructed by comparing, compounding, and separating contents that are copied from sensations. Conceptions formed in this way bear a mark of their origin: the content of such conceptions resolves, ultimately, into contents that are copied from, and therefore like, sensations.

If all our conceptions of material things are ideas of sensation and therefore like sensations, it matters a great deal what our sensations are like. As Lorne Falkenstein emphasizes, if our sensations are, for example, extended and bear spatial relations, then what we may collect from our sensations is better suited for the purposes of conceiving the qualities of matter. At this point in the dialectic, Falkenstein notes, Reid's understanding of the issues broached in the *experimentum* depends heavily on his dualism.¹ For Reid sensations are mental acts (feelings); they “can have no existence but in a sentient mind” (IHM VI xx, 168), an “unextended and indivisible substance” (IHM VII, 217). While sensations imply “no kind of extension, nor parts,” material things do; and while material things imply existence independent of thought, sensations do not (IHM V vi, 64). Sensations and material things are therefore as different as two things can be, as different as a toothache and a triangle, Reid says (IHM V viii, 74).

Coupling this dissimilarity with the ideal system's principle about the origin of our conceptions, we have a powerful argument for conceptual skepticism:

Bishop Berkeley gave new light to this subject, by showing, that the qualities of an inanimate thing, such as matter is conceived to be, cannot resemble any sensation. . . . Every one that attends properly to his sensations must assent to this . . .

¹ His point is made forcefully in Falkenstein (2002). The point also informs his comparison of the responses of Hume and Reid to “Condillac's paradox,” as well as his comparisons of their accounts of localization. See Falkenstein (2005, esp. 424–32); and Falkenstein (2000).

But observe what use the Bishop makes of this important discovery: Why, he concludes that we can have no conception of an inanimate substance, such as matter is conceived to be, or of any of its qualities; and that there is the strongest ground to believe that there is no existence in nature but minds, sensations, and ideas: If there is any other kind of existences, it must be what we neither have nor can have any conception of. But how does this follow? Why thus: We can have no conception of anything but what resembles some sensation or idea in our minds; but the sensations and ideas in our minds can resemble nothing but the sensations and ideas in other minds; therefore, the conclusion is evident. (IHM, V viii, 74–5)

The principle driving this argument maintains, according to John Campbell's helpful recent gloss, that all our concepts are made available by experience (Campbell 2002). The anti-similarity premise maintains that experience does not make available concepts of anything mind-independent. It follows that we cannot form (and therefore do not have) conceptions of mind-independent things.

The principle driving this argument, of course, is a two-way street. If we have a conception of things such as matter is supposed to be—i.e., a conception with content not derivable from sensations nor appropriately similar to sensations—then the conceptual skeptic's principle is false. For if we have such a conception, then, since experience does not make such a conception available, we have a concept that is not made available by experience. Reid's aim in the *experimentum* is to argue fact against theory, in just this way.

That we have clear and distinct conceptions of [some bodily qualities], which are neither sensations, nor like any sensation, is a fact of which we may be as certain as that we have sensations. . . . These facts are phenomena of human nature, from which we may justly argue against any hypothesis, however generally received. (IHM V viii, 76)

The central thesis of Reid's *experimentum* is therefore that we have at least one conception that is neither an idea of sensation nor like a sensation (i.e., one conception which is not made available by experience). Such a conception refutes by counterexample the conceptual skeptic's principle about the sort of conceptions we can form and therefore the sort we have.

3 Reid's Counterexample

Reid's claim in the *experimentum* is that our conceptual repertoire includes some conceptions of material things that are neither ideas of sensation nor like sensations. The claim is open to a stronger and weaker interpretation. This section distinguishes the two, and then advances the weaker reading of Reid's counterexamples.

3.1 A conception/our conception

Reid's claim that there are counterexamples to the ideal system's account of our conceptions of material things may be understood in two ways. On a strong interpretation, Reid is claiming that we conceive of certain qualities, and that the principles of the ideal

system allow for no conception at all of those qualities. On this reading, Reid's claim to offer counterexamples can be undermined simply by showing that the ideal system can provide any conception at all of the disputed qualities. On the weaker interpretation, Reid is not claiming that the ideal system cannot account for *a* conception of certain qualities, rather he is claiming that the ideal system cannot account for *our* conception; that is, Reid is claiming that any conception the ideal system can provide is not *our* conception. On this reading, Reid is refuted not simply by showing that the ideal system can provide some conception or other of the relevant qualities, but by the more demanding task of showing that the system can account for a particular conception of the relevant qualities—i.e., our conception. Both interpretations entail that we have conceptions that, according to the principles of the ideal system, we should not have. On the first interpretation, we should have no conception at all of such qualities as extension, figure, and motion; on the second we should not have the conceptions we in fact do.

The difference between accounting for *a* conception and *our* conception of certain qualities may be illustrated as follows—we will turn to Reid's actual example (our primary quality concepts) in the next section. Suppose we were visited by a race of aliens who felt no pain; and suppose further that these aliens were presumptuous enough to claim that they could form all the conceptions human beings have of their own mental states. Naturally, we would present our conception of pain as a counterexample. The aliens might reply that they do have a conception of our pain, explaining that they conceive of our pain as *the inner state of human beings which makes them grimace, shout, and recoil in response to various stimuli*. This is a conception of pain in the sense that it has (roughly) the same extension as our conception; it is a mental state that allows the aliens to apprehend (roughly) the same things our conception of pain allows us to apprehend. If our claim against the aliens is that they can form no conception at all of our pain, then our alleged counterexample seems refuted.

Not so, if our claim is that they cannot form our own very specific conception of pain. Leaving aside any differences in the extension between their conception and our own, there are good grounds to grant that the aliens have indeed formed a conception of pain but not our conception. We could rightly explain that our conception of pain differs from theirs in the way it presents or describes its objects, the way in which the things apprehended are understood. The alien's conception presents or describes our pain solely in extrinsic, relational terms—specifically in terms of the causal relation our pain bears to other things (e.g., various stimuli and behaviors). Our most basic conception of pain presents or describes its referent not in terms of its relation to other things, but as it is in itself; we conceive our pain as a mental state with a certain intrinsic character, a distinctive phenomenal feel. Our conception of pain is, in this respect, very dissimilar to the alien's. The terms invoked by the alien to describe our pain are exclusively causal or functional; pain is presented or described as something which produces certain outputs for certain inputs. The terms invoked by our (most basic)

conception of pain are not functional; pain is presented or described as something that has a certain character or feel, independently of any role it plays in a network of causes. This dissimilarity is evidence that our conception of pain is not what we might call an “idea of function.” Arguably, no amount of cogitation on the relation our pain bears to various stimuli and behaviors will reveal anything at all about what pain is, independently of its causal role. No conception of pain derived by reasoning and reflecting on the relation our pain bears to other things therefore will be *our* conception.

On the interpretation of the *experimentum* developed below, Reid is in the same position vis-à-vis the ideal system that we are in this exchange with the imagined aliens. His claim is not that the ideal system can account for no conception at all of qualities like extension, figure, and motion; rather his claim is that the ideal system cannot account for our conceptions of these qualities. Reid thinks the ideal system cannot account for our conception of the relevant qualities for a reason that parallels our reason to think the aliens cannot account for our conception of pain. The aliens can form only a functional conception of our pain (a conception of our pain which describes its object in terms of its relation to other things) and our basic conception of pain is not purely functional. The ideal system can form only a sensational conception of the disputed qualities (a conception of the qualities which describes material objects in terms of their relation to our sensations) and our basic conception of the qualities is not sensational. To see why Reid thinks these things, we must see what he thinks our conception of qualities like extension, figure, and motion are like, and why.

3.2 *Our direct conceptions of the primary qualities*

Reid's counterexamples emerge from his analysis of touch. The starting point of Reid's discussion of tactile perception is the observation that by touch we perceive several bodily qualities, as well as importantly different kinds of qualities (IHM V i, 54). By smelling, tasting, and hearing we perceive (originally) only one range of bodily qualities—odors, tastes, and sounds, respectively. These qualities are, furthermore, of a single kind; they are all secondary qualities. Reid's list of the qualities we perceive by touch, by contrast, includes “heat and cold, hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, figure, solidity, motion, and extension.” Reid classifies the first pair on this list as secondary qualities and all the rest as primary.

The primary qualities are, for Reid, distinguished by the nature of our perception of them; and the nature of our perception of them is distinguished by the nature of the conceptions involved in the respective acts of perception. To perceive involves believing in the present existence of a body (EIP II xx, 226). To believe in the present existence of a body involves having a conception of the body (EIP IV i, 295). To have a conception of a body involves both apprehending it and characterizing or describing it. The conceptions involved in perception either describe their objects in terms of a relation they bear to other things or not. Direct conceptions, in Reid's idiom, are conceptions that present or describe their objects as they are in themselves, and not

merely in terms of a relation they bear to something else. Relative conceptions, by contrast, present or describe their objects not as they are in themselves but only in terms of a relation they bear to other things. A relative conception, says Reid, “is, strictly speaking, no notion [i.e., conception] of the thing at all, but only of some relation which it bears to something else” (EIP II xvii, 201).

Reid's distinction between the primary and secondary qualities is framed in terms of this distinction between the type of conceptions involved in perception:

there appears to me to be a real foundation for the [primary/secondary quality] distinction; and it is this: That our senses give us a direct and distinct notion of the primary qualities, and inform us what they are in themselves: But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a relative and obscure notion. They inform us only, that they are qualities that affect us in a certain manner, that is, produce in us a certain sensation; but as to what they are in themselves, our senses leave us in the dark. (EIP II xvii, 201; see also IHM V iv, 61–2).

The smell of a rose, as we have seen, is something we conceive of relatively and obscurely, as “an unknown quality or modification, which is the cause or occasion of a sensation which I know well” (EIP II xvii, 202). Our conception of a quality like hardness, Reid thinks, is quite different; it is direct and distinct. He characterizes the descriptive content of our conception of hardness as *the cohesion of the parts of a body with more or less force*. This conception does not characterize the quality of a body in terms of its relation to our sensations or to anything else. Such a conception is therefore direct; it constitutes an understanding of what the quality is in itself, and not merely how it affects us.

For present purposes, we need not settle the question of whether Reid has indeed uncovered a “real foundation” for the primary–secondary quality distinction.² The crucial question is whether he has uncovered a real distinction between types of perceptual acts, a distinction that entails the possession of direct conceptions of some bodily qualities. Reid does not argue directly for the claim that the perception of the primary qualities involves direct conceptions. In keeping with his stated method, he rests his claims on attentive inner observation (EIP I v, 56; IHM I i, 11).

Whether our notions [i.e., conceptions] of primary qualities are direct and distinct, those of the secondary relative and obscure, is a matter of fact, of which every man may have certain knowledge by attentive reflection upon them. To this reflection I appeal, as the proper test of what has been advanced. (EIP II xvii, 203)

Reid's appeal to reflective observation is fair enough. It is not clear that there is any other method to determine what sort of conception is involved in a certain perceptual act. Nor is Reid's description of the phenomena without merit. Imagine being exposed to an altogether new smell. You will immediately be aware of a new olfactory sensation. Pending further investigation, your understanding of what you smell—i.e., the cause

² For a sympathetic evaluation of Reid's distinction, see McKittrick (2002) and Lehrer (1978).

of this sensation—will be tenuous indeed. Your only conception of the cause will be, as Reid predicts, *something that occasions this new olfactory sensation*. Now imagine handling an altogether new hard object. Provided you do not press your hand against the hard object with sufficient intensity to cause noticeable pain, the attendant tactile sensations will not be an object of your attention at all. Rather you will immediately conceive of the object in terms that make no reference at all to these sensations; you will conceive of (and believe in) the present existence of a hard object, a body whose parts firmly adhere.

Compelling as it may be, Reid does not require his appeal to inner observation to stand alone. He presses several strands of circumstantial evidence into the service of his counterexamples. In particular, he notes two asymmetries between our conception of the primary and secondary qualities that are neatly explained by his claim about the nature of our conception of each. First, the intrinsic nature of hardness and the other primary qualities is not a subject of serious philosophical or scientific inquiry, while the nature of smells and the other secondary qualities is (EIP II xvii, 203–4; also IHM V iv, 61). The intrinsic nature of hardness is not a subject of serious inquiry for the same reason the intrinsic nature of circularity is not. Reid recognizes that there are interesting questions about what causes qualities like hardness or circularity to be instantiated, or about their typical effects; but there are no interesting questions about the nature of these qualities. We know what they are, and not just how they are related to other things. For a body to be hard is for its parts to adhere firmly; for a body to be circular is for its parts to be circumscribed by a curved line which is equidistant in all directions from a point within the line. “It is not so with secondary qualities. Their nature not being manifest to the sense, may be a subject of dispute” (EIP II xvii, 203). Our conceptions of the secondary qualities imply nothing about these qualities beyond the effect they have on our sensations. For a body to have the smell of a rose, we have seen, is for it to have an unknown cause which occasions certain sensations in us. Consequently, what the smell of a rose is, in and of itself, is “a proper subject of philosophical disquisition,” a subject about which we may entertain various hypotheses (EIP II xvii, 204). The lack of a need for inquiry into the nature of a quality like hardness supports Reid’s claim that our conception of such qualities is direct. If our conception of hardness were relative, it would be as necessary to inquire into the nature of hardness as it is into the nature of smells; yet it is not.

Second, a conception of one thing in terms of its relation to something else is of no cognitive value unless the “something else” is itself understood. Where perception involves sensational conceptions, then, the relevant sensations must themselves be familiar and distinct objects of thought. Conversely, where the sensations themselves are not familiar objects of thought, it is not plausible to suppose that perception involves sensational conceptions. The sensations involved in the perception of the secondary qualities are very familiar indeed.

[They] are not only signs of the object perceived, but they bear a capital part in the notion [i.e., conception] we form of it. We conceive it only as that which occasions such a sensation, and therefore cannot reflect upon it without thinking of the sensation which it occasions: We have no other mark whereby to distinguish it. The thought of a secondary quality, therefore, always carries us back to the sensation which it produces. We give the same name to both, and are apt to confound them together. (EIP II xvii, 204)

The sensations involved in the tactile perception of hardness and the other primary qualities, by contrast, are neither familiar nor distinct objects of thought. The relevant tactile sensations are, in Reid's colorful words, "fugitives" which "hide in the shadows" of the external qualities they lead us to perceive (IHM V ii, 56).

There is, no doubt, a sensation by which we perceive a body to be hard or soft. This sensation of hardness may easily be had, by pressing one's hand against the table, and attending to the feeling that ensues, setting aside, as much as possible, all thought of the table and its qualities, or of any external thing. But it is one thing to have the sensation, and another to attend to it, and make it a distinct object of reflection. The first is very easy; the last, in most cases, extremely difficult. We are so accustomed to use the sensation as a sign, and to pass immediately to the hardness signified, that, as far as appears, it was never made an object of thought, either by the vulgar or by philosophers; nor has it a name in any language. (IHM V ii, 56)

When the sensations that accompany the perception of the primary qualities are neither notably painful nor pleasant, Reid says, "you can hardly persuade [a tactile perceiver] that he feels anything but the figure and hardness of the body" (EIP II xvii, 205). The lack of familiarity with—indeed, the lack of a vocabulary for—the sensations involved in the tactile perception of the primary qualities further supports Reid's claim that our conception of these qualities is direct. If our conception of the primary qualities were relative, the accompanying tactile sensations would be familiar and distinct objects of thought; for they would be an integral part of our thought about these qualities. Yet they are not. We are instead "as little acquainted with [them], as if we had never felt [them]" (EIP II xvii, 204).

For these reasons, Reid takes it to be obvious that we are indeed possessed of direct conceptions of some bodily qualities. The key question for Reid's purposes is whether our direct conceptions of the primary qualities are ideas of sensation or like sensations.

3.3 *Direct conceptions as counterexamples*

Here then is a phenomenon of human nature, which comes to be resolved: Hardness of bodies is a thing that we conceive as distinctly . . . as anything in nature. . . . The question is, How we come by this conception . . . ? (IHM V ii, 57–8)

Reid's opponents are committed to an answer: our conception of hardness, like our conception of any material thing, is an idea of sensation; we come by our conception of hardness and the other primary qualities by copying, comparing, compounding, and separating the sensations these qualities occasion in us. Reid's claim in the

experimentum is that this answer is demonstrably false. Reid demonstrates the falsity of the answer in two ways.

The lack of a family resemblance is the first clue that our conceptions of the primary qualities are not the progeny of sensations.

I have as clear a conception of extension, hardness, and motion, as I have of the point of a sword; and with some pains and practice I can form as clear a notion of the other sensations of touch, as I have of pain. When I do so, and compare them together, it appears to me clear as day-light that the former are not of kin to the later, nor resemble them in any one feature. (IHM V vii, 69)

Reid certainly overstates the differences, here. Since everything resembles everything else in some respect or other, there is at least one feature (e.g., mentality) our conceptions of the primary qualities share with our sensations. The important similarities do indeed appear to be missing, however. To highlight the dissimilarities Reid contrasts the implications of the two mental states. Sensation, Reid says, “implies no kind of extension, nor parts, nor cohesion” but implies a sentient being performing acts (or experiencing feelings). The conception of hardness, by contrast, implies nothing about acts (feelings) or sentience, but implies extension, parts, and cohesion (IHM V v, 64; EIP II xvii, 203).

Another way to bring out the dissimilarity is to explicate the content of the conceptions our senses give us of the primary qualities. These conceptions are direct. So they present or describe their objects (material things) as they are in themselves, and not simply in terms of some relation they bear to something else. So they do not present or describe their object in terms of any relation they bear to our sensations. So the descriptive content of these conceptions does not resolve into terms copied from sensations. So their descriptive content does not bear the mark of conceptions derived from sensations. We therefore cannot call our direct conceptions of the primary qualities “ideas of sensation,” unless, Reid says, “we call that an idea of sensation, which hath no resemblance to any sensation” (IHM V ii, 58). The absurdity of this last suggestion is supposed to be obvious—like calling a child a descendant of parents with whom she shares no genes. Since a certain kind of similarity is a necessary condition for being an idea of sensation, and since our direct conceptions of the primary qualities are not relevantly similar to sensations, our direct conceptions are not ideas of sensation.

Reid also tests the ideal theorist’s claim by means of a thought experiment (IHM V vi, 65–7). The experiment invites the ideal theorist to walk through the process of reasoning and reflection on sensations that allegedly produces our direct conceptions of the primary qualities. Since the blind share our conceptions of the primary qualities, sight must not be essential to the process. So Reid imagines the subject of the thought experiment to be blind. To distinguish the role of our tactile sensations from the role of any proprioceptive sensations, Reid imagines that the subject’s body is, initially, “fixed immovably in one place.” Finally, he imagines the subject stricken by “some strange distemper,” which robs him altogether of every conception he had obtained

by touch, but leaves his faculty of sensation and reason intact. In this condition, Reid imagines giving our subject a series of progressively more complex tactile sensations, challenging the ideal theorist to identify the point at which the subject acquires a direct conception of the primary qualities by reasoning and reflecting on sensations. If our conceptions of the primary qualities are indeed ideas of sensation, we should be able to imagine, at least in outline, how a subject in this condition could reacquire our conceptions of the primary qualities. If our conceptions cannot be reclaimed in this way, they are not ideas of sensation.

Reid argues that the subject cannot acquire our conceptions at any point in the process. The core of his reasoning is explained at the outset.

Suppose him first to be pricked with a pin; this will, no doubt, give a smart sensation: he feels pain; but what can he infer from it? Nothing surely with regard to the existence or figure of a pin. He can infer nothing from this species of pain, which he may not as well infer from the gout or sciatica. Common sense may lead him to think that this pain has a cause; but whether this cause is body or spirit, extended or unextended, figured or not figured, he cannot possibly, from any principles he is supposed to have, form the least conjecture. Having had formerly no notion of body or of extension, the prick of a pin can give him none. (IHM V vii, 65)

Reid is not denying that our subject may form a conception of the cause of his sensation. He can form a relative, sensational conception. Knowing that he is not the cause of these feelings, and that they must have a cause, the subject may form the conception of an unknown cause of his known sensations—e.g., *something which occasions such-and-such sharply painful sensations*. But such a conception reveals nothing about what the cause is in itself—any more than a conception of the gout as *the unknown cause of certain painful sensations* reveals what the gout is. Our subject has no way to apprehend the cause of his sensation in terms which make no reference to his sensations; he has no way to conceive the cause of his sensations as a body—i.e., an extended, figured, hard, material thing. For extension, figure and hardness are direct conceptions, and our subject has only simple feelings, and relative conceptions of their cause. He cannot copy these direct conceptions from his sensations. For any conception copied from sensations relates its object to things that exist in our minds, and our direct conceptions of bodies do not. Nor can he concoct our direct conceptions by combining, comparing, and separating conceptions copied from sensations. For these operations do not allow our subject to generate a way of describing objects that differs fundamentally from the conceptions copied from sensations. In this condition, the subject not only cannot know whether the unknown cause of his sensations is body or spirit, he cannot so much as conceive of the unknown cause in such terms.

Reid argues next that a more complex range of tactile sensations cannot fundamentally alter the subject's position vis-à-vis the unknown cause. Reasoning and reflecting on more complex sensations does not reveal anything more about the intrinsic nature of the unknown cause than reasoning and reflecting about the simple case. Such reasoning simply allows us to form more and more complex relative conceptions—

So Reid's argument goes. As our subject encounters a body that moves across his hands or face, he is able to conceive of *something which occasions sensations whose intensity and focus fluctuate over time*. As our subject is allowed to experience the sensations associated with the movement of his limbs, he may conceive of *something*

⁴ Ganson (1999) helpfully frames this issue in terms of our subject's lack of what psychologists call a body image, the ability to represent one's own spatial extension as such. He also critically evaluates both Brown's and J. S. Mill's attempt to derive the necessary body image from muscular (i.e., proprioceptive) sensations, and awareness of temporal extension and divisibility (55–60).

which occasions sensations whose intensity and focus fluctuate over time and also in coordination with proprioceptive sensations. What eludes our subject at every turn is any direct conception of the cause of his sensations, any conception of the cause as it is in itself and not merely as it is related to our sensations. Whether the cause of his sensations is "body or spirit, extended or unextended, figured or not figured," he still cannot form "the least conjecture." Since our conceptions of the primary qualities are direct, and the conceptions formed by our subject are not, Reid concludes:

Upon the whole, it appears that our philosophers have imposed upon themselves, and upon us, in pretending to deduce from sensation the first origin of our notions of external existences, of space, motion, and extension, and all the primary qualities of body, that is, the qualities whereof we have the most clear and distinct conception. These qualities do not at all tally with any system of the human faculties that hath been advanced. They have no resemblance to any sensation, or to any operation of our minds; and therefore they cannot be ideas either of sensation, or reflection. The very conception of them is irreconcilable to the principles of all our philosophic systems of the understanding. (IHM V vi, 67)

3.4 Comments on the counterexamples

Reid's position in the *experimentum*, on the weaker interpretation, is defined by the two points explained above: we have direct conceptions of some bodily qualities (as indicated by a careful analysis of the mental acts constitutive of tactile perception); and our direct conceptions are not "ideas of sensation" (since they cannot be acquired by reasoning and reflecting on our sensations), nor are they like sensations (since their descriptive content does not resolve into terms which make reference to sensations). The next section examines how well the position defined by these claims withstands scrutiny. The current section concludes by tying down a few loose ends.

First, Reid is well aware that he too must face the question, how do we come by our direct conceptions? But Reid's own story about the acquisition of these conceptions is not on trial in the *experimentum*. The point of the *experimentum* is to challenge the story told by the ideal system. Reid's critique of the ideal system does, however, play a significant role in the development of his own alternative. Having shown that the very conception of extended, figured, and hard objects is "irreconcilable to the principles of all our philosophic systems of the understanding," (IHM V vi, 67), Reid sees only two options. We can judge these conceptions on the basis of our theories, abandoning the conceptions and with them the very idea of a mind-independent cause of our sensations. Or, we can judge the philosophical systems on the basis of their failure to account for our conceptions. Down the first path, "the wisdom of philosophy is set in opposition to the common sense of mankind" (IHM V vii, 67). The folly of this option needs no further demonstration, for Reid, than this: "Even those philosophers who have disowned the authority of our notions of an external material world confess that they find themselves under a necessity of submitting to their power" (IHM V vii, 68).

The second path “make[s] a virtue of necessity,” attributing our direct conceptions of the primary qualities to the principles of our constitution. Unless and until we uncover some other principle which explains how certain tactile sensations give rise to conceptions which are not at all like them, Reid sees no option but to conclude: “That our sensations of touch indicate something external, extended, figured, hard or soft, is . . . a natural principle. The belief of it, and the very conception of it, are equally parts of our constitution” (IHM V vii, 72).

Second, on the interpretation presented above, the issue Reid presses against the ideal system concerns the descriptive content of our direct conceptions of certain bodily qualities. What explains our ability to present or describe the objects of sense independently of any relation they bear to our sensations? The mere possession of direct conceptions of bodily qualities raises the question. Anyone who understands Reid’s explication of hardness as *the firm adhesion of the parts of a body* has the conception. This means, on the one hand, that Reid’s case against the ideal system sits rather loosely atop his analysis of the mental acts that constitute tactile perception. There is little reason to doubt that we have direct conceptions of some bodily qualities—whether or not we ultimately accept Reid’s reasons for thinking so. On the other hand, the issue is not obviated by the claim that we have other conceptions of the same qualities, conceptions with a different sort of descriptive content. The question of how we come to think of our pain as *a mental state with a certain qualitative feel* is not answered simply by noting that we also think of our pain as *an inner state that causes certain behavioral outputs*. Nothing about the issue Reid raises, therefore, requires the stronger interpretation of his position. Reid need not claim that we can form no (relative, sensational) conception of certain bodily qualities according to the principles of the ideal system. He need only claim that we have conceptions that cannot be derived in the way the ideal system requires.

Reid not only says nothing that requires the stronger interpretation of his position in the *experimentum*, he says some things that prohibit it. He explicitly allows that we have both a direct and relative conception of a chiliagon, for example. Reid further encourages the formation of a full complement of relative conceptions of the primary qualities. Were it not for our “habit of inattention” to the tactile sensations that suggest the perception of the primary qualities, Reid thinks the error of the ideal system would be easily discerned. Perceiving the firm adhesion of the parts of a body is very different from perceiving something that occasions such-and-such tactile sensations. The difference would be obvious, Reid thinks, if by “pains and practice” we could flesh out the relative, sensational description of the quality.

The sensations of touch are so connected, by our constitution, with the notions of extension, figure and motion, that philosophers have mistaken the one for the other, and never have been able to discern that they were not only distinct things, but altogether unlike. However, if we will reason distinctly upon this subject, we ought to give names to those feelings of touch; we must accustom ourselves to disjoin them from, and to compare them with, the qualities signified or suggested by them. (IHM V iii, 64)

The chiliagon example provides a template for the project Reid recommends in this passage. A circle, for example, can be conceived in relative, sensational terms as *a bodily figure that, from one point of view (the point of view directly above or below the center point), occasions a circular visual appearance (and from other points of view, occasions a more or less oblong visual appearance)*. Nor need our relative conceptions of bodily figures make reference only to visual appearances. We may conceive of a square relatively in terms of the number of right angles we will feel in conjunction with the proprioceptive sensations associated with moving our hands along its perimeter. If Reid thought we could form no relative, sensational conceptions of the primary qualities—i.e., no conceptions consistent with the principles of the ideal system—both this example and this advice would be incoherent.

Finally, on the weaker interpretation our direct conceptions of the primary qualities are counterexamples to the ideal system's thesis because our conceptions of the primary qualities are not relative, sensational conceptions, as the ideal system requires. This gives the weaker interpretation an advantage over the stronger, but brings disadvantages of its own. On the stronger interpretation, Reid is essentially claiming that a list of our conceptions of material things cannot be mapped onto a list of all the conceptions formed according to the principles of the ideal system, because there is no conception at all of the primary qualities of bodies on the ideal system's list. So understood, Reid's counterexamples stand or fall on the question of whether we can form sensational conceptions of the primary qualities. Show that the ideal system's principles allow the formation of a conception of the disputed qualities and Reid's counterexample is undermined.

The weaker interpretation does not stand or fall on the question of whether we can form relative, sensational conceptions of the primary qualities. For, on the weaker interpretation, Reid is claiming that our direct conceptions of the primary qualities are neither identical to nor derivable from any conception formed according to the principles of the ideal system. The advantage, here, is that Reid's counterexamples are not vulnerable to refutation simply by producing a relative, sensational counterpart to our direct conceptions of the primary qualities. Reid may grant, for example, that we have both the following conceptions:

$\text{hardness}_{\text{direct}} = \text{df}$ the firm adhesion of the parts of a body

$\text{hardness}_{\text{sensational}} = \text{df}$ something that occasions such-and-such sensations.

Acknowledging the existence of $\text{hardness}_{\text{sensational}}$, however, has its price. For Reid must now defend the claim that $\text{hardness}_{\text{sensational}}$ is neither identical to $\text{hardness}_{\text{direct}}$, nor do these conceptions bear relations weaker than identity but strong enough to support the derivability of $\text{hardness}_{\text{direct}}$ from $\text{hardness}_{\text{sensational}}$. He must defend the claim, for example, that $\text{hardness}_{\text{direct}}$ is not a copy of or a construction from $\text{hardness}_{\text{sensational}}$. Any defense of these claims must rely on auxiliary theses concerning the identity conditions of conceptions as well as the nature of such mental operations as copying, comparing, separating, and combining conceptions.

Specifically, a complete defense of the weaker interpretation requires a defense of the following theses:

1. For all x and all y , if there is a z such that z is a material object and x is a sensational conception of z , and y is a direct conception of z , then y is not x .
2. For all x and all y , if there is a z such that z is a material object and x is a sensational conception of z , and y is a direct conception of z , then y is not a copy of x .
3. For all x and for all y , if there is a z such that z is a material object and x is a sensational conception of z , and y is a direct conception of z , then y is not derivable from x by means of such operations as combination, separation, and comparison.

These are the points at which Reid's reasoning, on the weaker interpretation, is open to refutation. These auxiliary hypotheses are not implausible, either in themselves or as interpretations of Reid's thinking. As we have already suggested, Reid seems to accept (2) and (3) because relative and direct conceptions are not similar, and conceptions that are copied from another or derived by combination, separation, and comparison are similar. (1) is plausible because a difference in descriptive content is sufficient for a difference in conceptions, and sameness of extension between conceptions is not sufficient for the identity of conceptions. This is now a philosophical platitude (viz., morning star/evening star, creatures with a heart/creatures with a kidney). The thesis is, further, implicit in Reid's own recognition of distinct conceptions of a single object (e.g., a chiliagon). But it is well beyond the scope of any one essay to settle all the textual or philosophical questions raised by the auxiliary theses. Consequently, our judgment of success of Reid's reasoning, on the weaker interpretation, must be tempered. Granted these very plausible auxiliary hypotheses, Reid's gamble in the *experimentum* is a sure thing.

4 Reid's Counterexample Defended

The interpretation offered so far explains Reid's confidence in the *experimentum*; it does not yet answer the recent, more pessimistic assessments of his odds. That is the aim of this final section. The conclusion of the last section is sufficient to show that, if Reid's *experimentum* does fail, it is not for either of the two main reasons recorded in the secondary literature.

4.1 *The sophisticated sensationalist*

Keith DeRose argues that a sophisticated sensationalist evades the argument of Reid's *experimentum* (DeRose 1989, cf. 341). DeRose's sophisticated sensationalist is modeled after Berkeley in the *New Theory of Vision*, particularly Berkeley's explanation of how distance is suggested by visual sensations. On this account we conceive of qualities like distance, figure, and solidity in terms of the tactile sensations we would have, were we in the presence of these qualities and taking certain actions (i.e., having certain sensations of bodily motion). This account differs from that of a simple sensationalist

insofar as it conceives of bodily qualities in terms of a conditional relation among a complex set of sensations as opposed to a single sensation. The sophisticated sensationist “does not think of our concepts of solidity and tangible figure (for example, the concept of a sphere) as being images of a single tactile sensation, but rather to be a knowledge that certain types of tangible ideas tend to go together, particularly in conjunction with certain actions” (DeRose 1989, 341). DeRose suggests that this form of sensationalism can accept Reid’s definition of hardness by claiming “that the only content there is in thinking of a body as being such that it cannot easily be made to change its figure is the sensations one thinks would be had if, for example, he were to push against the object” (DeRose 1989, 341).

The sophisticated sensationist offers a plausible way to flesh out the “such and such” clause in the definition of hardness_{sensational} above:

hardness_{sophisticated-sensational} = df something apt to occasion the sensations one would have were one to have certain other sensations of bodily motion.

This sensational conception of hardness undermines Reid’s counterexamples on the stronger interpretation, since the crucial question for the ideal system on the stronger interpretation is whether it can account for any conception at all of a quality like hardness. On the weaker interpretation, however, the crucial question is whether hardness_{direct} is identical to or is derivable from hardness_{sophisticated-sensational}.

Suppose the sophisticated sensationist claims that hardness_{direct} simply is hardness_{sophisticated-sensational}. This understanding of the position is one way of taking DeRose’s remark that to think about the qualities of an object like a sword simply “is to know what sensations one would have if there were a sword present and if certain actions were taken” (DeRose 1989, 341). This understanding of the sophisticated sensationist’s position falls afoul of the most uncontroversial of the weaker interpretation’s auxiliary hypotheses—namely, the first, which claims that a difference in descriptive content is sufficient for a difference in conceptions. Even if we suppose that hardness_{direct} and hardness_{sophisticated-sensational} are extensionally equivalent, it does not follow that they are identical. All that follows is that the two conceptions pick out all and only the same things. But extensional equivalence among conceptions is not equivalence *simpliciter*. Something about the conception of an object as hard_{direct} and hard_{sophisticated-sensational} is not the same. In the first case, the conception describes its object in terms of the interrelation of the parts of a body; in the second case, in terms of the relation something unknown bears to known sensations. The difference is indicated by the cognitive significance of the two conceptions. One who thinks of something as hard_{direct} is in a position to affirm that what they are thinking about is a material thing. One who thinks of something as hard_{sophisticated-sensational} is not. The latter thinker remains in the position of the subject of Reid’s thought experiment: “whether this cause is body or spirit, extended or unextended, figured or not figured, he cannot possibly form the least conjecture” (IHM V vi, 65).

Suppose the sophisticated sensationist claims that hardness_{direct} is not identical to but is derivable from hardness_{sophisticated-sensational} by the ideal system’s sanctioned

mental operations. This understanding of the position is suggested by DeRose's remark that the sophisticated sensationalist's conception of hardness is "the only content there is in thinking of a body as being such that it cannot easily be made to change its figure" (DeRose 1989, 341). On this view no one who has formed a full complement of conceptions from sensations can lack the direct conception of hardness; for there is nothing more in the direct conception than what is in a complete understanding of our sensations. Of course, this is precisely what is ruled out by the second and third auxiliary hypotheses of the weaker interpretation—and for plausible reasons. No amount of understanding of the relation an unknown something bears to known things amounts to a direct understanding of the unknown thing, an understanding of what the thing is like independently of its relations to other things. A full complement of conceptions derived from sensations yields nothing more than a thorough understanding of something in terms of its relation to our sensations. A full complement of conceptions derived from sensations therefore entails nothing about the intrinsic character of the cause of our sensations, and therefore does not entail our direct conception of material things. Someone could have a complete understanding of our sensations and yet lack our understanding of bodies.

The parallel with the presumptuous alien (of §2.1) is again helpful. By a thorough analysis of the relation human pain bears to behavior in various circumstances, the aliens may arrive at a very impressive functional conception of human pain. If the only content to our conception of pain is what their functional conception captures, then it would be impossible to acquire their functional conception of pain and lack our own. Yet the aliens themselves are the proof to the contrary. It is entirely possible for someone to have a sophisticated functional conception of human pain and yet lack the conception of pain in terms of its intrinsic character. The aliens might insist that the only content there is to our conception of pain is what is defined by their functional conception. But there is no reason anyone with a direct conception of pain should grant the point. Just so, anyone with a direct conception of a material thing like hardness has a reason to reject the claim that there is nothing more to their conception but what follows from a thorough knowledge of the relations those things bear to our sensations.

The sophisticated sensationalist therefore does not evade the argument of Reid's *experimentum* on the weaker interpretation. Unless one of the auxiliary hypotheses is refuted, the existence of a sensational conception of qualities like hardness—however sophisticated that conception may be—proves only that the ideal system can account for a conception, not our conception, of the qualities.

4.2 *The private concession (to Condillac)*

Ryan Nichols claims that Reid's counterexamples are undermined not by sophisticated conditional relations among sensations, but by a sufficiently complex set of simultaneous tactile sensations (Nichols 2007, 96–101). To make the case for his claim, Nichols appeals to the line of reasoning Condillac offered for thinking conceptions of body can be derived from sensations. Perhaps unbeknownst to Reid, Condillac constructed

a thought experiment that parallels Reid's own, and which led him to the opposite conclusion. Condillac imagines a statue slowly being endowed with sensations, and argues that certain tactile sensations will enable the statue to derive a conception of body—first its own, and then others. The tactile key to the world of bodies is the sort of simultaneous sensations the statue will have when it lays its hand, for instance, upon its chest. He will have two sensations of solidity, as Condillac calls them, and he will judge them adjacent to and outside of one another. These sensations constitute a continuum of contiguous, impenetrable objects, from which he may copy conceptions of contiguity and impenetrability. By moving his hand across his body he will form the conception of his body as a single extended object. By touching other things, which produce only a single sensation of solidity, the statue will form the conception of other bodies,—i.e., things adjacent to and outside of one another and which are not part of his own body (Condillac, 1982).⁵

On the basis of this line of reasoning, Nichols accuses Reid of attacking a straw man in his published version of the thought experiment (Nichols 2007, 101). For Reid's published version does not consider what may be derived from the confluence of simultaneous tactile sensations to which Condillac appeals. Worse still, in unpublished manuscripts, Reid does consider such simultaneous sensations, and, when he does, Nichols takes him to concede the force of Condillac's point (104–5). This makes Reid guilty not only of attacking a straw man, but also of “shielding his readership” from evidence of the fallacy (107). If Nichols' charges stand, Reid loses his wager in the *experimentum*, and is also a bad sport. The charges are both textual and philosophical. The philosophical charge is that Condillac's reasoning undermines Reid's counterexamples to the ideal system; the textual charge is that Reid effectively concedes the point in unpublished manuscripts. This essay concludes by arguing that neither charge stands: Condillac's reasoning does not undermine Reid's counterexamples, whether or not Reid concedes as much; and Reid concedes no significant point to the ideal system in his unpublished manuscripts, whether or not it is Condillac's.

As Falkenstein argues, Condillac's account of touch “does not explain how we construct an idea of space out of originally non-spatial tactile sensations, but presupposes that tactile sensations are themselves spatially extended (or at least spatially disposed) to begin with, and that the statue merely learns to notice this feature” (Falkenstein 2005, 434). Falkenstein quotes Condillac's own explanation for why this must be so: “since a body is a continuum, formed by the contiguity of other extended bodies, it is necessary that the sensation that represents it be a continuum, formed by the contiguity of other extended sensations.”⁶ Nichols himself quotes this passage and notes the implicit necessary condition on forming a conception of extension from sensations. Indeed, in developing his criticism he freely makes use of the point that

⁵ The thought experiment is discussed in Nichols (2007, 96–101) and Falkenstein (2005, 415–20).

⁶ This passage is quoted with others in Falkenstein (2005, 434). The source may be found in translation here: Condillac (1982, 230).

sensations are spatially disposed: he says the sort of sensations Condillac describes feel “as though they are spatially located” (Nichols 2007, 100). As we have noted, Reid does not doubt that this is so for those of us whose conceptions of body have not been eradicated by “some strange distemper.” But in the *experimentum* the challenge is to explain how our conceptions of spatially extended objects can be derived from sensations that are not extended. Condillac’s reasoning is therefore a red herring. At most, it serves to emphasize Falkenstein’s point that Reid’s account of what can be derived from sensations depends crucially on what Reid, a dualist, takes sensations to be—i.e., un-extended.

Thus even if Reid had conceded the force of Condillac’s reasoning in unpublished manuscripts, he would have been mistaken to do so. But he does no such thing. Indeed, in the relevant manuscripts he yields no significant point to the ideal system, Condillac’s or otherwise. Here is the passage Nichols considers crucial (unedited and quoted at length due to its relative inaccessibility):

Suppose a blind man by some strange distemper to have lost all the experience and habits he had got by feeling all notion of extension, figure and motion {even of the figure and dimensions of his own body} but to retain his reasoning and reflecting powers. If he felt a post before him this would not at first hinder his running his head against it. Several unlucky knocks might make him attend to those feelings that went before them and by degrees raise the fear of one when he had those sensuous feelings. When he moved his hand or foot . . . he would be conscious of a certain effort {of mind} and a feeling consequent it. This feeling he might {call} motion but it is certainly extremely different from our notion of motion for it would include no notion of change of place. He moves his hand variously further and further in the in the air [sic]. These he may conceive as various modifications of what he has called motion in his hand but as that motion includes not extension so neither can its modifications. By one of these modifications he runs his hand against his nose. Some accidents of this kind would teach him the way to his nose and that it was something related unto him. That by a gentle motion of his hand towards it he might feel it and by a more violent motion he might hurt himself. In like manner he may find out other parts of his body and learn to conduct his hand to them.

Suppose then that by a long course of observation and reflection he hath learned to give names to the several parts of his face his nose his forehead brows eyes mouth lips chin and cheeks etc and that he can at pleasure move his hand to any one of them say that he can move one hand to one and another to another part at once. Let us no[w] consider what idea he can from all this Collect of his Face. It seems to be a vastly complex one Made up of an Effort of his hand variously modified as it passes over the severall [sic] parts of his face the feelings of the Swelling of the Muscles and Pleasures of the Joints in his hands and fingers the feelings of his face that correspond with these. When I endeavour to put all these together they Seem not to have the least Resemblance to my Idea of a Face.⁷

Nichols rightly notes that this manuscript goes beyond the considerations addressed in Reid’s published version of the thought experiment by considering the sort of

⁷ Quoted in Nichols (2007, 103–4). Nichols is to be credited with bringing this manuscript into the scholarly discussion of Reid’s *experimentum*.

simultaneous sensations the subject will have upon touching a part of his own body. The manuscript also grants that *a* conception of such qualities as motion and facial figure may be collected from sensations. This concession is bad news for the *experimentum* only on the stronger interpretation. The passage is, however, very nearly an explicit endorsement of the weaker interpretation: the question which interests Reid, here, is not whether the subject can form *a* conception of such qualities as motion and figure, but whether it can form *our* conception. His answer is unequivocal. The sensational conception of motion sketched here is not *our* conception of motion. For the descriptive content of our conception is not framed in terms of muscular (i.e., proprioceptive) sensations; it is framed in terms of extension and its modifications. The sensational conception of facial figure sketched in this passage is not our conception of that figure. Our conception is not framed in terms of the set of simultaneous (tactile and proprioceptive) sensations we have when we touch our face; it is framed in terms of the arrangements of the parts of an extended material thing. Put differently, the descriptive content of the conceptions of motion and figure recognized in this passage ultimately resolves into terms that are copied from sensations. Our direct conceptions of motion and figure are not similarly sensational. The question in the *experimentum* is whether our direct conceptions can be derived from sensations. Nothing Reid says in this passage suggests that they can.⁸

Of course, a defender of the ideal theory may argue that Reid is wrong about this. Like the sophisticated sensationalist, she may argue that our direct conceptions either are identical to or are derivable from the sensational conceptions of motion and figure Reid recognizes in these manuscripts. But like the sophisticated sensationalist, she will run up against the very plausible auxiliary hypotheses of the weaker interpretation. No sensational conception is our direct conception, unless extensional equivalence among conceptions is sufficient for equivalence *simpliciter*—and it is not. Our direct conceptions of motion and facial figure are not derivable from these sensational conceptions, either. For if they were so derivable, then it would be impossible for someone with the relevant sensational conceptions to lack our direct conception—and it is not. Someone with a complete complement of sensational conceptions of motion and facial figure cannot form the “least conjecture” as to whether the occasion of his sensations is “body or spirit, extended or unextended, figured or not figured” (65).

A complex set of simultaneous tactile sensations, then, does not undermine Reid's counterexamples any more than a sophisticated conditional relation among sensations does. Both show that the ideal system can form a relative, sensational conception of qualities like figure extension and motion. Neither shows that the ideal system can form our direct conceptions of these qualities. Our direct conceptions of extension, figure, and motion, then, remain counterexamples to the principles of the ideal system. Any argument against the material world based on these principles is indeed, as Reid claims, a “rope of sand.”

⁸ See Grandi (2008) for a similar assessment of Nichols' interpretation of the unpublished manuscript.

2

Thomas Reid on Instinctive Exertions and the Spatial Content of Sensations

Chris Lindsay

1 Introduction

One oft-challenged aspect of Reid's philosophy is his rejection of the claim that sensations possess spatial content; on his view, the properties of sensations are exhausted by their phenomenal character. Such a position, critics claim, fails to acknowledge the richness of the information acquired through sensation, particularly in relation to the way in which sensations can ground one's knowledge of the location of body parts and of the external qualities encountered in sense experience. Furthermore, Reid's position seems to require a rejection of the *prima facie* plausible claim that one can have qualitatively identical sensations in relation to numerically distinct body parts.

I claim that we can find the resources to address these concerns elsewhere in Reid's work. In his last great philosophical essay, 'Of Power', Reid makes the plausible claim that "our first exertions are instinctive" and made "without any distinct conception of the event that is to follow." According to Reid, these instinctive exertions allow us to form beliefs about correlations between exertions and consequential events. Such instinctive exertions also explain the origin of our conception of power. I argue that the supporter of Reid can use the notion of instinctive exertions to address the objections above while maintaining his claim that sensations are not presented to the subject as located in space.

2 Reid's Account of the Role of Instinctive Exertions in 'Of Power'

In 'Of Power', Reid notes that voluntary exertions entail a prior conception of the desired event; one must also believe that it is within one's power to bring about the

event and that the exertion is a feasible means of doing so.¹ For Reid, the exertion of the appropriate power is sufficient for the bringing about of the event: this is so irrespective of whether one knows that one possesses the power.

All that is necessary to the production of any effect, is power in an efficient cause to produce the effect, and the exertion of that power; for it is a contradiction to say, that the cause has power to produce the effect, and exerts that power, and yet the effect is not produced. The effect cannot be in his power unless all the means necessary to its production be in his power. (EAP IV ii, 203)

It is implicit in his account that there need be no guarantee of the success of the attempt (OP, 3): one can hope that the effort should succeed, but one's hopes can be dashed through the loss of the power or through an inadequate attempt to exercise it. That Reid accepts that one can attempt to exercise a power but fail is to be expected in light of his whole-hearted acceptance of the empirical facts of physiology:

The nerves are fine cords which pass from the brain, or from the spinal marrow, which is a production of the brain, to all parts of the body, dividing into smaller branches as they proceed, until at last they escape our eye-sight: And it is found by experience that all the voluntary and involuntary motions of the body are performed by their means. When the nerves that serve any limb, are cut, or tied hard, we have then no more power to move that limb than if it was no part of the body. (EIP II ii, 75)

Whether or not one's attempts to exert one's powers are efficacious is in part dependent upon the functioning of the body; should one suffer nerve damage of the sort described above, one's attempts are less likely to have the desired effect. That it is possible for one to believe that one is in possession of a power one lacks shows that there is no entailment from effort to event: "we perceive not any necessary connection between the volition and exertion on our part, and the motion of the body that follows them" (EAP I vii, 40).

In light of this, we can ask how one comes to know which powers one possesses and how one acquires a sense of which exertion is likely to be followed by the desired event. Knowing the extent of one's powers is a substantial cognitive achievement: not only should we admit the possibility that one can be mistaken about the range of powers currently in one's possession, we also require some account as to how one acquires such knowledge in the first place. These issues will provide the focus of this section and the following.

When discussing the origins of the conception of power in the opening paragraphs of 'Of Power', Reid rules out three potential accounts of the source of this conception. This is consistent with his commitment to broadly Newtonian principles of reasoning.² Agreeing with Hume, he notes that power "is not an object either of sense or

¹ See also the fourth of the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*: "An exertion made deliberately and voluntarily, in order to produce an effect, implies a conviction that the effect is in our power" (EAP IV ii, 204).

² See, for example, EIP I i, 17–39 and I iii, 47–52. Ryan Nichols questions the extent of Reid's commitment to Newtonian principles in Nichols (2007).

consciousness" (OP, 3); nor does he wish to accept that knowledge of the full range of one's powers and of the effects of exertions is innate.³ Instead of adopting any such position, Reid holds that it is through experience that we come to learn that we have the power to affect changes in the body and in the environment as well as the range of this power. Crucial to Reid's account of the process by which such knowledge is acquired is the notion of an *instinctive exertion*.

I am rather inclined to think that our first exertions are instinctive, without any distinct conception of the event that is to follow, consequently without will to produce that event. And that finding by experience that such exertions are followed by such events, we learn to make the exertion voluntarily and deliberately, as often as we desire to produce the event. And when we know or believe that the event depends upon our exertion, we have the conception of power in ourselves to produce that event. (OP, 3)

This passage is central to Reid's account; we will return to it frequently in the following. How it should be understood depends upon how we take the notion of an exertion. One intuitive reading is that newborns and younger infants are by nature active, not merely passive percipients: they flail about, move their heads and their eyes, and so on. That is to say, they are naturally inclined to form exertions, even though they are initially blind to the consequent effects of these.⁴ It is only once the child has substantial, repeated experience of the conjunctions of exertions and bodily movements that she comes to learn that certain exertions can bring about bodily movements of that sort. So a certain exertion might be followed by a particular movement of the left arm, another by a certain motion of the eyes. This reveals to the infant that she possesses the power to produce such events and, furthermore, the means by which she can do so; the infant is then in a position to form a conception of the desired event and attempt to bring it about at will.

An initial concern that stands in the way of this reading can be found in Reid's discussion of the possibility of exertion without will. Reid notes that these are so often found together, it can be difficult to separate them:

This account likewise supposes that an exertion is something different from a deliberate will to produce the event by that exertion, and that there may be exertion without will. It must be acknowledged that these two are so conjoined, when we have got some knowledge of the extent of our power, that we find it very difficult to distinguish them. (OP, 3–5)

The example that Reid provides in support of this possibility sits uncomfortably with the reading above.

³ See also EAP III i.ii, 78–88.

⁴ In the third of the *Essays on the Active Powers*, Reid characterizes instinct as follows: "By Instinct, I mean a natural blind impulse to certain actions, without having any end in view, without deliberation, and very often without any conception of what we do" (EAP III i.ii, 78). Physiological processes such as breathing and swallowing are given as examples of instinctive actions.

I will to walk for half an hour. The exertion immediately succeeds. During my walk, my thought is wholly occupied, on some other subject than the walk, so there is not a thought of it or will concerning it at present in my mind; yet the exertion of walking continues. In this instance there is exertion without will. (OP, 5)

The concern is that the exertion of walking sounds very much like the exercise of walking, rather than something that occurs prior to the exercise of the power.⁵ If this is what Reid intends, then the exertion cannot be the act of initiating the exercise of a power—walking, in this case—as it was in the above sketch of the role of instinctive exertions.

Taking the exertion to be more akin to the exercise of a power would leave us with a different story as to the role exertions play in one's coming to grasp the extent of one's powers. The new story would be that infants already possess an awareness of correlations holding between volitions and bodily movements: they are instinctively inclined to move their bodies, limbs, eyes, and so on, and the consequences of such bodily movements—what the child can achieve through them—are revealed through experience. Adapting Reid's passage accordingly would give us this picture: finding by experience that, for example, arm movements are followed by such events—the lifting of a cup, say—we learn to make the skilled movement voluntarily and deliberately, as often as we desire to lift a cup.

The substantive issue between these two readings is whether the infant has a prior grasp of the fact that she possesses any powers relating to her bodily movements prior to the performance of such motions: on this second reading, it would appear that she learns that she has the power to throw the TV remote across the room or torment the cat (this allowing the infant “to make the exertion voluntarily and deliberately” on future occasions), but she does not learn in this way how to move her limbs or eyes and perform other such basic actions—such knowledge is already in her possession.

In contrast, on the first reading, the infant learns not only such complex behaviours but also how to produce more rudimentary events, such as the moving of the eyes or of an arm. On this account, the exertions that are performed by instinct are truly blind: there is no conception of anything that is to follow. The ability to perform more sophisticated, directed actions would come at a later stage in the infant's development, after she has acquired the basic power to control her own bodily movements and has come to realize that further actions can be performed and goals achieved through the exercise of these rudimentary powers, where again such knowledge would only become available through experience.

One way to clarify the differing interpretations offered here is through the distinction Paul Hoffman draws between exertions_(A) and exertions_(E) (Hoffman 2006). Exertions_(A) are activations of powers—“activating or turning on a power such as the power to walk, analogous to throwing a switch”—whereas exertions_(E) are the

⁵ As Paul Hoffman notes (Hoffman 2006).

exercises of powers, “the action or activity that is analogous to the light’s going on, the exercise of that active power, which in the case of the power to walk just is walking” (432).

On the first reading above, the instinctive exertions mentioned are exertions_(A); the subject activates the power instinctively, without any prior expectations as to the resulting effect. The second reading has the infant establishing what she is capable of achieving through the instinctive activities, the exertions_(E), of which she is capable, where these activities are the exercises of existing, familiar powers, in just the same way that the power to walk is a power with which Reid is acquainted in the passage above.

Reid’s example of an exertion without will—the continued exercise of walking—does seem to lend some credence to the second reading. However, it also supports the distinction Hoffman finds between different varieties of exertion. As Hoffman notes in the passage above in which Reid provides us with the example, there appears to be some equivocation in the usage of the term ‘exertion.’ The first (“I will to walk for half an hour. The exertion immediately succeeds”), most plausibly mentions an exertion_(A). It concerns the instigation of an act of walking; the exertion is not the successful consequence of this activation of a power, it is the activation. The second occurrence of the term ‘exertion’ (“During my walk, my thought is wholly occupied, on some other subject than the walk, so there is not a thought of it or will concerning it at present in my mind; yet the exertion of walking continues”), which serves to pick out the actual exertion without will—the continued walking—is not an activation. Its referent is the exercise of the power that continues while Reid’s thoughts are turned to other matters. In other words, it concerns an exertion_(E). So while Reid’s example of an exertion without will does not provide unambiguous support for the first reading, the passage in which it appears clearly indicates that Reid admits more than one form of exertion into his system.

Of course, it might be plausible to suggest that when one acquires a new, complex ability—the ability to drive a car, the ability to swing a golf club—one does so by attending to the effects of exertions_(E) of powers with which one is already familiar, even when one does not quite know what the outcomes of these exertions will be. One can learn through trial and error, in other words. Nevertheless, it seems most plausible to hold that exertions_(A) are what Reid has in mind in his discussion of instinctive exertions in ‘Of Power.’ Reid’s primary concern in this section is not the acquisition of new skills: it is the origin of our conception of power. If one is already capable of attending to one’s exertions_(E), then one already possesses a conception of one’s active power. This can be seen in the above case of walking. Here active power has already been brought into play in the initial exertion: that this is a full-blooded exercise of active power is apparent from the presence of will. The continued exercise of walking, then, is not the kind of example to which Reid is referring when he introduces the suggestion that “our first exertions are instinctive” (OP, 3): such exertions are exertions_(A). That these are exertions_(A) is also consistent with Reid’s

claim that the immediate effects of the exercise of an active power are motions in one's body or directions in one's thought. It is by attending to the upshot of one's exertions_(A) that one comes to be aware of the events that one can bring about and comes to possess a conception of power.

Reid, therefore, holds that we learn the range of our abilities by instinctively forming exertions, where these are activations of powers, with no idea as to the basic, bodily movements that will follow. Once the movements have occurred, we are then in a position to identify correlations between exertion and movement, recognize the bodily movements as the effects of our exertions, and perform such actions whenever we choose.

3 Exertions and Sensations

If instinctive exertions can provide us with knowledge of the actions we are capable of performing, where these events include basic bodily movements, we can ask how they succeed in doing so. How do exertions serve to inform us of our capabilities? What is it that follows the exertions that enables the establishment of correlations between exertions and bodily movements?

A familiar—and very plausible answer—is that some form of experiential feedback is necessary if we are to be in a position to form correlations between exertions and consequent bodily events. If one's initial exertions are “instinctive, without any distinct conception of the event that is to follow,” then there must be some means by which one can become aware of whatever it is that happens to follow one's exertions. Without such feedback we would be blind as to whether our exertions brought about any effects—where this includes bodily movements—whatsoever and thus unable to learn how to cause such effects again in the future. This is not to deny that a mature individual can attempt to perform an action in the absence of perceptual feedback (when anaesthetized and blindfolded, for example), but this is only possible where the agent possesses prior knowledge of her possibilities for action (she already knows how to move her arms, and so forth).

Sensations play this role for Reid. They function as indicators of external properties; while sensations do not resemble the properties of which they inform us, they nevertheless ground our knowledge of the physical properties present. We are so constituted that certain sensations suggest certain properties to us; they are natural signs of external properties. Some of the accompanying perceptions are acquired, as illustrated by Reid's example of the taste of cider, but not all can be acquired through experience in this way:

Our perceptions are of two kinds: some are natural and original, others acquired, and the fruit of experience. When I perceive that this is the taste of cider . . . that this is the smell of an apple . . . these perceptions and others of the same kind, are not original, they are acquired. But the perception which I have by touch, of the hardness and softness of bodies, of their extension, figure and motion, is not acquired; it is original. (IHM VI xx, 171)

It is important to note that, for Reid, we cannot reason from the occurrence of sensations to the existence of external bodies or properties: there is no resemblance between sensations and external qualities that would facilitate such an inference and, given that we cannot even begin to deduce the physical bases of phenomenal qualities merely from their appearance, an inference to the best explanation is not possible (Buras 2009, 341). Neither can experience explain the association of signs and properties; we do not have independent access to the latter.

That sensations do not resemble the properties of bodies is a central tenet of Reid's theory and crucial to his attack on the way of ideas; it is a central plank of his account of perception. That this is so is made clear by his *experimentum crucis*:

This I would therefore humbly propose, as an *experimentum crucis*, by which the ideal system must stand or fall; and it brings the matter to a short issue: Extension, figure, motion, may, any one, or all of them, be taken for the subject of this experiment. Either they are ideas of sensation, or they are not. If any one of them can be shewn to be an idea of sensation, or to have the least resemblance to any sensation, I lay my hand upon my mouth, and give up all pretence to reconcile reason to common sense in this matter, and must suffer the ideal scepticism to triumph. But if, on the other hand, they are not ideas of sensation, nor like to any sensation, then the ideal system is a rope of sand, and all the laboured arguments of the sceptical philosophy against a material world, and against the existence of every thing but impressions and ideas, proceed upon a false hypothesis. (IHM V vii, 70)

Despite this lack of resemblance between sensations and physical properties, it is plausible to suggest that on Reid's account it is through the sensations that accompany our exertions that we come to learn how to repeat bodily movements: we find an exertion to be accompanied by a particular sensation that acts as a natural sign of the relevant external, bodily property. I do not mean here to take a position on whether Reid holds that sensations are an essential ingredient of the perceptual process, standing between the surface impacts and physiological processes on the one hand and conception and belief—the essential components of perception for Reid—on the other, or whether they are a coincidental accompaniment of conception and belief (perception's "faithful sidekick," as Todd Buras puts it (Buras 2009, 332)). That sensations as a matter of fact play a role in bodily awareness seems an independently plausible claim; sensations of touch, as well as kinaesthetic and proprioceptive sensations, serve to give us access to one's current bodily disposition in space. That Reid's account is consistent with this can only increase its plausibility.

4 Some Concerns Relating to the Location of Sensations

Famously—notoriously—Reid holds that sensations do not have intrinsic spatial content; their properties are exhausted by their phenomenal character.⁶ While a sensation

⁶ See, e.g., EIP II xviii, 211–17.

of touch might seem to appear to us as located in the tip of the right index finger or in the sole of the left foot, sensations properly understood are not located in space and do not contain such information. This is not, of course, to say that knowledge of physical properties and their locations, where this includes properties of one's body, is not grounded in awareness of sensations: sensations inform us of the presence of external properties and of states of the body due to fundamental principles of human nature—our constitution—that serve to connect sensations with properties and body-relative locations (distal locations in the case of sight, smell, and audition, proximal locations in the case of touch and taste). Certain sensations are natural signs of external properties, and it is through such sensations that we come to be aware of the presence of these properties. The intimate relationship between sensations and locations is a result of our nature and not indicative of any intrinsic spatial content:

[W]hen we consider the sensation of pain by itself, without any respect to its cause, we cannot say with propriety, that the toe is either the place, or the subject of it. (EIP II xviii, 213)

It is only the accompanying perception—the conception and belief—that concerns the cause of the sensation; as these always accompany the sensation, we are inclined to mistakenly ascribe the location to the sensation rather than to the cause. Reid goes so far as to state that someone who, through a failure in his constitution, lacked any grasp of the relevant natural signs could confuse the location of the cause of a pain:

How do we know the parts of our bodies affected by particular pains? Not by experience or by reasoning, but by the constitution of nature. The sensation of pain is, no doubt, in the mind, and cannot be said to have any relation, from its own nature, to any part of the body: but this sensation, by our constitution, gives a perception of some particular part of the body, whose disorder causes the uneasy sensation. If it were not so, a man who never before felt either the gout or the toothach, when he is first seized by the gout in his toe, might mistake it for toothach. (IHM VI xii, 125)

This gives rise to three related worries. The first is that sensations as Reid construes them seem ill-equipped to convey the rich amount of information that sensations as a matter of fact do convey. The second worry is that Reid provides us with a poor account of the content and phenomenology of bodily sensation with regard to the perceived location of sensations and their causes. Finally, there is the objection that Reid fails to allow for the possibility of qualitatively identical sensations pertaining to different locations upon one's body.

The first concern relates to an objection that has been raised by Michael Martin (Martin 1995). Briefly, it is the thought that Reid's account of sensations, by dint of the fact that they are mental items with purely phenomenal intrinsic properties, seems inadequate to act simultaneously as natural signs of two distinct sets of properties: those properties of external objects that are causally affecting one's sense organs, and the properties of our own bodies (specifically, the present disposition of the relevant sense organs). While sensations of toothache or gout might be thought to inform us

only of the states of parts of one's body, other sensations—such as those of touch—inform us of both the presence and location of the instance of hardness and the current disposition of the hand that is in contact with the hard object.

In the context of a discussion of the phenomenology of tactual experience, Martin claims:

Reid's interpretation of the phenomenology does not seem to be the correct one. When one attends to the object felt, one is aware of various properties of the object—its surface texture, how solid it is, and its general shape—and one is aware of the object “out there” . . . in shifting one's attention [to the sensation], one is not moving from the external physical world to introspective attention of the inner, mental world. Rather, one is shifting one's attention from objects that lie outside of one's boundaries . . . to what is going on at or beneath that bodily boundary (Martin 1995, 270).

On Martin's account, when one shifts one's attention from the property of the external object to the sensation, one is actually shifting one's attention to the properties of one's sense organ and not to a purely phenomenal mental item, as Reid would have it. Martin's understanding of Reid is certainly correct: that Reid takes the attentional shift from external property to sensation to constitute a shift from perception to the introspective awareness of a “sensation of the mind” is explicit in the discussion of extension in chapter 5 of the *Inquiry*, and can be seen from the following passage:

Pressing my hand with force against the table, I feel pain, and I feel the table to be hard. The pain is a sensation of the mind, and there is nothing that resembles it in the table. The hardness is in the table, nor is there any thing resembling it in the mind. . . . I touch the table gently with my hand, and I feel it to be smooth, hard, and cold. These are qualities of the table perceived by touch; but I perceive them by means of a sensation which indicates them. This sensation not being painful, I commonly give no attention to it. It carries my thought immediately to the thing signified by it, and is itself forgot, as if it had never been. But by repeating it, and turning my attention to it, and abstracting my thought from the thing signified by it, I find it to be merely a sensation, and that it has no similitude to the hardness, smoothness, or coldness of the table which are signified by it. (EIP II xvi, 195–6)

By turning one's attention away from the properties of the object signified by the sensation to the sensation itself, one is attending to the private mental activity, not to the properties of one's hand (that a particular part of one's skin is flattened and distended, that the fingers are grouped thus, and so on). This looks problematic in that the account of the phenomenology of touch offered by Martin is independently plausible: in turning one's attention away from the external property to the sensation, one can come to focus on the state of one's sense organ rather than a mental, purely phenomenal item. Sensations can inform one of both sets of properties, those of the external object and those of one's body.

One line of response to Martin's criticism is to question whether it is the same sensation that informs the subject of both external and bodily properties. Must Reid concur with Martin on this point? The obvious counter to this is that different

sensations act as signs of the distinct properties: one sensation acts to inform us of the presence of the external property of hardness, another of the bodily event of the flattening of the skin. Reid says little by way of addressing the matter of whether one's awareness is constituted by one sensation pointing in two directions, or two sensations co-existing; this topic is passed over in the crucial discussions in both the *Inquiry* and the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*. Furthermore, there are good reasons for avoiding such a line of reply: the claim that there are two sensations present, one of which informs the subject of the presence of hardness, the other informing her of the flattening of the surface of the skin, appears profligate and phenomenologically problematic, in that it is difficult to conceive of one putative sensation existing in the absence of the other. It is far from obvious that one could experience an object as hard while not experiencing the skin as distended; conversely, when one's skin feels flattened (due to an extended period of leaning against a surface, for example), one has the illusory experience as of pressing against something hard. If we can avoid attributing a position that requires the multiplication of sensations to Reid, then so much the better for his account.⁷

The second issue concerns a feature of all sensations, not just those that signify properties of external objects; namely, that they present either themselves or the property signified as located at a particular point relative to the body.⁸ Falkenstein and Martin both raise this concern, the former in relation to the following well-known passage:

If a man runs his head with violence against a pillar, I appeal to him whether the pain he feels resembles the hardness of the stone, or if he can conceive anything like what he feels to be in an inanimate piece of matter. The attention of the mind is here entirely turned towards the painful feeling; and, to speak in the common language of mankind, he feels nothing in the stone, but feels a violent pain in his head. It is quite otherwise when he leans his head gently against the pillar; for then he will tell you that he feels nothing in his head but hardness in the stone.

(IHM V ii, 56)

He claims that sensations serve to locate the property signified relative to the body and to other properties impacting upon one's body:

Reid describes me resting my head against a pillar and forming the belief in the present existence of a body with parts that resist relative motion. But surely I do more than that. I also form the belief that this body is pressing against my head rather than, say, my foot. And I localize the hardness relative to other hard, soft, rough, smooth, figured, and movable objects I may be feeling at the same time. (Falkenstein 2000, 315)

⁷ Similar considerations concerning profligacy warrant the rejection of the implausible position that there are unique sensations acting as natural signs for all possible combinations of external property plus body part. While such a theory could explain one's ability to locate both one's body parts and the causes of sensations, it would come at the cost of multiplying natural signs exponentially and downgrading what is in fact a substantial cognitive achievement.

⁸ I will not take a position here on whether it is the sensation or the property that appears to be located.

Sensations, to expand on Falkenstein's comment, present properties to us as located near to or far from the other sensations (if one believes, contra Reid, that sensations are presented as spatially located) and signified properties that we experience as a matter of course, either with respect to the surface of the skin (in which case one might hold that sensations of touch occur in a two-dimensional manifold) or in relation to the body-image or to the body itself (in which case one might favour the suggestion that they are presented in a three-dimensional space). While sensations such as pains can convey vague or indeterminate information about location (e.g., an itch can present itself as being somewhere on the back without a precise location), it is inconceivable that one can experience a pain or an itch that is not localized at all. The suggestion that sensations lack spatial content and are distinct from beliefs about the locations of their causes is not a *prima facie* plausible view. The second worry is, accordingly, that Reid provides us with a poor account of the content and phenomenology of bodily sensation. Martin criticizes Reid on just this point:

Thomas Reid, in his discussion of touch in the *Inquiry*, noted that in tactual perception there were two elements to which a perceiver could attend: a subjective sensation internal to the mind, and an objective perception of the properties of the felt object. . . . However, where Reid surely goes wrong is in describing this sensation as nothing more than a subjective sign, internal to the mind, to be contrasted with full-blown perception. For the sensation one feels in one's fingertip has as much claim to be concerned with a feature of the objective world as does one's tactual perception. The sensation itself has a felt location, and that is not some metaphorical location 'internal to the mind'—it is felt to be at some location internal to one's body.

(Martin 1992, 204)

In separate papers, Michael Martin and Bill Brewer have advocated accounts of bodily awareness that treat sensation as a form of perception, part of the content of which concerns information about the spatial location of the sensation (Martin 1995; Brewer 1995). Both accounts build upon Brian O'Shaughnessy's highly influential work on sensations and the body image (O'Shaughnessy 1980).

Martin's account accommodates the claim that sensations of bodily contact point in two directions by recognizing the fact that touch is a proximal sense: it is the sense that occurs at the body–world boundary. In such experience, we acquire information about what lies on either side of this boundary, both the spatially located property or properties that one is in contact with and the state and location of the body part at the point of contact. Contra Reid, such sensations are intrinsically spatial in nature according to Martin.

Brewer's account is even more explicitly troublesome for Reid in that he attempts to utilize the spatial content of sensation in order to provide an argument against dualist theories of mind: while his primary target is the Cartesian, the argument applies equally to Reid's form of dualism. While we can leave aside the details of his argument in the present context, his conclusion is that the "psychological subject is a spatially extended object" (303). He takes this to follow from the fact that sensations have intrinsic spatial content: following O'Shaughnessy, this content is "not just feeling, not

just feeling-in-a-certain-body-part, but *feeling-in-a-certain-body-part-at-a-position-in-body-relative-physical-space*” (O’Shaughnessy 1980, 165; quoted in Brewer 1995, 300). For Brewer, the object of bodily awareness is both spatial and psychological, and sensations are intrinsically spatial.

Both Brewer and Falkenstein object to one consequence of Reid’s denial of spatial content to sensations: if sensations cannot be distinguished in terms of their spatial location, they have to be distinguished in terms of a phenomenal difference, but, on their views, it is highly implausible to suggest that a burning pain on the back of the right hand is qualitatively different from a burning pain on the back of the left hand (Brewer 1995, 298; Falkenstein 2000, 317). Both Brewer and Falkenstein hold that such pains could be qualitatively or phenomenally identical; the only difference is the spatial location (the location within a body part in wider physical space). If this is so, then Reid’s characterization of sensation is fundamentally flawed.

The suggestion that certain sensations relating to different body parts can be qualitatively identical raises a further worry in light of the preceding considerations. If one does not have an innate, prior awareness of correlations between exertions and bodily movements (as Reid explicitly states in ‘Of Power’), and sensations are the means one possesses for the establishment of such correlations, then the existence of such indiscernible sensations would seem to undermine one’s ability to establish such correlations, at least in relation to those body parts.

Falkenstein notes that Reid does touch upon the localization of sensations, commenting that “the only hint he gives of how he might answer the question [of how we localize different tactile sensations or their associated objects] has to be gleaned from a passing remark in the [*Inquiry*’s] chapter on vision” (316). In this passage Reid states that a sensation of pain, “by our constitution, gives a perception of some particular part of the body, whose disorder causes the uneasy suggestion” (IHM VI xii, 125). However, if we are open to the possibility of indiscernible sensations, it is clear that this fails to provide a satisfactory answer to any of the concerns mentioned above.

In the following section, I will try to show that we can find in Reid’s writings the makings of a plausible response to these concerns. Central to this proposal are the instinctive exertions discussed in ‘Of Power’.

5 A Proposed Line of Response to these Worries

I suggest that any attempt to defend Reid against these charges has to meet two challenges. Firstly, it has to be shown that Reid’s claim that sensations can act as natural signs of external qualities is tenable in the face of the charge that certain sensations relating to different body parts can be qualitatively indistinguishable; this is required if we are to remain faithful to Reid’s explicit account of the nature and role of sensations. Secondly, we have to provide some account of how such sensations, despite lacking any inherent spatial content, can ground our knowledge of the spatial locations of physical qualities and objects, crucially including those properties relating to the current spatial

disposition of the object that is one's body. Knowledge of the spatiality of one's own body and of its possibilities for action is a substantial cognitive feat: how can Reid account for this?

Before addressing this issue, we should note one phenomenal feature of sensations in relation to Martin's objection that, in cases of touch, when one shifts one's attention from the external quality to the sensation, one comes to attend to the properties of one's body, not a mental item. While Martin is undoubtedly correct that this attentional shift is possible (and common), he downplays the fact that, as Reid states, one can attend to the purely phenomenal character of the sensation. This shift is less common (as we are less concerned with the phenomenal character of sensations than we are the state of our bodies) but is nevertheless familiar to those concerned with pure appearances, such as artists and the like. Reid's claim that focusing on the phenomenal character stands in contrast to attending to the external property causing the sensation is correct; still, he has to be able to explain the third possible object of attention, the bodily organ, as Martin emphasizes.

I think that the first step a supporter of Reid has to take is to deny Brewer's and Falkenstein's claim that there need be no phenomenal difference between distinct sensations pertaining to different body parts—an itch relating to the centre of the back of the left hand and an itch relating to the equivalent spot on the right hand, for example. The worry, recall, was that if sensations are not phenomenally distinguishable, then they cannot play the role Reid ascribes to them, in that they will be unable to act as signs of specific body parts, as they clearly do. One way of defusing this concern would be to claim that even if the sensations are phenomenally identical, the fact that different parts of the nervous system transmit the information about the causes of sensation could facilitate discrimination between them at a subpersonal level, and that this could ground the subject's knowledge of the spatial location of body parts and external properties. For example, it could be argued that beliefs about the locations of sensations or their causes are not based in the qualitative character of the sensations but are non-inferentially caused by such subpersonal processing. So, my knowledge that it is my left rather than right ear that is being brushed by a hair is not grounded in the sensation I am currently experiencing but is the direct result of non-conscious events within the nervous system and brain.

To offer a response of this sort on Reid's behalf, however, would be to move significantly from his explicit view on the role of sensations. While it is unquestionable that impacts on the sense organs and subsequent events within the nervous system play a crucial, if not wholly understood, role within the perceptual process, to take the line that such processes are solely responsible for one's locating external properties would be to deny sensations any role whatsoever in this process. If we can find another way of resolving these worries that is more in keeping with Reid's stated position, then we should do so.

So, are there grounds for rejecting the suggestion that there is no clear phenomenal difference between sensations in the left hand and those in the right? There are two

points that we can note at this juncture. Firstly, sensations are sensitive to physical differences in their causes: different physical properties will bring about different sensations in subjects. While Reid does not discuss how fine-grained the tracking of bodily and external properties by sensations is, it is reasonable to assume that he would agree that differences between one's hands could manifest themselves in the corresponding sensations. That there are such differences is unquestionable: while we can admit the logical possibility of qualitatively identical body parts, differing only in spatial properties, this is not the case in nature. Patterns of veins and hairs, size, the relative lengths of fingers, one's muscular development, fingerprints, scratches, and cuts: these all vary between hands. If such differences manifest themselves in sensations, however slightly, then the physical possibility of qualitatively indistinguishable sensations begins to seem vanishingly small. A burning pain on the back of the left hand will be similar to a burning pain on the back of the right hand, but minor differences are almost certain.

The second point to note is that individual sensations rarely appear in isolation: the sensation of a burning pain in most cases will be accompanied by sensations corresponding to hand position and posture, external properties in contact with the hand or arm, and so on.⁹ A sensation on the left hand is likely to be accompanied by a different cluster of sensations from that which accompanies a sensation on the right hand. That this is so, however, should not suggest to us that by itself it can constitute a response to the problem of locating indiscernible sensations. To assume this would be to fail to recognize that we are not yet in a position where we can claim that the co-occurrence of sensations is, in many cases, indicative of their clumping together spatially. The possibility of an inferential move of this sort is part of what is at stake. Nevertheless, it can play a part in a Reidian response to this issue.

Consider an infant producing an instinctive exertion_(A) without any sense of what event might follow. The event—a bodily movement—occurs, and the infant undergoes sensations corresponding to the event. These sensations act as natural signs of any properties present and, presumably, of the bodily motions that occur. Such sensations are rarely, if ever, single in cases of action; the complexity of any self-directed action will involve the movement and control of different sets of muscles. If there are any differences between the sets of sensations in similar actions associated with different sides of the body, then this will be adequate to ground the correlations between sensations and signified that Reid requires. Even if some of the sensations are near-indiscernible from ones relating to the other side of the body, the presence of unambiguously unique sensations will allow the infant to group these sensations together as pertaining to the same part of the body. At the most basic level, what facilitates the establishment of these correlations is the uniqueness of the instinctive

⁹ While we might be inclined to draw attention to the role of proprioceptive sensations here, we should note that Reid—unsurprisingly—does not, restricting his attention to the traditional five senses. For a recent discussion of the individuation of the senses, see the Introduction to Macpherson (2011).

exertions_(A) generated by the infant. These allow for the clustering of sensations: an instinctive exertion_(A) corresponding to a movement of the left arm might cause sensations acting as signs of the flexing of the arm, of hardness against the upper forearm, of heat towards the end of the arm, and the like.

Instinctive exertions_(A), that is to say, enable the subject to establish correlations between unique exertions and equally unique sensations. In the brief account given in ‘Of Power,’ Reid notes that infants produce such exertions “without any distinct conception of the event that is to follow, . . . without will”. In the “strict philosophical sense” these are not actions of a human; there is no conception or deliberate intention present (EAP III i.i, 74). Reid classifies the actions—behaviour might be more appropriate—of instinct as the result of a mechanical principle of action. They are the result of “blind impulse.” Such instinctual behaviours allow the infant to learn through experience that certain exertions are followed by certain sensations. Repeated experience of such pairings gives rise to the expectation that such sensations will follow the relevant exertions in the future.¹⁰ Were these sensations unambiguously unique, then they would be in a position to act as natural signs of physical effects—bodily movements—without any ambiguity as to whether the sensation is a sign of a movement of the left arm or a movement of the right arm (or whatever). In other words, the subject will be in a position to develop an awareness of the effects of his exertions in just the way Reid describes.

By playing such a role in Reid’s system, instinctive exertions are well placed to assist with an answer to the other issue noted above, the matter of how sensations come to inform one of the current disposition of one’s body and of one’s possibilities for action. Once the subject has come to be aware of just what it is that the sensations act as natural signs of, he has acquired “the conception of power in [himself] to produce that event.” If nature has equipped the subject with the appropriate range of signs, then, given that the signs are of bodily movements and the powers are powers to produce these bodily movements, this is equivalent to the claim that the subject has acquired a grasp of his possibilities for action. Through the pairing of instinctive exertions with sensations, the subject has acquired a sense of the range of actions available to him and of how to go about producing these. Exertions are mapped onto bodily movements by this instinctive process, in a way that enables him to repeat the actions when he desires. It is through this mapping that non-spatial exertions become associated with spatial bodily movements.

What about knowledge of one’s current disposition in space? This is different from a grasp of one’s powers; with some qualifications, one could know how to move one’s arm without knowing its present position with regard to the rest of one’s body. Some account of knowledge of the way in which the body is disposed in space is required

¹⁰ “Another instance of belief which appears to be instinctive, is that which children shew even in infancy, that an event which they have observed in certain circumstances, will happen again in like circumstances” (EAP III i.ii, 87).

if Reid is to successfully account for all the features Brewer and Martin note without assigning locations to sensations. One's memory of recent movements, combined with the awareness of external properties existing at one's boundaries—the feel of hardness against the palm of one's hand, the feel of the softness of one's side against one's inner arm—provides one with a sense of one's current arrangement in space. This is consistent with the fact that one loses track of one's current posture (more specifically, joint position) if one is prevented from moving for even a relatively short period of time (Marcel 2003).

As noted above, Martin and Brewer account for the spatial content of sensation by reference to the possession of a body image; sensations are presented to one as occurring within a space defined by this image. On this account, sensations and instinctive exertions are prior to spatial awareness: they facilitate it. That is to say, instinctive exertions, through their connection with natural signs for bodily movements and states, allow one to build up a body image, when this is construed as a grasp of the structure of one's body and one's possibilities for action. Consistent with Reid's view of sensations, this body image does not come at the level of sensation, though, but at the level of perception. Sensations do not appear to us as located relative to this—only actual body parts and movements have spatial location.

It is not enough, though, to say that sensations precede spatial awareness in this way, even if it is both plausible and in keeping with Reid's explicit claims. We need an account of how sensations of touch get their apparent spatial location. An account of this is required in order to accommodate the fact that we locate instances of hardness, as noted by the objections to Reid from Martin and Falkenstein outlined above. One possible answer to this is that it is through their association with the actual locations of the body parts involved: we locate these by reference to the body image generated by sensations and instinctive exertions. Subjects—primarily philosophers—confuse their knowledge of the location of their body parts—say, the left hand—delivered through the body image with the non-spatially located sensations associated with those body parts. This is consistent with Reid's discussion of the apparent location of pain in the *Intellectual Powers*, in which he attributes such errors to the philosopher drawing out of everyday usage “a sense that was never meant” (EIP II xviii, 213). This can also explain the similarities between, say, an itch or a pain pertaining to the back of the left hand and a similar sensation pertaining to the back of the right hand. The physiological processes are similar in each case, but each sensation is connected to different motor responses: the itch on the left hand will involve an inclination to scratch it with the right hand, and so on.

We can also use this to explain Martin's point that we can turn our attention from the external property to what is going on at the boundary of the skin, rather than the pure sensation. Once the subject has constructed a body image from her awareness of exertion-sensation pairings, she can attend to the locations of the causes of the sensations. As noted above, there is no conflict between this and Reid's claim that the attentional switch is from external property to mental sensation.

6 Concluding Remarks

Instinctive exertions are central on this account. As we saw at the start of this essay, Reid allows that we do not know the effects of our exertions prior to their exercise. We cannot reason from the effort to the effect—“we perceive not any necessary connection between the volition and exertion on our part, and the motion of the body that follows them” (EAP I vii, 40)—nor would experience alone be sufficient in the absence of natural signs. The approach outlined here accommodates Reid’s claims while giving a primary place to one’s activities—surely something to which a follower of Reid should be sympathetic. It does so without any commitment to the claim that we come into this world with a prior grasp of our possibilities for action (as Reid notes in ‘Of Power’) and without being unnecessarily profligate on the matter of natural signs.

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3

Perceptual and Imaginative Conception

The Distinction Reid Missed

Marina Folescu

1 Introduction

Conception has a prominent role to play in Thomas Reid's philosophy of mind, as is apparent from his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. The present investigation concerns Reid's explanation of how objects (be they real or non-existent) are conceived. According to him, conception functions in two different ways: it is either an ingredient in another act of thinking, such as perception or memory, or it is exercised by itself, sometimes about objects that do not (and will never) exist. Fictional objects can be remembered, but to do so the mind needs an initial, independent grip on them, which can only be achieved by an exercise of "bare conception."¹

This essay shows that there is a deep-rooted tension in Reid's understanding of conception: although the type of conception employed in perception is closely related to the one employed in imagination, three fundamental features distinguish *perceptual conception* (as the former will be referred to throughout this essay) from *imaginative conception* (as the latter will be called henceforth).² These features would have been ascribed by Reid himself to conception as involved in perception, but not to conception as involved in imagination. He should have recognized them as marking the former as a different kind from the latter, and he should not have hastily lumped

¹ These two ways of employing conception are discussed by Reid in EIP I i, 24 (lines 19–22; 29–33), and especially in EIP IV i, 295–6.

² Reid argues that imagination, "when it is distinguished from conception," is a species of conception, namely the one that can be employed about visible objects (EIP IV i, 306). It may be a bit misleading to call the second type of conception 'imaginative conception.' The use of this label should, however, highlight the related, but different structures of perception and imagination. For a perceptual experience to take place, two necessary conditions must be satisfied: the perceiver must conceive the object and have an irresistible belief in the existence of the object perceived. By contrast, only one of these conditions is necessary for imagination: the imaginer must conceive a certain object, without regard to its existence.

perceptual and imaginative conceptions together.³ As we shall see, some of the things that Reid says show him to be at best undecided, and at worst, inconsistent. A fair portion of this essay is dedicated to showing that, by giving up some of the claims Reid makes, primarily his idea that the conception involved in perception is identical with conception involved in imagination, the more important and forward-thinking aspects of his project can be salvaged. To do this, let us first see what are the dimensions along which this distinction should be drawn.

The first and most important distinguishing trait concerns the fact that perceptual conception of bodies does not essentially proceed by way of concepts. A child who does not possess the concept “red” will be able to perceive a certain red object as it is, namely red. If perceptual conception were propositional and if it were, as Reid thinks, an essential ingredient in any perceptual experience, the child would not be able to perceive the red object accurately, unless he had the concept “red” in his conceptual repertoire. Later in this essay, a more detailed explanation will show why considerations like this weigh in favor of thinking that perceptual conception is non-conceptual or non-propositional. What has been said so far, however, should be enough to make apparent the contrast with imaginative conception. According to Reid, to imagine something one must combine different attributes with which one was previously acquainted. To be able to do so, one must think of a specific color, a specific size, shape, etc., put together in a certain way. This would not be possible if the imaginer did not possess the respective concepts. In this sense, imaginative conception is conceptual or propositional.

Second, the substances of which we have a relative notion in perception are complete objects. By contrast, most of the objects of imagination are incomplete. This is a consequence of how these objects are “given” to us: the power of imagination combines several qualities together, but there is no requirement that in doing so imagination will completely specify all the qualities had by such an object. For instance, very rarely an imaginer will wonder what is the color of the stomach of a particular imagined centaur. If one does so wonder, one can imagine it being a vivid shade of purple, if one so decides. However, whether to undergo such an act of imagination or not is entirely open to that imaginer. This issue is not already settled, as it is in the case of a particular existing horse. The point here is that perception is always about complete objects, while imagination is about, at most, completable, but incomplete objects. The nature of the objects conceived on a given occasion makes a difference for what type of conception one employs.

³ If the conception involved in perception were nothing more than imagination, as Reid mistakenly thought (e.g., EIP I i, 25), perception would turn out to be an overly intellectualized process. This is not only empirically contradicted by the fact that small children, and animals of all kinds can perceive, but it is also contradicted by what Reid thinks to be the case: he argues that brutes and infants do perceive, just like mature human agents do. The fact that Reid is aware of this issue, which received empirical support only in the late twentieth century, is very forward-thinking.

Third, perceptual conception makes salient properties from the substance to which those qualities belong, whereas imaginative conception bestows properties on the imagined incomplete object.

The starting point for establishing the fundamental distinction between perceptual and imaginative conception is Reid's characterization of perception in EIP. The next section will explain how conception functions, when it is an ingredient in perception. A good way of understanding perceptual conception is to liken it to the relation of 'having in mind,' discussed in Donnellan (1997). This explanation provides a richer context for developing the other two distinguishing features of perceptual conception.

Section 3 discusses Essay IV of EIP, where Reid characterizes the power of conception and imagination. The explanation of how imaginative conception operates is based on the following model: the mind starts by considering a certain set of properties and then orients itself towards an object that is supposed to uniquely correspond to that set. In the course of defending this thesis, the contrast between the two kinds of conception will fully emerge: while perceptual conception makes salient some of the properties had by the complete perceived object, imaginative conception works by 'creating' an imagined incomplete object.

2 Perceptual Conception

According to Reid, when one conceives a material substance, as part of a perceptual experience, one does not classify or subsume that body under concepts. He argues that conception proper is not propositional, and that it implies no judgment about what is conceived:

Thus we see that the words *conceive*, *imagine*, *apprehend* have two meanings, and are used to express two operations of the mind, which ought never to be confounded. Sometimes they express simple apprehension, which implies no judgment at all; sometimes they express judgment or opinion. . . . "I conceive an Egyptian pyramid." This implies no judgment. . . . the thing conceived [the Egyptian pyramid] may be no proposition, but a simple term only, as a pyramid, an obelisk. (EIP I i, 25)

The interpretation offered here takes this idea one step further: not only is conception proper not propositional, in the sense that it does not affirm or deny anything of the object conceived, but, when employed in perception, it is not even conceptual. A mental counterpart of the term "Egyptian pyramid" is not necessary in order for someone to perceive such a pyramid, when in its presence. One might possess such a concept, and one might use it when one sees a pyramid, but perception may occur in its absence. In other words, propositional concept-attribution may be deployed alongside perception, but this is neither necessary for perception, nor is it the result of the way the material substance is conceived. Rather, the concepts deployed in perception may belong to other operations of our minds (e.g., judging), occurring at the same time as perceptual conception. Reid's writings support this idea by indicating that perception

(much like other operations of the mind) never occurs in isolation and that we must pay special attention to distinguish what is specific to perception from other faculties. The following two passages back up this interpretation:

Most of the operations of the mind, that have names in common language, are complex in their nature, and made up of various ingredients, or more simple acts; which, though conjoined in our constitution, must be disjoined by abstraction, in order to our having a distinct and scientific notion of the complex operation. (EIP I i, 37)

This observation is made here only, that we may not confound the operations of different powers of the mind, which, by being always conjoined after we grow up to understanding, are apt to pass for one and the same. (EIP II v, 97)

Section 2.1 starts with a discussion of some of the secondary literature on Reidian perception, where the consensus seems to be that perception of bodies does take place, but that the conception associated with perception of bodies is necessarily conceptual. An objection to this view will be raised and an alternative interpretation will be offered, arguing that, given some cases that Reid himself discusses, Reidian perceptual conception of bodies must be non-conceptual. This discussion leaves out perception of qualities, which has its own special conditions, different from those necessary for the perception of bodies. In section 2.2, the other two features distinguishing perceptual from imaginative conception are discussed in order to emphasize why Reid should be understood as saying that substances are complete objects and that perceptual conception works in making qualities of substances salient to the mind.

2.1 *The non-conceptual character of perceptual conception*

In perception, we learn that the world is populated with objects and also what kind of objects they are.⁴ There are two sides to any perceptual experience: one ‘physical’; the other one ‘mental.’ The former is determined by the impression that the object perceived makes on the perceiver’s organs of sense, the nerves and the brain. The latter relates to the operation and the content of perception, understood as a faculty of our mind.

Concerning the physical side, no perceptual experience can occur in the absence of an impression made by the object on a certain organ of sense (EIP II ii, 74). These impressions correspond “exactly to the nature and conditions of the objects by which they are made,” whereas our sensations and perceptions correspond only in a varying degree to these impressions (EIP II ii, 76). This gives us a first characterization of perception: it is not only direct, but also, for lack of a better term, ‘objectively’ perspectival. Our perception depends on the “medium which passes between the object and the organ” (EIP II ii, 74). This medium is also responsible for making our

⁴ As Copenhaver (2006, 282) rightly observes, one of the crucial distinctions that Reid draws is between sensation and perception: the sensation that accompanies every perceptual experience supplies the “what-its-like” feature of which we are aware when we perceive something, whereas perception proper is constituted by a representational content, meant to give us knowledge about the world around us.

perception more or less distinct. A perceptual experience always gives us information about an object perceived under certain conditions, which, in the case of visual perception, include but are not restricted to: light, distance, position. These conditions constitute the aforementioned perspective: it matters for how somebody perceives a chair whether he sees it in broad daylight or at dusk, or whether he sees it from three feet or from ten:

The objects in this room will be seen by a person in the room less and less distinctly as the light of the day fails; they pass through all the various degrees of distinctness according to the degrees of the light, and at last, in total darkness, they are not seen at all. (EIP II v, 97)

The way this objective perspective contributes to how something is perceived is significant for the distinction between perceptual and imaginative conception. Perceptual conception is always of the object as it is presented there and then to the perceiver. By contrast, imaginative conception has more to do with how the conceiver puts together certain qualities the object conceived is thought to have. The imaginer, as opposed to the perceiver, is entirely responsible for supplying a given 'subjective' perspective, from which the object is imagined.

Reid characterizes the mental side of perception as having the following key ingredients: a conception of the object perceived, and an irresistible and immediate belief of its existence (EIP II v, 96).⁵ Perceptual conception presents the object to the perceiver, while the belief allows the perceiver to assert that the object exists. To see how everything works together, let us take as an example an instance of visual perception (this is just for heuristic purposes; an instance of any type of perception, in any of the perceptual sense-modalities, would work just as well). Suppose that someone sees a chair. This means, first, that the chair in question must exist. Second, a certain impression on the perceiver's organ(s) of sight must be present. Third, this impression must give rise to a visual sensation, which prompts the perceiver to perceptually conceive of the object and believe in its (present) existence, in the place and in the position it is perceived to be.

To paint a complete picture of how perception works, we must understand what it is that we perceive when we see, for instance, a chair. The most straightforward reading of the passage in which Reid gives his official characterization of perception (EIP II v, 96) indicates that when we see a chair, we perceive the chair, and not just some of its qualities. A perceiver sees the chair with its qualities, but he does not see qualities

⁵ According to Copenhaver (2010, 291) the belief component of a perceptual experience has the role of supplying the perceiver with information regarding what type of object he is currently perceiving. She argues that this belief predicates certain properties to the object that the perceptual conception presents to the perceiver. However, perceptual belief does not have this role: Reid argues that, in perception, one is seized by a belief that the object perceptually conceived *exists* when it is thus conceived. So the only property that perceptual belief seems to be responsible for attributing to the object is existence (on the assumption that existence is such a property.) This issue will not be further developed in this essay, even though the problem of concept-application is all the more interesting, on the assumption that perceptual conception is not conceptual.

and then infer that they belong to a certain solid object, used for sitting. However, this reading is in tension with several other passages from EIP. When Reid talks about the objects of perception proper, he argues that they “are the various qualities of bodies” (EIP II xvii, 200). Previously, at the opening of the EIP, he argued that the following is one of the principles taken for granted:

All the things which we immediately perceive by our senses, and all the things we are conscious of, are things which must be in something else as their subject. Thus by my senses, I perceive figure, colour, hardness, softness, motion, resistance, and such like things. But these are qualities and must necessarily be in something that is figured, coloured, hard or soft, that moves, or resists. It is not to these qualities, but to that which is the subject of them, that we give the name of body. (EIP I ii, 43)

The straightforward interpretation of these two passages is that material substances are not immediately (in the sense of ‘directly’) perceived; only primary qualities have this privilege, according to Reid (EIP II xvii, 202). The notion one forms of both secondary qualities and bodies is relative (e.g., EIP II xvii, 203, and EIP II xix, 219). However, one must not think that Reid believes that we know that there exists a substance because we infer that the qualities perceived are bundled together in a certain body. The belief in the existence of the material substance must be non-inferential if we are to count as perceiving it. The perception of material substances must be, in a certain sense, immediate, namely non-inferential.⁶

There are other options here, however: first, Reid may be interpreted as saying that both substances and qualities are perceived, but that perception of qualities is not necessary for the perception of bodies. In this case, the type of conception associated with perception of bodies is not necessarily conceptual. It is not conceptual, in the sense that the body under consideration is not conceived just as the sum total of the qualities it has. To put it differently, it is not the case that a perceiver thinks about the body perceived as whatever it is that simultaneously instantiates the perceived color, shape, size, etc. If this were the case, the content of that perception would be given by a complex definite description denoting the body in question; this cannot be done without deploying concepts. Moreover, as it will be shown later on, if the perceiver is mistaken regarding one quality, then the body in question is not actually perceived. On the current interpretation, however, the body can be perceptually conceived and hence perceived, even without correctly perceiving and hence conceiving all of its qualities.

Second, one can argue that both qualities and the objects they belong to are perceived, but that perception of the latter cannot happen without the perception of the former. On this view, perceptual conception of bodies involves concept-attribution and is propositional.

⁶ For more on the distinction between different notions of “immediacy” which Reid used, see Buras (2008).

The former interpretation is the one developed throughout this essay: whenever an object makes an impression on our organs of sense, we have a sensation that leads to the formation of conceptions of the qualities had by that object and also a conception of the body having those qualities. The conception of the body in question is non-propositional and the belief that the body exists is non-inferential. This interpretation leaves open the possibility that perceptual conception of qualities is conceptual, in the following sense. Unless one is in a position to deploy concepts of specific colors, sizes, etc., one is not in a position to perceptually conceive and hence perceive the respective qualities. This issue is the topic of another paper and it will not be further addressed here.

Chappell (1989), Yaffe and Nichols (2009), and Gallie (1997) favor different versions of the latter interpretation.

Chappell argues that for hardness to be perceived, an impression of hardness must be made on the organs of sense and that, in turn, gives rise to a certain sensation. Such a sensation would “suggest the quality of hardness [to the perceiver], that is, prompt him both to conceive of this quality and believe that it exists in the hard body that first started the perceptual process, which conception and belief [would] constitute his perception of that quality” (Chappell 1989, 59). According to him, we perceive qualities that we believe to exist in the world and we also believe that they belong to certain bodies. On this interpretation, it is unclear by what process someone starts with the perception of the quality of hardness and ends up with the belief that the quality exists in the hard *body*. It is possible that Chappell thinks that this missing step is supplied by an inference. Someone perceives a quality; qualities cannot exist by themselves; hence there is an object which is such-and-such (in this case, a hard body) that is perceived. According to Chappell, the conception of body one forms in perception is necessarily connected with the quality perceived and, as such, necessarily attributive. One is thus unable to conceive the body in the absence of a mode of conception: in the example that he gives, one necessarily conceives of the body *as* a hard substance, by first conceiving the quality of hardness. If this process is inferential, and it seems to be, it cannot count as perception for Reid.⁷

Yaffe and Nichols (2009) argue that

to conceive of an object is to be aware of that object as the bearer of some particular property. . . . To perceive an object is to be aware of it in a particular way, as the possessor of a particular quality, *and*, at the same time, to be convinced that the object exists and is as you conceive it to be.

This passage indicates that, in order to perceive a body, one must perceive the property that the object is understood to possess. Otherwise, one would not be able to be

⁷ Passages indicating that Reid thought that material substances can be perceived can be found throughout EIP, and there is nothing to prevent this type of perceptual experience from occurring in the absence of (accurate) perception of qualities. See, for instance, EIP II xix, 219 (lines 29–35), and EIP IV iii, 327.

perceptually aware of an object as the bearer of that property. If the property in question is not perceived, but just thought to be perceived (or plainly misperceived), the perception of the material substance is in question, since the only way of being perceptually aware of the object is by correctly attributing a property to that object. One consequence of Yaffe and Nichols' interpretation is that perception of objects, namely bodies, is conditionally dependent on perception of their qualities. The tight connection they allege to exist between the conception of an object and the perception of a property had by that object rules out the possibility of illusions, in which the property in question is misperceived, but the object itself is actually perceived. The following passage shows that Reid's theory allows for such cases, thus Yaffe and Nichols' interpretation is problematic:

... in perception, the notion which our senses give of the object may be more or less clear, more or less distinct, in all possible degrees. Thus we see more distinctly an object at a small than at a great distance. An object at a great distance is seen more distinctly in a clear than in a foggy day. (EIP II v, 96)

Consider this: sometimes someone perceives an object, but he is mistaken with regard to what properties that object has. In fact, he is mistaken even with regard to what kind of object it is; all he knows is that there is an object there, and that object causes him to see a certain shape, color, size, etc. To make the problem more vivid, let us take an example, adapted from Donnellan (1997, 372–3). Suppose that on a sunny afternoon, a group of friends goes for a walk in the park. In the distance, one of them sees a man carrying an umbrella and says to the others: "How funny: that man carries an umbrella! He is probably a tourist; it never rains in LA, in the summer." To this, one of the others replies: "What man with an umbrella? That is just a rock you're seeing, though it looks like a man carrying an umbrella." The object of perception was the rock, although the first perceiver took it to be a man with an umbrella. The question is: how did the perceiver conceive of the rock? On Yaffe and Nichols' interpretation, it follows that the perceiver conceived of the rock as the bearer of the shape, color, and size of a man with an umbrella. But if this is true, it is unclear in what sense the perceiver can truthfully be said to have been perceptually conceiving of the rock itself. Rocks have rock-properties, not man-with-an-umbrella-properties. If the only way the perceiver was aware of that rock is as the bearer of some properties (e.g., man-with-an-umbrella-properties), as Yaffe and Nichols suggest, he cannot be said to have had any *de re* thoughts about the rock itself, since rocks do not have man-with-an-umbrella-properties.

One could argue that, since a man with an umbrella and the rock in question have common shape properties, the perceiver conceived of the rock as a presently existing thing with a certain shape. So the argument above would show at most that rock-properties can be incorrectly ascribed, but not shape-properties. However, a similar argument applies to shape. To see how this works, think about a shape-illusion, for instance the Hering illusion, in which two straight lines appear to be curved. What

this illusion (and others like it) shows is that the object in question is perceived, even when the perceiver is wrong about its shape. In this particular case, the straight shape of the lines is misperceived, but the lines themselves are perceived. In this sense, it is accurate to say that one had a *de re* perception of the two lines, while being wrong about their shape.

Reid would describe situations like these by arguing that the rock (or the straight line) was the object of perception, even though some of its qualities were misperceived. However, Yaffe and Nichols describe this situation differently: the perceiver misperceived the object itself, because he misconceived it as the bearer of non-existent properties, and there was no other way of conceiving that object, in that situation. But illusions, understood as perceptions of objects whose properties are misperceived, do happen and Reid has a way of explaining why such anomalies occur.⁸

What Reid argues that happens with animals and young children when they perceive also counts against Yaffe and Nichols' interpretation. Contrary to their claim that perceptual awareness of an object is dependent on our correct attribution of a property to that object, Reid argues that animals and infants do perceive, but they do not have the intellectual abilities to distinguish between qualities and objects (EIP II xix, 219, lines 18–25). Rather, they perceive these things jumbled together. One way to interpret this is to think that one can perceive an object, without relying on its properties, because sometimes no distinction between objects and properties is actually made.

The interpretation in Gallie (1997) is similar to that of Yaffe and Nichols', but he takes it one step further: he argues that conception in general, thus including perceptual conception, requires one to have an ability for linguistic representation. He thinks that perceptual conception cannot function in the absence of one's prior grasp of concepts, and of words used to express those concepts. Therefore, perception itself cannot properly function without the perceiver having such a prior grasp and use of concepts. In reply to this interpretation, Reid would point out that animals and young children are quite capable of perceiving the outside world. It is not our superior perceptual abilities that distinguish us from animals, but our powers to process the information we are fed by our senses: "brute animals, *who have the same senses that we have*, cannot separate the different qualities belonging to the same subject, and have only a complex and confused notion of the whole" (EIP IV iii, 327). What animals lack is our power of abstraction and analysis. Moreover, while it is true that one can have a more or less accurate notion of the objects around oneself, Reid nonetheless argues that such a notion is not formed in perception: "The child has all the notion of it [a jack for roasting meat] which sight gives; whatever there is more in the notion which the man forms of it, must be derived from other powers of the mind"

⁸ See, for instance, his discussion of how the senses can be fallacious and how they could be improved, in EIP II xxii and II xxi, respectively. This issue will not be further developed in this essay, but it makes it clear that bodies are objects of perception.

(EIP II v, 97). Gallie (1997, 321) unnecessarily over-intellectualizes a process thought by Reid to be basic, and shared by us with infants and animals with no linguistic abilities.

Furthermore, one may perceptually conceive of things, as one often does in perception, that are not always communicable through language. For instance, in perceiving a red body, one thereby conceives that particular shade of red. But, if asked what shade of red that is, the perceiver may be at a complete loss. Since our perceiver cannot verbalize what particular shade of red he perceived and hence perceptually conceived, Gallie would have to say that no perception actually took place. In support of Gallie, one might argue that our perceiver perceived a red thing, since he is able to say that he is seeing a red body, even though he does not know what particular shade of red that is. To make the problem more apparent, then, think about a color that does not yet have a name (or whose name is not known by a certain perceiver). A perceiver would not be able to deploy a linguistic representation of that color, and, on Gallie's interpretation, someone like that would not actually be in a position to perceive that color. This is an unwanted consequence. Moreover, Gallie did not provide enough textual evidence to show that this is Reid's view. If we attend to such evidence, passages like the ones quoted above support a different interpretation: animals and human beings perceive even before being able to exercise any linguistic abilities.

Therefore, according to Reid, and contrary to the interpretations discussed so far, we have a way of perceiving an object, and hence conceiving it, without necessarily perceiving its qualities, and without necessarily thinking about that object under a certain concept—e.g. “hard body,” or “red ball,” etc. Perhaps perceiving a body's quality of being a thing or a presently existing thing might be required, but these types of qualities are not relevant here, since they are common to all perceived substances and would not be enough to distinguish between one body and another. This result should make the issue concerning the conceptual or non-conceptual character of perceptual conception easier to address and develop.

The previous discussion brings us to the crux of the problem: just what is this perceptual conception of material substances? Reid's first attempt to explicate conception is in Essay I, where he defines some of the main terms of the book. “[T]o *conceive*, to *imagine*, to *apprehend* . . . signify an act of the mind which implies no belief or judgment at all” (EIP I i, 24). Thus to conceive means to apprehend something, to entertain a thought, a belief, a sensation. To perceive a material substance, however, something else is needed: one must also believe that what one presently conceives also exists. Such a belief cannot be formed unless that object is conceived by the perceiver, on a given occasion. The conception had by a perceiver may be clear or obscure; either way, a conception of the object is necessary for the formation of the existential belief. Conception is more primitive than belief—there can be no belief without conception, whereas there can be conception of an object without belief in its existence (EIP II xx, 228). According to Reid, the faculty of conception is a basic operation of the mind; it always has an object, although sometimes its object may not

exist. As it will become apparent from section 3, the type of conception employed about non-existing objects is importantly different from the type used to think about existing ones.

In perception, we conceive of real and existing objects, along with some of their qualities. Our conception of an object, formed in perception, ranges between clear and obscure, many times depending on external circumstances. The same can be said about our knowledge of an object: it too comes in degrees. The conception of an object had in perception is distinct from the notion of that object, had by understanding what qualities the object has and how they fit together. A carpenter knows a lot more about chairs than a layperson does just by looking at the chair in front of him. The impression made by the body in front of him on his visual organs leads to his conceiving of the chair, but not necessarily *as* a chair—i.e., as an object used for sitting. In order for perceptual conception to be propositional, it should be necessary for a perceiver to conceive of the qualities of the chair *as* qualities of such an object and conceive of the chair itself *as* an object used to sit on. Moreover, such a perceiver would be required to have concepts denoting all these qualities and the object itself (as a chair), for this type of conception to be conceptual, whereas Reid thinks that one can perceptually conceive a chair, in a different way—i.e., non-descriptively and non-propositionally:

Thus the notion which a child has of a jack for roasting meat, will be acknowledged to be very different from that of a man who understands its construction, and perceives the relation of the parts to one another, and to the whole. The child sees the jack and every part of it as well as the man: *The child, therefore, has all the notion of it which sight gives*; whatever there is more in the notion which the man forms of it, must be derived from other powers of the mind, which may afterwards be explained. (EIP II v, 97) [Emphasis added]

This passage supports the interpretation found in William Alston (1989, 43): perceptual conception of material substances is not about the use of ‘general concepts,’ and it can actually operate in their absence. The powers of classification can be used, but they are not necessary for perception. And if they are used, the information they provide must be distinguished from the information provided by perception proper. This lesson is drawn from Reid’s claim that the notion the child has by sight of that object is identical to the one the man has by sight of the same object. Reid contrasts the conception of an object one has in perception with the more sophisticated notion of the same object, at which one may arrive after careful contemplation and after employing several other faculties (e.g., abstraction and generalization). Alston is right in arguing that conception is not about subsuming an object under a concept and thinking about it as being of a certain kind. The passage just quoted adduces important evidence in favor of the idea that perceptual conception of substances is not propositional. Just to perceive, one does not need to have and use general concepts. If such concepts are however available, one will probably use them and have a richer type of experience. Reid’s suggestion is that this type of experience is a compounded

one, with perception being just one of its components, together with abstraction and generalization bringing in general concepts.⁹

James Van Cleve (2004) presents another argument against the idea that perceptual conception of bodies is conceptual: if the conception involved in perception were conceptual (i.e., formed with concepts and impossible in their absence), it would already be present in the belief of the existence of the object perceived. In such a case, “[f]orming a conception of an object would be entertaining some proposition about it and the belief component of perception would consist in affirming that proposition” (Van Cleve 2004, 107). But then, one would need to have and be able to use a whole array of concepts when one perceives that a chair is in front of oneself. This would be inconsistent with Reid’s idea that infants and all kinds of animals can perceive objects, together with their qualities.

Let us make things more explicit. Van Cleve (2004, 108) proposes to understand perceptual conception as a kind of Russellian acquaintance, since “it is not constituted by conceptualization or judgment.” Van Cleve does not construe conception as the full-blown Russellian version of acquaintance, since that would make it impossible for Reid to argue that we perceive external objects.¹⁰ Accordingly, perceptual conception should be understood as the awareness of an object one has while perceiving that object. Contrary to Russellian acquaintance, Reidian perceptual conception is not supposed to give one full knowledge of the thing perceived. Examples like the one where someone perceives the rock and thinks it is something else would not be possible: on Russell’s view, if the perceiver is actually acquainted with the rock, he cannot think instead that he is perceptually acquainted with a man with an umbrella, whereas on Reid’s view, this situation is entirely plausible. To gain a better grip on this notion of perceptual conception, Donnellan’s relation of ‘having in mind’ might be better suited here. Donnellan, unlike Russell, does not presuppose that the ‘having in mind’ relation gives one knowledge about the respective object. Thus, someone will be said to have the rock in mind, in the situation under consideration, even though he incorrectly ascribes man-with-an-umbrella-properties to it. Reid’s terminology suggests that this is a better approximation: he uses ‘apprehension’ to indicate that to conceive something often just means to entertain a thought about that thing, without judging that thought to be true or false.¹¹

⁹ This issue brings to mind the controversy surrounding Reid’s notion of acquired perception. Some Reid scholars believe that acquired perception is not proper perception, because it is inferential; while others think that it is no more inferential than original perception. For more details, see Van Cleve (2004) and Copenhaver (2010). Another way of drawing the line between original and acquired perception is to think that the former involves the non-conceptual type of conception, while the conception employed by the latter is fully conceptual. This issue will not be further developed in this essay.

¹⁰ Russell (1910) argued that we are acquainted only with sense-data (which are mind-dependent), universals, and ourselves; material substances cannot be objects of acquaintance.

¹¹ In discussing Reid’s notion of conception, Nicholas Wolterstorff (2001, 6) uses the same idea of having in mind, or securing a mental grip onto something, to characterize it. Wolterstorff’s usage is suggestive and appropriate. However, his notion of ‘having in mind’ is different from Donnellan’s: Wolterstorff argues that the mental grip in question is secured by deploying a singular concept, understood to be something like a

For this to happen, perceptual conception must be understood as having a non-conceptual character, in the sense that its content is not given by a (propositional) description-like entity. Perceptual conception of bodies is best understood as direct awareness of the objects perceived. One may raise an objection here: to be able to perceptually conceive substances, one must have at least very general concepts, like “body,” “solidity,” etc., otherwise one would not be able to individuate a body and distinguish it from others. So, perceptual conception cannot be non-conceptual, in the way discussed so far. There are several things one could say in reply to such an objection. First, it should not be too difficult to perceive where a body ends and another one begins: no two bodies occupy the same space and this can be apparent, in the absence of any concepts of body. Different sense-modalities which are employed for acknowledging the presence of material substances in one’s environment may help distinguish among different bodies. For instance, if someone touches something with his left hand while also seeing something to his right (while he has his head turned to the right), that person should be able to notice that he is dealing with two different things. This should be so, even when that person is not able to conceptualize what kind of things the two objects are.

Second, even if the same sense-modality is employed, one should still be able to acknowledge the presence of two bodies, even though no concept of body or solidity is present to the mind of the perceiver. For instance, if one touches something with a hand while also eating something (and thus touching it with his tongue), one should be able to register the difference between the two things, even though one would not be able to descriptively characterize the two objects.

For all these reasons, perceptual conception of bodies should be understood to be non-conceptual.

2.2 *Perceptual conception selects properties from complete objects*

Existing substances are complete objects, in the sense that for some given quality *Q*, that quality is (or is not) a constituent of a particular substance that one perceptually conceives on a given occasion. The fact that that quality is (or is not) a constituent of the object is independent of somebody’s perceptually conceiving it. Reid does not speak of substances as being complete objects, in this sense. However, he argues that all contingent objects cannot be known by normal, limited minds, but only by the mind of their creator (EIP VII i, 545). There is more in a substance than meets the eye. The fact that these are created objects suggests that once created, no other constitutive qualities are going to be added to them; moreover, each created material substance is

definite description (15), whereas one of Donnellan’s points is to show that one can have something in mind, even though a definite description used to describe it is not satisfied by that thing. Donnellan’s notion allows one to form singular thoughts about external objects, in the absence of correct application of concepts to that thing, whereas Wolterstorff’s does not. To fully settle this dispute, one would need to go beyond the purposes of the present essay, but it is important to note that Reid’s notion of perceptual conception is better explained by Donnellan’s notion of ‘having in mind’ for the reasons noted in the main text.

a unique individual. Reid takes this claim of individuality very seriously, arguing that even the qualities belonging to these substances are individuals, since only individuals are things that exist; universals are non-existent, in his view. The following passage supports this interpretation:

To this I answer, that the whiteness of this sheet is one thing, whiteness is another; the conceptions signified by these two forms of speech are as different as the expressions: The first signifies *an individual quality really existing*, and it is not a general conception, though it be an abstract one: the second signifies a general conception, which implies no existence, but may be predicated of every thing that is white, and in the same sense. On this account, if one should say that the whiteness of this sheet is the whiteness of another sheet, every man perceives this to be absurd; but when he says both sheets are white, this is true and perfectly understood.

(EIP V iii, 367) [Emphasis added]

The individuality of the qualities does not have a marked role to play in how we understand the notion of completeness attributed here to Reid; its importance resides in the fact that it helps distinguish between one object and the next.

To better understand the idea that substances are complete objects, let us think about them as supporting complete constellations of qualities. We do not have perceptual (or other type of) access to all the qualities that make up a complete set; however, we can conceive of qualities that are not given to us in perception. But it is important to understand that perceptual conception of substances only enables our access to a limited subset of qualities. This is reminiscent of Locke's distinction between nominal and real essences in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (1975/1700, III iii–v), with the caveat that Reid, in contrast to Locke, thinks that individuals have essences from which all their qualities flow.¹² The real essence is immutable, complete, and not discoverable by mere mortals; so, instead, we make do with attributing nominal essences to individual substances. The latter type of essences are neither immutable nor complete: they can be changed by either introducing or subtracting qualities from the designated set (or by subtracting qualities from the respective set).

Part of the set that makes up the nominal essence of a substance is constituted by qualities that are made available to us by the perceptual conception of the substance in question. When we perceive a particular horse, for instance, what we perceive is a complete object, since a horse is a created individual material substance. However, the perceptual conception that is an ingredient of somebody's perception will not present to his mind every quality had by the respective horse. It will not even present every

¹² The idea that there is more to a substance than meets the eye, or, more generally, the mind, is also reminiscent of Locke, in a different way. Locke (*Essay*, II xxxi, 1; xxxi, 3; and xxxi, 6) thought that our ideas of substances are incomplete, and thus inadequate, because there is more in the thing than in the idea; whereas our ideas of mixed modes or relations are adequate, and complete, because everything we think of a mode is in the idea we have of it. On the present interpretation of Reid, non-existent things (some of which, at least, would be counted among mixed modes by Locke) are incomplete things, even though, in a Lockean jargon, one can say that our ideas of non-existent things are still adequate. But substances are still seen by Reid as being complete things, and our conceptions of them quite inadequate.

perceivable quality had by that horse. For instance, the horse under consideration might have a tail that is 40 cm long, and a perceiver will certainly perceptually conceive the horse as having a tail; but he will not conceive that tail as being 40 cm long. His perceptual conception is not fitted to discriminate such details. But, arguably, the length of the horse's tail is a perceivable quality of that horse. It may thus be said that perceptual conception selects, in the sense that it makes salient some properties of the substance perceived and only those are presented to the perceiver. Although any constellation of qualities inherent in a substance is complete, whenever someone perceives the substance, he only perceptually conceives a subset of those qualities. One would need to have perceptual access to the real essence of things, in order to be in principle able to perceptually conceive all of their qualities. Even then, it is doubtful that perceptual conception can present one with all the qualities of a certain substance: one must not forget that perception is perspectival. It would thus be counterintuitive to argue that one can perceive and hence perceptually conceive the tail of a horse, if one just has a frontal view of the respective horse. Perceptual conception of a substance is quite selective concerning what properties (if any) it makes salient to the perceiver's mind. Both this trait and the fact that the objects of perception are complete are not shared by imaginative conception.

3 Imaginative Conception

The structure of imagination is analogous to that of perception, with some qualifications: a perceptual experience is evoked by a sensation of the external object and involves a type of conception and a belief that the object conceived exists; an imaginative experience is not evoked by a sensation and it only involves a type of conception, and no belief concerning the existence of the object conceived. Although structurally the two faculties are quite similar, this section shows that imaginative conception is different from the perceptual kind. Whereas the latter is non-conceptual, the former is fully conceptual—i.e., propositional. In a way, more thinking power is needed for someone to imagine a centaur than just to see a horse. Furthermore, whereas perceptual conception makes salient some of the properties of complete objects, imaginative conception “bestows” on the imagined objects the qualities they are imagined to have. Imagining a non-existent object logically entails the ascription of certain known (and conceptualized) qualities to that object. Section 3.1 develops the claim that imaginative conception is conceptual, while section 3.2 explains how an imaginer constructs incomplete imagined objects, out of a pre-determined set of qualities.

3.1 *The conceptual character of imaginative conception*

Reid dedicates a whole essay to what he calls “conception,” but the issues he addresses there are different from the ones raised by perceptual conception. Some of the things he says in Essay IV do not apply equally well to perceptual conception and this

indicates that what he calls “bare conception” is interestingly different. The distinction between perceptual and imaginative conception to which this essay draws attention is best supported by Essay IV.

Regardless of whether one finds it compelling and helpful to assimilate perceptual conception to Russellian acquaintance, according to Reid (EIP IV i, 308–9), the type of conception employed by imagination is analogous to the type of knowledge one can have by description, as Russell (1910) suggested. In order to be able to imagine a winged horse, one must either be acquainted with such an animal, or have the concepts denoting the bits and pieces that would make up such an animal and a way of putting them together, so that the result would be a winged horse. Minimally speaking, an imaginer of a winged horse would need to know what wings are, what horses are, and be able to form a conception of how wings could be attached to a horse. Since winged horses do not exist, our imaginer cannot be acquainted with such a beast. Imaginative conception is active in a sense in which perception is not, namely it must “construct” its objects; hence one must have a prior grasp of the components from which those objects are constructed. In order to be able to imagine a certain new (not previously heard) sound, an imaginer would need to be able to imagine both the pitch and the tone of that sound. Without having any concepts denoting the two different characteristics of the sound, such an imaginer would be in no position to carry out his act of imagination. One must be able to identify each component in such a way that it can be attributed to an imagined object; an imaginer must have something like a concept denoting the components used to construct the imagined object.

A congenitally blind person cannot conceive colors (either perceptually or imaginatively), Reid argues, because such a person cannot be acquainted with color. But something more than just perceptual acquaintance is required for imagination. One must not forget that Reid thinks that imagination is a certain type of bare, or simple, conception (EIP IV i, 306). And conceiving an object, be that object an actual object of sense, and not just a mythological creature, in the absence of any other operation of the mind of which conception might be an ingredient, does not just happen out of the blue, because “conception of objects is not the first act of the mind about them. External objects are perceived by our senses before they are simply conceived.”¹³ Moreover, “we must have judged or reasoned before we have the conception or simple apprehension of judgment, or of reasoning” (EIP IV iii, 327).

According to Reid then, one must not only be acquainted with the bits and pieces of what one (imaginatively) conceives, but also be able to separate the conception-component of perception (or consciousness, or belief/judgment), and reflect on it. This analysis alters the nature of conception itself: the simple conception is different from the conception-component employed in perception. What in perception was non-conceptual becomes fully conceptualized when what Reid calls “conception” (and

¹³ This excerpt is to be found in Aberdeen MS 2131/8/ii/02 and is reproduced here from Nichols (2007, 46).

hence imagination) is exercised by itself. We should not be misled by his use of a single term, namely “conception,” to refer to both an ingredient of all the other operations of our mind, and a faculty that can simply present an object to the mind, without expressing any judgment about it. The process of acquiring a perceptual conception is different from that of having a simple conception, including an imaginative one. Whereas perceptual conception just happens in perception because we are constituted in a certain way, so that our sensations suggest such conceptions, “simple conceptions are got by analyzing more complex operations” (EIP IV iii, 327). So, simple conceptions, and hence imaginative conceptions, are different from perceptual conceptions: to be able to use this type of conception, someone must have a fully conceptualized understanding of the object conceived.

Although imaginative conception is derived from perceptual conception, the former can still be different from the latter; this derivation simply means that someone cannot have a purely imaginative conception of a yellow winged-horse, unless one was previously acquainted, in perception, with yellow, wings, and horses. This does not contradict the thesis that perceptual conception is non-conceptual: once we analyze the information we have in perception, we can form concepts about all sorts of things and only when we have those concepts can we employ imaginative conception, in the way envisaged by Reid. The fact that we are supposed to know every little detail which we use when we imagine a mythical creature shows that imaginative conception is conceptual. It is quite counterintuitive to claim that we are going to imagine a certain centaur without construing that object under the concept “man-horse,” or something similar. The first difference in character between the two types of conception should be by now apparent.

3.2 *Imaginative conception “bestows” qualities on incomplete objects*

Although imaginative conception of non-existent objects must start from known ingredients, the way of combining those ingredients is entirely up to the imaginer. We can imaginatively conceive things that do not exist, as clearly and distinctly as we can perceptually conceive things that do exist. However, it is we who arrange the parts and combine the attributes, in the case of imagined non-existents. By contrast, nature is responsible for how things are in the real world, and, according to Reid, we cannot know entirely what powers of combination it used in putting together the objects that populate the world. It is different with the objects that are imagined by us, and known to have no existence. According to Reid, we may “form an endless variety of combinations and compositions, which we call creatures of the imagination. These may be clearly conceived, though they never existed” (EIP IV i, 310). The interesting question is: how can such non-existent individuals be conceived?

By way of reply, let us look at how Terence Parsons (1980) argues that non-existent objects are to be conceived, according to Meinong. One may worry that this is anachronistic: but the claim here is not that the whole Meinongian ontological system is supported by Reid’s philosophy. But some of the things Reid does say indicate that

he might have been of a Meinongian inclination.¹⁴ This does not mean that Reid thought that there are three separate levels of existence: existence, subsistence, and non-existence. Thinking of Reid as a Meinongian kindred spirit makes sense of his idea that when one imagines a centaur one does not form an *image* of a centaur in one's mind, but one conceives an animal, with a certain body, with internal life and motion, despite its obvious non-existence (EIP IV ii, 321–2). By imagining a centaur, one understands what it would be like to be in perceptual contact with such an animal. This does not confer existence or subsistence to a non-existent object; it just suggests how one can imagine a centaur, without necessarily bringing an image to one's mind.

According to Parsons, in a Meinongian framework, to each existing object there corresponds a unique non empty set of properties. These are all the properties that the object has. By employing such a method one can include in one's ontology non-existing, and even impossible, objects. For example, the set {goldenness, mountainhood} is correlated with a golden mountain, which is an object. There are no real, existing golden mountains, so this object is non-existent.¹⁵ Imaginatively conceiving a centaur proceeds in the following way: an imaginer conceives a certain set of properties (including, but not limited to, being an animal that is half man and half horse) and thinks that a certain imaginary object corresponds to it. To emphasize, an imaginer will be said to have not only a certain set of properties in mind, but also a certain object, “constructed” out of those properties by his act of imagination. This set of properties is nothing more than a set constituted by attributes that Reid says are necessary for imagining things that have no existence.

If we look at what Reid claims to happen when one imagines a centaur, this suggestion takes a clearer shape: in imaginatively conceiving a centaur, an imaginer puts certain properties together in such a way that the result is a certain non-existent animal with human head and torso, and with the body of a horse:

This one object which I conceive, is not the image of an animal, it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other . . . The thing I conceive is a body of a certain figure and color, having life and spontaneous motion. (EIP IV ii, 321–2)

The mythical animal imagined in this way is a certain individual; one does not just imagine the property of centaurhood, in general, as Gallie (1997, 320) thought. Reid is explicit on this issue: one imaginatively conceives a body with certain specific attributes. Moreover, imagining a certain centaur is not problematic: one way this can be done is by combining in one's imagination certain individual attributes, with which the imaginer is acquainted via perception. For instance, someone might imagine a centaur by thinking that it has the body of his neighbor's horse and the torso of

¹⁴ For more on this issue, see Nichols (2002).

¹⁵ Parsons (1980, 18–19). The set {roundness, squareness} is correlated with an impossible object. This essay will not discuss the difference between possible and impossible non-existent objects.

his neighbor. These bits of bodies do exist in reality and belong to individuals (and hence are themselves individuals). By combining two individuals in this manner, the resultant thing should be an individual itself—albeit a non-existent one. This is not to say that the universal centaurhood cannot be conceived; it can, but someone conceiving it will not be said to *imagine* anything. Reid argues that universals cannot be imagined, since imagination is related to objects of sense, and universals are not objects of sense, but he thinks that they can be conceived, without being thought to exist or not.¹⁶ According to Reid, imaginatively conceiving a centaur is not like conceiving a triangle, namely a universal, as Gallie (1997, 321) argues.

One may ask certain questions here about what this imaginative conception of an individual centaur might look like: for instance, will the imagined centaur have a particular color, be of a particular height, etc? There is nothing problematic in answering these questions in the manner suggested above: initially, the imaginative conception of a centaur is less distinct and it can be made clearer by adding more individual properties to the set of properties with which one begins. At this point, someone might worry that adding more specifications to a certain conception will not make that conception clearer, but it will change it, so that the imager has a different conception altogether. This worry might be addressed in either of the following ways: (i) one might argue that the initial conception is the same as the richer one, as it was already suggested; or (ii) one might argue that the initial conception is different from the richer one. Identity conditions for conceptions are not that clear, and making them so would take us too far from the concerns of the present essay. However, there are several things to say here: we use imagination when we interpret stories about mythological creatures, for instance centaurs. Some of these stories even name their native centaurs and once such a name is introduced, it is used throughout the story to refer to the same centaur. Think about the following situation: at the beginning of the story we are told that Flane is a brave centaur; by the end of the story, we will have learned that Flane has brown hair and green eyes, that he is the friend of Miradora, and uses a red bow to shoot his human enemies. If we set score by (ii) above, we would have to say that the conception of Flane we had at the beginning of the story is different from the one we had at its end. This is not how we talk about fictional objects, though. According to Reid, this should count as reason enough to prefer (i) to (ii).¹⁷

The issue is, of course, more complicated than this. More importantly, however, it is not peculiar to this theory of imagination, or to this kind of theory of fictional

¹⁶ Reid talks about the distinction between imagining a particular and conceiving a universal in EIP V vi, 394.

¹⁷ For more on the issue concerning how a name can be introduced to refer to something that does not yet exist and continues to refer to that *same* thing even after it starts to exist, see Jeshion (2010, 116–17). Reid comes close to this issue when he talks about how someone “may conceive a machine that never existed” (EIP V iv, 375). If somebody conceiving such a machine were to build it, and name it, the name would refer to the conception and to the actual object, once it is finished. The issue concerning centaurs is different, since they will never exist, but sufficiently related to see that if we use names to talk about them, and Reid argues that we do, there is not much to prevent us from preferring (i) over (ii).

characters, as Parsons (1980, 190) correctly notes. According to him, a similar issue can be raised about set theory more generally, and even about the meaning of scientific terms. Indeed, it is not altogether clear when a certain scientific term entirely changes its meaning and when it simply gains a richer one, while its content remains the same.¹⁸

Even if we accept (i) and agree that a certain conception becomes clearer as the imaginer specifies more attributes the centaur imagined is supposed to have, one may raise another problem. Earlier, it was claimed that non-existent objects are incomplete, in the sense that, for some property *P*, it is undecided whether a certain object has it or not. The worry then is this: just how incomplete are these non-existents? If an agent engaged in a certain imaginative act makes his initial conception clearer and clearer, by specifying more and more attributes that object might have, will not that imaginer make the object in question eventually complete? The simple answer is to say that such a situation might indeed occur. But this is not troublesome, since it was not claimed that non-existent objects are *necessarily* incomplete. Moreover, this actually helps the case this essay makes, by emphasizing that it is the imaginer's action that completes the object; it is not given to that imaginer as complete, from the beginning.

A more sophisticated answer takes into account the great difficulty raised by such an aim. Non-existing objects are, in principle, completable, but this does not mean that it is easy to do so. Nor does it mean that this task only requires a little bit of concentration on the part of the imaginer. On the contrary, it requires quite a lot and it is unclear that such a task can be achieved in an ordinary lifetime. To see why this is so, let us think about what ordinarily happens when someone actively imagines something. According to the theory developed here, an imaginer will be engaged in an act of imagination for a while, then he will probably return to more pressing issues. While the imaginer is thus engaged, he will not be concerned to specify all the attributes of the centaur he is imagining. He will probably think about it as having a particular shape, size, maybe even overall color, but he will not think about how many hairs the centaur has on his head, or what color his bow and arrows are or even whether his stomach is more human-like than horse-like. If we are only interested in offering a theory which explains how imagination actually works, then the worry above is not that worrisome; non-existent objects are mainly incomplete, maybe completable, but this is of no consequence. The moral of the story is the same: there is an important distinction between the objects of perception and those of imagination. The latter are incomplete or, at least, not as complete as the former.

However, let us think, for the sake of the argument, what might happen if one took it upon himself to specify everything that can be specified about a particular centaur, thus completing the conception and the non-existent object which corresponds to it. What would such an exercise entail? Our imaginer will have to specify not only what color the centaur's body has, the size of his body, the size, shape, and color of

¹⁸ For more on this issue, see the discussion in T. Parsons (1980) and the works he cites, which are classics concerning the issue of meaning change: Field (1973) and K. P. Parsons (1975).

his stomach, etc., but also, for every second of a day in the “life” of that centaur, what type of food he ate, how much, what internal processes his cells underwent, etc. If we think that to change but one such quality of the centaur means changing the world of which he is a part, because every object in a world is the product of that world, then the imaginer will have to sit down and describe the possible world to which this centaur belongs in such great detail that it will take him ages to do so. Moreover, it is not only a question of not having enough time to do this, but also a question of what power of computing our imaginer’s mind must have. This task is akin to that performed by God for every created thing in the world. So, yes, a non-existent object is not necessarily incomplete; but to successfully complete it, one must be very much like God, and no mortal human-beings are like that. So, from a human-being’s point of view, most of the objects of imagination are incomplete.¹⁹

This difference in the nature of existent and non-existent objects, namely that the former are complete, whereas the latter are (for the most part) incomplete, is the basis for the second difference between perceptual and imaginative conception. In perceptually conceiving existent objects, one must roughly know only that this body is different from that one. Perceptual conception makes certain properties of objects salient to the mind. These properties may be very general ones, such as recognizing that something is a body, or that something is solid. But in imaginatively conceiving a non-existent object, one must know something more specific about that object, since otherwise it would make no sense to say that this non-existent object is different from that one—there is no way of individuating them in space and time, since they do not exist. The only way of distinguishing between Magorian and Bane of the Harry Potter novels is by refining each imaginative conception such that different properties are included in each set, corresponding to each of the two non-existent objects.²⁰ Moreover, each of these two objects is nothing it is not conceived to be, and it is something inasmuch as we think of attributing certain qualities to it. Nature does not interfere with the process of combining and recombining these qualities. Imaginative conception bestows properties on the objects of imagination, and it is up to the imaginer to make such an object more or less complete. This is the third way of distinguishing between perceptual and imaginative conception.

4 Conclusion

This essay presented a distinction which Reid should have drawn in EIP, but did not. This distinction concerns the sharp difference between the conception employed

¹⁹ This qualification is needed because there are very simple objects that can be imagined completely, without requiring so much from the imaginer. For instance, imagining an electron coming into existence and being destroyed after just one second will require much less from an imaginer than imagining a centaur killing a human-being in a one-to-one fight.

²⁰ Such a differentiation works on the assumption that something akin to a Lockean principle of individuation is applicable even to imagined objects: no things of the same kind could be co-occurent.

in perception and the one employed in imagination. The arguments discussed here showed that there are three ways in which perceptual conception differs from imaginative conception. First and foremost, perceptual conception does not essentially proceed by way of concepts—i.e., it is non-conceptual and not propositional, whereas imaginative conception is entirely conceptual. This distinction is true to the spirit of Reid's philosophy: for instance, he thinks that the presupposition of existence is not required for conception and hence conception is a different faculty from perception. In the same vein, the presupposition of attribution of a quality to an object, which is necessary for imaginative conception, is sufficient for a finer-grained distinction between different types of conceptions.

Second, the objects of perceptual conception are complete objects; the objects of imaginative conception are incomplete—one can explicitly endow an imagined centaur with more properties, while one imaginatively conceives it, thus turning it into a more definite object, in one's imagination. But this is not true in the case of the objects of perception—they are what they are, nothing more or less, and perception does not alter this. Third, perceptual conception *selects* or makes salient properties from the object perceived, whereas imaginative conception *bestows* properties on the object imagined.

If the arguments and analyses presented here are correct, this distinction is real, even though overlooked by Reid. Without making this distinction explicit, we have no means of understanding exactly how conception contributes what it does to perception and how it contributes what it does to imagination. The danger that looms large over Reid's understanding of these faculties is thinking that perception is an over-intellectualized process, reserved only for higher animals, like humans. This is a serious concern, given that he often argues that perception, as he understands it, is a faculty that human agents have in common with brutes and non-speaking infants. If one were not able to perceive anything (or very little) unless one had a robust conceptual understanding of the objects and their surroundings, one would not be in a position to have any kind of initial knowledge of the external world. Neither would one be in a position to learn and add to the knowledge gained by perception. Reid's system needs this distinction and a charitable interpretation of the spirit of his project, like the one put forward in this essay, will see that this distinction is possible. However, further research is needed in order to establish what consequences this distinction has on the rest of Reid's philosophy.²¹

²¹ I would like to thank the editors of this volume, Todd Buras and Rebecca Copenhaver, for including this essay in the collection. For reading and extensively commenting on many previous drafts, I would like to thank James Van Cleve and Gideon Yaffe. I would also like to thank Alex Radulescu, for elucidating conversations and close reading of previous versions of this essay. In 2010, some of the material discussed here was presented at the *Thomas Reid: From His Time to Ours* conference, held at the University of Aberdeen and University of Glasgow. I am grateful to everyone in the audience for their suggestions, and especially to Claire Etchegaray and Esther Kroeker.

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4

Four Questions about Acquired Perception

James Van Cleve

1 Introduction

‘Acquired perception’ is the name Reid gives to a cognitive phenomenon that arises through three steps that may be characterized schematically as follows: (i) On the occasion of sensation S, I form (in accordance with my native constitution) a conception of and a belief in the presence of some external object or quality A. This much is *original* perception. (ii) As time goes by, I find that my perceptions of A are always or nearly always accompanied by perceptions (perhaps belonging to another sense) of some other object or quality, B. I develop the habit of thinking that B is present on occasions when I perceive A—even if I have not yet perceived B. (iii) Eventually, the association between A and B becomes so strong that, on the occasion of perceiving A, I automatically conceive of and believe in B without making any inference. I now have *acquired* perception of the quality B.¹

Reid’s favorite examples of acquired perception are the perception of distance and three-dimensional figure by sight. Reid agrees with Berkeley that what is given originally to sight is only a two-dimensional array in which objects are displayed as having locations along the left–right and up–down axes, but not along the near–far axis. “Outness” and three-dimensional shapes (such as being cubical or spherical) are given originally only to touch.² By experience, however, we come to learn that certain sensations connected with adjusting the “trim” of the eye and certain patterns of light and shadow are signs of distance and three-dimensional convexity. Eventually, we automatically conceive of and believe in a globe when we see an appropriately shaded disk. It is almost as though we *see* the convexity of the globe:

¹ Reid’s views on acquired perception are concentrated in chapter 6, sections 20–4, of *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, and in Essay 2, Chapters 21 and 22, of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*.

² I think Reid and Berkeley are wrong about this. “Outness” is originally given to sight, owing partly to stereopsis, a mechanism not known in their time. In this essay, though, I will go along with them for the sake of being able to work with their examples.

It is experience that teaches me that the variation of colour is an effect of spherical convexity, and of the distribution of light and shade. But so rapid is the progress of the thought, from the effect to the cause, that we attend only to the last, and can hardly be persuaded that we do not immediately see the three dimensions of the sphere. (EIP II xii, 236)

Other examples of acquired perception are hearing the size of a bell (EIP II xiv, 182) and seeing the weight of a sheep (IHM VI xx, 172). In this essay, I take up the following four questions. (1) Is acquired perception really *perception*? (2) Are secondary qualities objects of original perception, or of acquired perception only? (3) Does acquired perception involve any alteration in the content of our original perceptions? Finally, (4) are there any limits in principle to what might one day become an object of acquired perception for us? Before we get to these questions, however, it is necessary to say a little more about the mechanics of acquired perception.

2 The Mechanics of Acquired Perception

Reid first draws the distinction between original and acquired perception in the *Inquiry* in the following passage:

Our perceptions are of two kinds: some are natural and original, others acquired, and the fruit of experience. When I perceive that this is the taste of cyder, that of brandy; that this is the smell of an apple, that of an orange; that this is the noise of thunder, that the ringing of bells; this the sound of a coach passing, that the voice of such a friend; these perceptions and others of the same kind, are not original, they are acquired. But the perception which I have by touch, of the hardness and softness of bodies, of their extension, figure, and motion, is not acquired, it is original. (IHM VI xx, 171)

The distinction is further elaborated in the chapter of the *Intellectual Powers* entitled “Of the improvement of the senses” (2.21), where it is illustrated by Reid’s favorite example of it—the acquired visual perception of three-dimensional figure on the basis of originally perceived two-dimensional signs.

In what way are acquired perceptions “the fruit of experience”? There are two models to consider, an inference model and an association model. In the inference model, after being exposed to many cases of B conjoined with A (for instance, spherical shape with a certain pattern of shading), we form in accordance with induction the general belief ‘Anything that looks like this is a sphere.’ On subsequent occasions of something’s looking that way, we draw the inference ‘It looks like this, and things that look like this are spheres; therefore, it is a sphere.’ After several such occasions, the inference becomes fully automated: when we see something that looks the right way, we believe forthwith that it is a sphere, no longer passing through a major premise of the form ‘All As are Bs’ or combining it with a minor premise of the form ‘o is an A’ to conclude ‘o is a B.’ We simply leap to the belief that o is a B. We now have an acquired perception that the thing we are perceiving is a B.

In the association model, we go through the same history of experiencing As in conjunction with Bs as above, but we never form the explicit general belief that As are Bs (or if we do, we never use it as a premise in an inference). We simply form an association between As and Bs, which eventually becomes strong enough that on the occasion of perceiving an A, we instantly believe that it is a B. We now have an acquired perception that the thing we are perceiving is a B.

In either model, we have acquired perception only when the transition from A-perceptions to B-beliefs has become fully automatic and no longer (if it ever was) a matter of inference. The difference is that in the association model, we do not go through an inferential phase on our way to acquiring the acquired perception; in the inference model, we do. We might put the matter thus: the inference model posits a phase in which the subject has a belief in a constant conjunction, symbolizable as ‘S believes $(x)(Ax \rightarrow Bx)$ ’; the association model need posit no more than a constant conjunction of beliefs, symbolizable as ‘ $(x)(S \text{ believes } Ax \rightarrow S \text{ believes } Bx)$ ’.

Which model did Reid intend? I do not think he cared; so long as the product is right, the process does not matter. His indifference is shown in his indiscriminate use of two different formulations of the inductive principle that underlies our ability to form acquired perceptions:

When we have found two things to have been constantly conjoined in the course of nature, the appearance of one of them is immediately followed by the conception and belief of the other.

(IHM VI xxiv, 196, lines 1–3; see also 197, lines 9–11)

Thus, if a certain degree of cold freezes water to-day, and has been known to do so in all time past, we have no doubt but the same degree of cold will freeze water to-morrow, or a year hence.

(IHM VI xxiv, 196, lines 10–12; see also 197, lines 6–8)

In the first formulation, the inductive principle is said to produce in our minds a constant conjunction of beliefs; in the second, it is said to produce belief in a constant conjunction. Here and elsewhere, Reid uses the two formulations interchangeably.

I end this section by commenting on the relation of Reid’s account of acquired perception to ideas in three other writers, Berkeley, Helmholtz, and Ryan Nichols.

2.1 Berkeley

Reid is indebted to Berkeley for many examples of acquired perception, which Berkeley often describes using the term ‘suggestion.’ Suggestion is the automatic triggering of conception and belief in one thing by the sensation or perception of another, as when a blush suggests shame or a word suggests its denotatum. In the following passage, Berkeley explicitly distinguishes suggestion from inference:

To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. So likewise to be suggested is one thing, and to be inferred another. Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding. (Sec. 42 of the *Theory of Vision Vindicated*; 1975, 293)

Reid's notion of acquired perception and Berkeley's notion of suggestion could be said to be related as follows: A suggests B to person S if whenever S experiences A, S has an acquired perception of B for which A serves as the sign.

2.2 Helmholtz

Whereas Berkeley says that certain of our perceptions are based on suggestion, not inference, Helmholtz says that they are based on *unconscious* inference. Is there a disagreement between them? Robert Schwartz (1994) notes that the "psychological reality" of the major premise 'All As are Bs' in what Helmholtz calls inference may simply consist in the disposition of A ideas to trigger B ideas—what I have called a constant conjunction of beliefs. In that case, the difference between Helmholtz and Berkeley would be merely verbal.

2.3 Nichols

Ryan Nichols distinguishes two types of acquired perception in Reid: *inferential* perception (really an oxymoron, given that there is no reasoning in perception), in which one makes a conscious inductive inference from some perceived quality A to a further quality B, and *habituated* perception, in which the perception of a thing as being A makes one automatically believe it to be B, owing to the subject's previous history of inferential perceptions that a thing is B based on its being A (2007, 233–4). If these two types are exhaustive, it follows that all acquired perception is built on previous inference. However, despite this implication, I do not believe Nichols intends to force an inferential model on Reid. On p. 235, he seems to want to keep the possibility of an associationist model open.

3 Is Acquired Perception Really Perception?

Acquired perception is a powerful means of gaining information through the senses, but is it really *perception*? We cannot let the issue be decided by Reid's name for the phenomenon. A toy gun is not a gun, and artificial teeth are not teeth. By contrast, a toy block is a block, and artificial illumination is illumination.³ My question is whether acquired perception is like artificial illumination or artificial teeth.

Berkeley's answer to this question is clear and explicit:

In short, those things alone are actually and strictly perceived by any sense, which would have been perceived, in case that same sense had then been first conferred on us.

(1975, 194; 1948, 204)

By this criterion, what we perceive only with the help of learning we do not strictly perceive at all. Had we just now been given sight without any opportunity to learn correlations between the visible and the tangible, sight would afford us no clue of

³ Thanks to Roy Sorensen (personal communication) for these examples.

distance or three-dimensional shape. Berkeley unhesitatingly concludes that these properties are not strictly perceived by sight.⁴

Reid's answer to our question is more equivocal. After describing several apparent instances of acquired perception—for example, a farmer's apprehension that his neighbor's cattle have broken loose, based on the down-trodden state of his corn—he remarks,

These are instances of common understanding, which dwells so near to perception, that it is difficult to trace the line which divides the one from the other. (IHM VI xx, 173)⁵

In another passage, he describes a case in which he at first mistook a nearby seagull on a foggy beach for a man on horseback half a mile off. (Fog throws off our acquired perceptions of distance). He observes,

The mistake made on this occasion, and the correction of it, are both so sudden, that we are at a loss whether to call them by the name of *judgment*, or by that of *simple perception*.

(IHM VI xxii, 183)

In yet another passage, he calls the whole question I am raising a verbal one:

[When a kind of judgment becomes habitual] it very much resembles the original perceptions of our sense, and may not improperly be called *acquired perception*. Whether we call it judgment or acquired perception is a verbal difference. (EIP II xiv, 182)

Even if Reid refused to answer my question, is there an answer he *ought* to have given in light of his other commitments? Rebecca Copenhaver has forcefully argued that Reidian acquired perception in no way falls short of genuine perception (2010). In the rest of this section, I offer five arguments to the contrary.

3.1 First argument: *acquired perception is not immediate*

One of the hallmarks of perception for Reid is that it is *immediate*. Here is his official threefold account of perception:

If, therefore, we attend to that act of our mind which we call the perception of an external object of sense, we shall find in it these three things. *First*, Some conception or notion of the object perceived. *Secondly*, A strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present

⁴ To be sure, Berkeley has a broad sense of 'perceive' in which we may be said to perceive anything that is suggested to our imagination by a sensible cue, including the shame in another's soul when it is suggested by a blush and even God when we are made to think of him by the word 'God.' But things perceived in this broad sense are not immediately perceived, and Berkeley insists that only things immediately perceived are sensible things, or things perceived by the senses. "By sensible things I mean those only which are perceived by sense, and that in truth the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately" (1975, 164; 1948, 174).

⁵ In Reid's examples in this paragraph, the various facts "perceived" are all facts about the recent past. Elsewhere, he says perception always has a present object (see EIP I i, 23, lines 1–9). For this reason, I am not sure whether he would regard these instances of quasi-perceptual "common understanding" as cases of acquired perception.

existence. And, *thirdly*, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning.

(EIP I v, 96, and repeated elsewhere)

If it turns out that acquired perception is not immediate in the requisite sense, we will have the materials for the following syllogism:

1. All genuine perception is immediate perception.
2. No acquired perception is immediate perception.
3. Therefore, no acquired perception is genuine perception.

What, then, is the requisite sense? What does Reid mean by calling perception (or the belief involved therein) *immediate*?

Much of the time, Reid simply means that no reasoning or inference is involved, psychologically speaking. There is no marshaling of premises and drawing of conclusions. If this is all he ever means by immediacy, the syllogism above would have a false minor premise. As discussed in the preceding section, even if inference is part of the process by which acquired perception is developed, once the habit is fully acquired, the inference is no longer there. The transition from sensory sign to perceptual belief in the thing signified has become fully automated, and no vestiges of reasoning remain.

Nonetheless, there is another sense in which it is arguable that genuine perception is immediate for Reid and acquired perception not. Genuine perception is immediate in an *epistemic* sense: deliverances of perception are *immediately justified*—that is, justified without deriving their justification from any other beliefs. In Reid's favored terminology, deliverances of perception are first principles. But acquired perceptions do not seem to be like that. Even though my perceptual belief that the bell I am hearing is large is psychologically noninferential, it is justified only because on many past occasions when I heard similar sounds, I knew by sight or touch that they came from a large bell.⁶ Had I not been justified on those sundry occasions in what I believed about the source of the sound, I would not be justified now. Thus my current belief is not epistemically immediate.

On this point, I agree with Nichols:

[H]abituated perceptual beliefs . . . depend for their justification upon other perceptual beliefs upstream in the belief-forming and habit-forming processes. In this sense, habituated perceptual beliefs could not serve as basic beliefs in a foundationalist theory of the structure of empirical knowledge. (2007, 237)⁷

⁶ What I mean by 'perceptual belief' in this sentence is the belief that is ingredient in perception in Reid's threefold account. I am departing from the terminology of Copenhaver, who uses 'perceptual belief' for a further belief based on the perception.

⁷ For further reinforcement of this point, see Pollock's discussion (1974, 60–4) of "the principle of implicit reasons," according to which our justification for believing things may derive from general propositions for which we may never have articulated and the supporting instances that we no longer specifically recall, provided our past observation of the instances played a causal role in generating our present belief.

However, Nichols and I do not agree on the other premise in the argument from immediacy—that *all* genuine perception is epistemically immediate. He maintains that Reid is an epistemic direct realist—one who holds that the deliverances of perception are epistemically basic or immediately justified—*only* as regards the deliverances of original perception. In the inconsistent triad {*all perception is immediate perception, acquired perception is not immediate perception, acquired perception is perception*}, we both accept the second proposition, but he chooses to deny the first and I the third. Since the matter is controversial, I shall not rest my case on the argument from immediacy.⁸

3.2 Second argument: *I do not perceive my upstairs wife*

In previous work (Van Cleve 2004), I advanced the following example as a conundrum for Reid's theory of perception:

I return home and see my wife's car keys on the counter, whereupon I automatically conceive of her and believe that she is home. Since she is upstairs, I do not perceive her, but it seems that I fulfill all the conditions for [acquired] perception. (127)

This example can be made the basis of the following argument:

1. I have an acquired perception of my wife on the occasion of seeing her keys.
2. In fact, I do not perceive her on that occasion.
3. Therefore, not all cases of acquired perception are cases of perception.

Some friends and interpreters of Reid have taken exception to the first premise. Nichols opposes it on the ground that the example is out of character with Reid's other examples of acquired perception (2007, 232),⁹ and Copenhaver opposes it on the ground that my wife does not enter into the content of my car-key perception in the way she thinks required for *bona fide* acquired perception (2010, 305–6).¹⁰ Yet it seems to me that my critics must concede that the example contains all the ingredients that Reid ever lists as necessary for acquired perception. I do have a conception of my wife, I do believe in her present (and nearby) existence, this conception and belief have

⁸ Here is a third sense in which most acquired perception is not immediate: it is the product of a cognitive operation (be it inference or association) on items that are themselves perceived. In my opinion, however, there might be cases of genuine perception that also fail to be immediate in this sense—see the last two paragraphs of Van Cleve (2004). We have no basis here for an argument that acquired perception is not genuine perception.

⁹ See Reid's examples at IHM VI xx, 173, however, for examples not far removed from my own.

¹⁰ Copenhaver develops a threefold distinction among beliefs *ingredient* in perception, beliefs formed on the *basis* of perception, and beliefs *inferred* from perception. She regards the belief that one's spouse is home as a belief belonging to the middle category—a belief formed on the basis of perceiving the keys. However, she also explicitly argues that beliefs that initially belong to categories two or three may migrate (in the development of acquired perception) into category one—they may become perceptual contents or beliefs ingredient in perception, as happens when someone becomes expert at spotting counterfeit coins. I should like to know from Copenhaver what, if anything, keeps belief in my upstairs wife from becoming a perceptual content.

¹³ If you doubt that the colorblind person can *conceive* of redness, assume that he once had normal vision and acquired the ability to conceive of redness at that time. Not all colorblindness is congenital.

it satisfies. That is why I do not perceive my wife on the occasion of seeing her keys: though I may conceive of her under some description, I am not acquainted with her in any way, shape, or form.

Instead of acquaintance, why not appeal to the epistemic immediacy discussed above, saying that genuine perception must be epistemically immediate and my acquired perception of my wife is not? That seems right to me, but it cannot be the full story. Epistemic properties supervene on nonepistemic properties, and we would have to say what the relevant nonepistemic properties are. Perhaps genuine perception is epistemically immediate precisely because it incorporates acquaintance.

I went on to suggest in Van Cleve (2004), and I urge again now, that by the acquaintance standard, few cases of acquired perception qualify as perception. Thus even if the car-key example does not underwrite the simple 1–2–3 argument above, it does serve in the end to motivate the claim that not all acquired perception is perception.

3.3 *Third argument: I do not perceive by sight the heat of the poker*

One of the remarkable features of acquired perception is that it enables us to jump across sensory modalities, perceiving by one sense qualities that were originally given only to another. As Reid tells us,

We learn to perceive, by one sense, what originally could have been perceived only by another, by finding a connection between the objects of the different senses. (EIP II xxi, 236)

[By means of acquired perception] we often discover by one sense things which are properly and naturally the objects of another. Thus I can say without impropriety, I hear a drum, I hear a great bell, or I hear a small bell; though it is certain that the figure or size of the sounding body is not originally an object of hearing. (EIP II xiv, 182)

Berkeley gives another example of the same phenomenon—“seeing” the heat of a red-hot bar of iron when the heat of the iron is “suggested to the imagination by the colour and figure, which are properly perceived by that sense” (1975, 194; 1948, 204).¹⁴

Using this example to explicate what Berkeley means by ‘immediate’ when he says we do not perceive distance immediately, George Pitcher writes as follows:

A person, when he views a red, glowing poker that has just been taken from a roaring furnace . . . sees that the poker is very hot, but he does not really see the heat itself. . . . Just so, Berkeley tells us, a person can see that something is located at such-and-such a distance from him; but he cannot see the distance. . . . To say that we do not literally see the heat of the poker . . . is to say that the visual manifold of which we are aware when we see a hot poker does not contain any heat in it. Similarly, to say that we do not literally see the distance of objects is to say that the visual manifold of which we are aware when we see them does not contain distance. (1977, 7–8)

¹⁴ Berkeley actually speaks of “being said to see a red-hot iron bar,” but it is clear from the context that he means to discuss the sense in which one sees the heat of the bar, not just the sense in which one sees a bar that is hot.

Pitcher is endorsing Berkeley's own view as quoted earlier—that we actually and strictly perceive by any sense only those things we would perceive if that same sense had then been first conferred on us.

Drawing on examples of this sort, we may now construct another argument for the thesis that not all acquired perception is perception:

1. There are some properties that are proper to a given sense, as heat to touch: they cannot be strictly perceived by any other sense.
2. We sometimes have acquired perceptions through one sense of qualities proper to another.
3. Therefore, we sometimes have acquired perceptions that are not perceptions.

This argument seems intuitively compelling to me, and I shall let it stand without further comment on its merits.

I do, however, wish to take this occasion to discuss another issue prompted by Pitcher—the relationship between the original/acquired distinction and a further distinction invoked in Pitcher's remarks. Pitcher is willing to allow *that* we see that the poker is hot, but not that we see the heat itself. Implicit here is a distinction between *propositional* perception and *objectual* perception. Propositional perception is perception *that* *p*—for example, perception that *O* is *F*. Objectual perception is perception simply *of* *O* (an object) or of *the Fness of O* (a quality of an object), where these do not resolve into propositional perception.¹⁵

With this distinction in mind, let us look again at a passage from Reid:

Our perceptions are of two kinds: some are natural and original, others acquired, and the fruit of experience. When I perceive that this is the taste of cyder, that of brandy; that this is the smell of an apple, that of an orange; that this is the noise of thunder, that the ringing of bells; this the sound of a coach passing, that the voice of such a friend; these perceptions and others of the same kind, are not original, they are acquired. But the perception which I have by touch, of the hardness and softness of bodies, of their extension, figure, and motion, is not acquired, it is original. (IHM VI xx, 171)

It is striking that every one of Reid's examples of acquired perception in this passage is a case of propositional perception, while each of his examples of original perception is a case of objectual perception. Are the two distinctions aligned in Reid's thought—is every case of original perception a case of objectual perception and every case of acquired perception a case of propositional perception?¹⁶

¹⁵ Ordinary people sometimes use 'S sees the Fness of O' simply as a stylistic variant of 'S sees that O is F' (as in 'Tom saw the hopelessness of his situation'). Some philosophers allow that 'S sees O' is a permissible locution, but only if it is unpackable into '∃F(S sees that O is F)'. What I mean by objectual perception is perception of O (or the Fness of O) that is not in either of these ways equivalent to anything propositional.

¹⁶ Reid probably meant the distinction between original and acquired perception to be exhaustive, but he overlooked an intermediate case. Suppose that some years after my birth, someone programs my brain so that upon smelling a certain scent, I automatically believe that there are oranges nearby. The resulting perception would be neither original (because it does not arise in me by my native constitution) nor acquired (because it is not acquired by experience).

The answer to the first question is no. Reid's language indicates that there may be propositional perception in regard to the objects of original perception—for example, “we perceive visible objects to have extension in two dimensions” (EIP VI xxi, 236), and I may perceive “that there is in my hand a hard smooth body of a spherical figure” (EIP VI xxi, 237). Of course, we may also have objectual perceptions of the objects and qualities that are constituents of those propositions.

The answer to the second question is harder to determine. There are passages in which Reid does use objectual locutions to refer to acquired perceptions—for example, hearing the size of a bell (EIP II xiv, 182) and seeing the weight of a sheep (IHM VI xx, 172).¹⁷ But insofar as people sometimes use objectual locutions as stylistic variants of propositional ones, these passages do not settle the question. Reid might speak of the butcher's seeing the weight of the sheep even if he thinks that, strictly speaking, the butcher only sees *that* the sheep weighs so much. So the answer to the second question is not clear.

It is a thesis worthy of consideration that whereas genuine perception may take either an objectual or a propositional form, acquired perception may take a propositional form only. If the thesis were true, it would give us one more reason for thinking that acquired perception is not genuine perception.¹⁸

3.4 *Fourth argument: errors in acquired perception are not errors of the senses*

Perhaps the best case for thinking acquired perception is not perception in Reid's book is to be found in EIP II xxii, “Of the fallacy of the senses.” The purpose of this chapter is to refute the opinion of those philosophers who maintain that the senses are systematically fallacious, or at any rate, that they often deceive us. Reid admits that the senses *sometimes* deceive us, his leading example being the case of phantom pain felt in a limb no longer possessed (EIP II xviii, 214; II xxii, 251). But he maintains that *most* so-called fallacies of the senses are not fallacies of the senses at all; they are errors, but not errors of the senses proper.

Reid distinguishes four classes of alleged errors of the senses, of which only the fourth class contains errors of the senses properly so called (such as pain felt in a phantom limb). The first class is described (and dismissed) in the following paragraph:

Many things called deceptions of the senses are only conclusions rashly drawn from the testimony of the senses. . . . Thus, when a man has taken a counterfeit guinea for a true one, he says his senses deceived him; but he lays the blame where it ought not to be laid: For we may ask him, Did your sense give a false testimony of the colour, or of the figure, or of the impression? No.

¹⁷ He actually says “knows by sight” the weight of his sheep, but in the other examples in the same paragraph, he uses “perceives by his eye” and “sees” as though all three were equivalent.

¹⁸ A referee has suggested to me that one can see the difference in the nearness of a table and a door, not merely see that the table is closer than the door. I agree. But as I said in note 2, I disagree with Reid and Berkeley that what we have here is a case of acquired perception—it is original perception. For more on this point, see the section on Stereo Sue in Van Cleve (Forthcoming).

But this is all that they testified, and this they testified truly: From these premises you concluded that it was a true guinea, but this conclusion does not follow. (EIP II xxii, 244)

What I want to call special attention to in this passage is that the only qualities Reid mentions as being testified to by the senses are color, figure, and impression.¹⁹ These are all on the list of original objects of perception. In other nearby places, he uses interchangeably the expressions ‘what our senses testify’ and ‘what we perceive.’²⁰ So it is tempting to generalize from the guinea example to the following claim: the only objects we strictly perceive are the objects of original perception. Putting it the other way around, acquired perception is not perception strictly speaking.

The second class of alleged errors of the senses are errors we make in our acquired perceptions. Reid tells us that if acquired perception could be resolved into some form of reasoning, this class would reduce to the first class along with the false guinea, but since he thinks acquired perception “results from some part of our constitution distinct from reason,” he makes it a class of its own (EIP II xxii, 247). In any case, Reid maintains “that the errors of acquired perception are not properly fallacies of our senses” (EIP II xxii, 247). For example, if I am deceived by a clever painter into believing that a flat patch on canvas is really a sphere, I am in error, but my error lies not in original but in acquired perception. The objects of original perception—the light and colors—are distributed just as my senses say they are.

What Reid unequivocally affirms here is that *errors in acquired perception are not errors of the senses*. This provides the take-off point for the following argument:

1. No error in acquired perception is an error of the senses (premise).
2. If every acquired perception is an exercise of the senses, then every error in acquired perception is an error (in an exercise) of the senses. (This is a logical truth; compare DeMorgan’s ‘If every horse is an animal, then every head of a horse is a head of an animal.’)
3. Therefore, not every acquired perception is an exercise of the senses (from 1 and 2).
4. Every genuine perception is an exercise of the senses (premise).
5. Therefore, not every acquired perception is a genuine perception (from 3 and 4).

That argument seems to me decisive. However, as noted above, Copenhaver stands on the opposite side of the issue, holding that acquired perception *is* in all cases perception. She has sought to defuse the textual argument based on premise 1 above

¹⁹ Color and figure are objects of original perception by sight. I am not sure what he means by ‘impression.’ Perhaps he means the pattern impressed on the coin, which would be an original object of sight in two dimensions and of touch in three, or perhaps he means its heft, which would be an original object of touch.

²⁰ For example, at EIP VI xxii, 246, he says: “Our senses testify only the change of situation of one body in relation to other bodies” and restates this one sentence later as “It is only the relative motions of bodies that we perceive.”

by proposing that ‘error of sense’ is a technical term for Reid. She takes it to refer specifically to errors in original perception. This proposal apparently keeps the door open for saying that errors in acquired perception, though not errors of sense in the technical sense, can nonetheless be cases of misperception, as required by her view. However, her proposal does nothing to block the argument as I have stated it. The premises are 1, 2 and 4, and her proposal leaves all of them standing.²¹

The question whether acquired perception is genuine perception has been reincarnated in contemporary philosophy of mind as the question whether so-called higher-level properties (properties such as being a pine tree or being an apple, which are not on Reid’s list of objects of original perception) can be *represented* in perception. That is, can such properties belong to the contents of perception proper and not just to the contents of beliefs formed on the basis of perception? Susanna Siegel (2006) offers the following test question as a diagnostic for determining one’s stand: if you are taken in by a bowl of wax fruit, is your error an error in perception or an error in accompanying belief? If your visual experience represents only colors and shapes, you have made an error in belief; if it represents apples and pears, you have made an error in perception.²² It seems to me that in his discussion of the fake apple made of turf, Reid has given as explicit an answer as one could wish to Siegel’s question: your error is an error in belief, not in perception (EIP II xxii, 245).

3.5 *Fifth argument: speak with the vulgar, but think with the learned*

For my final argument, I let Reid speak for himself:

Acquired perception is not properly the testimony of those senses which God hath given us, but a conclusion drawn from what the senses testify. . . . The appearance of the sign immediately produces the belief of its usual attendant, and *we think we perceive* the one as well as the other. [emphasis added]

That such conclusions are formed even in infancy, no man can doubt; nor is it less certain that they are confounded with the natural and immediate perceptions of sense, and in all languages are called by the same name. We are therefore authorized by language to call them perception, and must often do so, or speak unintelligibly. But philosophy teaches us in this, as in many other instances, to distinguish things which the vulgar confound. I have therefore given the name of acquired perception to such conclusions, to distinguish them from what is naturally, originally, and immediately testified by our senses. (EIP II xxii, 247)

²¹ Perhaps one could maintain that if ‘error of sense’ has a technical meaning in Reid, one cannot drop the parenthetical expression in my premise 2, shortening ‘error in an exercise of the senses’ to ‘error of the senses’. I need take no stand on that. I can stay with the longer formulation of premise 2, under which it is a logical truth. And I can rewrite premise 1 as ‘No error in acquired perception is an error in an exercise of the senses’ to make it engage with premise 2. It is clear that Reid would assert 1 in either the longer or the shorter version.

²² In this context, Copenhaver remarks, “It is precisely because we are perceptually sensitive to such features as ‘being a tomato’ and ‘being a quarter’ that we may be misled by wax vegetables and counterfeits.” I do not see why that is so. Even if the content of my perception were limited to colors and shapes, could it not still mislead me into believing falsely that there is a tomato in the bowl?

In this telling passage, the equivocation of the earlier passages is gone. Reid all but says that in calling acquired perception “perception,” we are speaking with the vulgar. When we think with the learned, we acknowledge that acquired perception is not perception proper.

4 Are Secondary Qualities Objects of Acquired Perception Only?

Reid is an upholder of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, though he rejects some ways of drawing it. *Pace* Locke, it is not true that primary qualities resemble our sensations and secondaries do not; *pace* Berkeley’s Hylas, it is not true that primary qualities are mind-independent and secondaries not. Both sets of qualities are mind-independent, and neither set resembles anything in our minds. But in Reid’s view, there is a basis for drawing the distinction nonetheless:

Our senses give us a direct and a distinct notion of the primary qualities, and inform us what they are in themselves: But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a relative and obscure notion. They inform us only, that they are qualities that . . . produce in us a certain sensation. (EIP II xvii, 201)²³

Some commentators, including (Lehrer and Smith, 1985), (Nichols, 2007, 224), and (Buras, 2009, 348ff.), attribute to Reid the thesis that all perception of secondary qualities is acquired perception. One possible piece of evidence for their attribution is the following passage:

Three of our senses, to wit, smell, taste, and hearing, originally give us only certain sensations, and a conviction that these sensations are occasioned by some external object. We give a name to that quality of the object by which it is fitted to produce such a sensation, and connect that quality with the object, and with its other qualities.

Thus we learn, that a certain sensation of smell is produced by a rose; and that quality in the rose, by which it is fitted to produce this sensation, we call the smell of the rose. Here it is evident that the sensation is original. The perception, that the rose has that quality, which we call its smell, is acquired. In like manner, we learn all those qualities in bodies, which we call their smell, their taste, their sound. (EIP II xxi, 235)

Reid does indeed seem to say here that at least *three* classes of secondary qualities—smells, tastes, and sounds—are perceived only via acquired perception. But are we entitled to generalize this claim to *all* secondary qualities?

I think not. The outstanding exception is *color*, which Reid certainly regards as a secondary quality (EIP II xvii, 201) and which he lists among the original objects of sight in the *Inquiry*: “By [sight] we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only, and their visible place” (IHM VI xx, 171). Confounding the issue, however,

²³ For further discussion, see Van Cleve (2011).

is a fact noted by Nichols (2007, 224)—Reid apparently omits color when he comes to list the original objects of sight in the *Intellectual Powers*:

By [sight] we perceive visible objects to have extension in two dimensions, to have visible figure and magnitude, and a certain angular distance from one another. These I conceive are the original perceptions of sight. (EIP II xxi, 236)

Does this signal any change of view on his part?

Again, I think not. For one thing, it is quite possible that Reid's pronoun 'these' in the sentence quoted is meant to refer back not just to the qualities mentioned in the previous sentence, but to color, which was mentioned in the sentence just before that.²⁴ For another and more decisive thing, Reid clearly implies later on the same page that color is originally perceived. Speaking of a sphere that we now know (by acquired perception) to be three-dimensional, he says: "The eye originally could only perceive two dimensions, and a gradual variation of colour on the different sides of the object" (EIP II xxi, 236, lines 26–8; see also lines 36–7 on the same page).

So there is at least one secondary quality, color, that we perceive originally. Are there others? I would like to advance the following conjecture: if our senses enable us to *localize* a secondary quality (as they do in the case of colors, textures, and temperatures), we may have original perceptions regarding it. To see what lies behind the conjecture, look back at the quotation about the rose. By our original constitution, when we smell a rose, we know that some quality of some external object is causing our sensation—we just do not know what object or where. It takes repeated experience and induction before we know that the quality (i.e., the cause of the fragrant sensations we are getting) resides in a rose. At that point, we have acquired perception: we can perceive by smell that a rose is in the room, even if we have not yet seen it. With color, we do not need to go through any such process to learn where the external cause of our sensation lies. That is because the same retinal excitations that give us sensations of color also induce us to believe that the cause of them lies in a certain direction. As Reid says, we always see any point of an object along the line passing from the retinal point stimulated by it back through the center of the eye and into ambient space. (See IHM VI xii, 122–3, for Reid's formulation of this law of vision.)²⁵ Owing to this law, we have an innate ability to localize the distal causes of our color sensations. We have no such innate ability to localize the causes of our olfactory sensations.

Are there any other secondary-quality sensations that should be grouped with color rather than smell in this regard? Yes: heat and cold. When we feel a surface to be warm or cold, we do not merely have a certain sensation and believe it to have an external quality somewhere as its cause; we know that the cause is right here, at the ends of

²⁴ Here is the sentence: "By sight, we learn to distinguish objects by their colour, in the same manner as by their sound, taste, and smell." What makes the matter ambiguous is that sound, taste, and smell are also mentioned in the same breath.

²⁵ For further discussion of this law, see Van Cleve (2003), especially section IX.

our fingertips. The same is true of rough and smooth, if they count as secondary qualities.²⁶

Apart from the matter of localization, there is another way in which I think Lehrer, Smith, and Nichols may be too hasty in declaring secondary qualities to be objects of acquired perception only. What Reid gives as an example of acquired perception in regard to smell is “the perception, that the rose has that quality, which we call its smell.” That leaves open the possibility that we have an original perception to the effect that *some* quality exists that is causing our sensation or, more colloquially, that a certain scent is in the air. Perhaps (though it seems a stretch) one could even be said to have an objectual perception of the scent or quality itself, without knowing where it resides. In one or both of these latter two ways, there could be original perceptions of all secondary qualities, including those that are not innately localized.

That is a welcome result for me, since it provides a way out of an inconsistency in Reid that would threaten to arise on my interpretation otherwise. According to Lehrer, Smith, and Nichols, (1) secondary qualities are objects of acquired perception only. According to me, (2) acquired perception is not perception. Yet according to Reid himself, (3) secondary qualities are objects of perception.²⁷ (1)–(3) form an inconsistent triad. If Reid does not embrace (1), the inconsistency does not arise.

A deeper potential contradiction about secondary qualities is addressed in my final section.

5 Does Acquired Perception Alter the Content of our Original Perceptions?

Originally, I perceive a sphere only as a variegated disk and a certain type of bird only as a slow flutter of gray and white. Subsequently, I have the acquired perception of the disk as a sphere and the moving patches of color as a mockingbird. Do my original perceptions survive as ingredients in the enriched perception? Or are they transformed into or superseded by something else?

As a preliminary to determining Reid’s answer to this question, let us consider Locke’s answer, which he presents under the heading “Ideas of Sensation often changed by the Judgment” in 2.9.8–10 of the *Essay* (1690/1975):

The Ideas we receive by sensation, are often in grown People alter’d by the Judgment, without our taking notice of it. When we set before our Eyes a round Globe, of any uniform colour . . . ’tis

²⁶ I am not sure whether they do. They supervene, of course, on primary qualities—the hardness of an object and its figure at a fine level of resolution. But I do not think our senses give us any very determinate notion of the configuration responsible for the roughness or smoothness we feel, and that fact would make textures secondary qualities in Reid’s scheme.

One more example of a localized secondary quality may be mentioned: pain. In its primary sense, pain is a sensation, but there is also a sense in which we perceive pain as some unknown disorder in our toe causing the sensation (IHM VI xxi, 175).

²⁷ EIP II xvii is entitled “Of the Objects of Perception; and first, of primary and secondary Qualities.”

certain, that the *Idea* thereby imprinted in our Mind, is of a flat Circle variously shadow'd, with several degrees of Light and Brightness coming to our Eyes. But we having by use been accustomed to perceive, what kind of appearance convex Bodies are wont to make in us; . . . the Judgment presently, by an habitual custom, alters the Appearances into their Causes: So that from that, which truly is variety of shadow or colour, collecting the Figure, it makes it pass for a mark of Figure, and frames to its self the perception of a convex Figure, and an uniform Colour; when the *Idea* we receive from thence, is only a Plain variously colour'd, as is evident in Painting. (145)²⁸

That seems to be an unequivocal answer to our question—sensation is altered by learning and judgment. But does Locke really mean it? I think not. In the first place, there can hardly be any question of a two-dimensional object somehow morphing into a three-dimensional object. Dimension is a topological invariant; if the original cue does not survive, that must be because it is replaced, not altered. In the second place, not even the talk of replacement accurately expresses Locke's view if such talk is taken literally. Scrolling ahead to Locke's more careful statement of what he is getting at, we read:

[The judging of shape from shadow] is performed so constantly, and so quick, that we take that for the Perception of our Sensation, which is an *Idea* formed by our Judgment; so that one, *viz.* that of Sensation, serves only to excite the other, and is scarce taken notice of it self; as a Man who reads or hears with attention and understanding, takes little notice of the Characters, or Sounds, but of the *Ideas*, that are excited in him by them. (146)

And therefore 'tis not so strange, that our Mind should often change the *Idea* of its Sensation into that of its Judgment, and make one serve only to excite the other, without our taking notice of it. (147)

Although Locke uses the language of “changing” one more time, the surrounding commentary makes clear that it is not to be taken literally. The original cues are “scarce taken notice of,” but like the characters on a page, they are still there.

Turning now to Reid, we find that his view of the matter is substantially the same as Locke's:

It is experience that teaches me that the variation of colour is an effect of spherical convexity, and of the distribution of light and shade. So rapid is the progress of the thought, from the effect to the cause, that we attend only to the last, and can hardly be persuaded that we do not immediately see the three dimensions of the sphere. (EIP VI xxi, 236)

He even uses the same example of words or characters, comparing sensory cues to “the words of a language, wherein we do not attend to the sound, but to the sense” (IHM II

²⁸ Interestingly, Locke's discussion of this issue serves as the context in which he raises and answers Molyneux's question. Locke's answer is no—the newly sighted person would not recognize what he saw as a globe or a cube because he would not yet have connected the two-dimensional objects he sees with the three-dimensional objects he knows by touch.

ix, 43, and elsewhere). It appears, then, that the objects of original perception are still present in richer states of acquired perception. It is just that we do not attend to them.

Yet there are passages in which Reid tantalizes us by pulling us in the opposite direction:

Nay, it may be observed, that, in this case, the acquired perception *in a manner* effaces the original one; for the sphere is seen to be of one uniform colour, though originally there would have appeared a gradual variation of colour. (EIP VI xxi, 236, emphasis added)

There are many phaenomena of a similar nature [to double vision due to lack of focus], which shew, that the mind may not attend to, and thereby, *in some sort*, not perceive objects that strike the senses. (IHM VI xiii, 135, emphasis added)

Custom, by a kind of legerdemain, withdraws gradually these original and proper objects of sight, and substitutes in their place objects of touch, which have length, breadth, and thickness, and a determinate distance from the eye. (IHM VI xx, 167)

What are to we make of these passages?

For a potentially illuminating parallel, we may consider the recently much investigated topic of inattentional blindness (Mack and Rock, 1998). I invite any readers who are unfamiliar with this phenomenon to seek out a demonstration of it (easily available on the internet) before reading on.²⁹

In one famous demonstration, subjects are asked to view a video of two interspersed teams passing basketballs back and forth. They are asked to count how many times the ball changes hands among members of the white-shirted team. With their minds thus occupied, over 50% of subjects do not notice what they are amazed to see on a replay: that someone wearing a gorilla suit has strolled right through the midst of the basketball players. This is an example of the “blindness” we sometimes have to objects to which we do not attend.

My suggestion is that once a cue has become a sign for us in the acquired perception of something else, we often become inattentionally blind to it. Of course, this proposal may simply be a case of *obscurum per obscurius*, replacing one imponderable question by another. Did I see the gorilla or not? It was right there before my eyes; yet in some sense I was oblivious to it.

Reid’s answer, I believe, is that we are still aware of the cues—even though they are “in a manner” effaced and even though “in some sort” we do not perceive them. It is a measure of the perplexing nature of the phenomenon that Reid uses such equivocal language, but I believe we can construct a respectable Reidian case that we are still aware of the cues.

One argument that awareness of the cues remains is physiological. The cue or sign in acquired perception may be either a sensation or something originally perceived (EIP VI xxi, 237). Suppose it is a sensation. For Reid, connections between physical

²⁹ Try http://youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo&feature=player_embedded.

impressions and mental sensations are part of our original constitution and are therefore not undoable by learning or shifts in attention. If we have the same stimulus again, we shall have the same sensation again. (This is a principle that was made famous by Helmholtz a century later.) The physical causes of sensations to which we no longer attend are still there, and therefore the sensations are still there. Moreover, we never have sensations according to Reid without being conscious of them (IHM VI xxi, 175, last three lines). It follows that sensational signs we no longer attend to, even if we are in some sense blind to them, are still there before our consciousness.³⁰

The same argument can be extended to cover cases in which the sign is something originally perceived. This is because Reid holds (i) that the laws connecting sensations with original perceptions are as much a part of our constitution as laws connecting physical impressions with sensations (IHM VI xxi, 174), and (ii) that there is no such thing as an unconscious perception (EIP II xv, 191). Cues in the external world to which we no longer attend are therefore still consciously perceived.

Reid explicitly endorses the possibility for which I am contending when he says, “We are conscious of many things to which we give little or no attention” (EIP I ii, 42).³¹

My suggestion, then, is that the legerdemain that “withdraws” the original objects of sight withdraws them only from attention, not from existence or awareness. The attentive eye can catch the magician’s hand.

6 Could *Anything* Become an Object of Acquired Perception?

Acquired perception is a tremendous enlargement of our cognitive faculties, far outstripping original perception. As Reid notes,

The acquired perceptions are many more than the original. . . . We learn to perceive by the eye, almost every thing which we can perceive by touch (IHM VI xx, 171).

But are there any limits on the class of objects to which our acquired perceptions might one day extend?

As a foil to Reid’s stance on this issue, I shall use the views of Paul Churchland, a proponent of the radical plasticity of perception. According to Churchland (1979),

³⁰ Yaffe (2009) challenges my assumption that Reid makes use of the premise that sensations supervene on physical states of organs. However, he thinks Reid has reasons independent of that assumption for holding that we can be conscious of items to which we do not attend. The latter proposition is all I need to sustain my claim that one’s original cues survive in acquired perception.

³¹ Russell endorsed a Reidian position (Russell 1913, 9): “Thus the question we have to consider is whether attention constitutes experience, or whether things not attended to are also experienced. It seems we must admit things to which we do not attend, for attention is a selection among objects that are ‘before the mind,’ and therefore presupposes a larger field, constituted in some less exclusive manner, out of which attention chooses what it wants.” For further arguments in support of the claim that we can be aware of items to which we do not attend, see Tye (2006).

we could come to perceive anything that causally interacts with our sensory systems, given only scientific progress and enlightened education.

Churchland identifies two conditions for perceiving a property ϕ : (i) we must have sensations that are caused by ϕ and reliably indicate its presence, and (ii) we must respond noninferentially to those sensations with the belief that something is ϕ : that is, with a belief deploying a term or concept that means ϕ (14). Reid would agree that these conditions are in most cases necessary for perception. Perception of an object is typically mediated by sensations nomically correlated with it,³² and perception always involves psychologically noninferential beliefs in response to these sensations.

Churchland goes on to offer a holistic conceptual-role account of what it is for a belief containing a given concept to be about one property rather than another. In a nutshell, “The meaning of a term (or the identity of a concept) is not determined by the intrinsic quality of whatever sensation happens to prompt its observational use, but by the network of assumptions/beliefs/principles in which it figures” (15). Reid could agree with the negative part of this—the beliefs that figure in perception are not about the sensations that prompt them, but about external qualities. He would probably disagree with the positive part, maintaining that which qualities a belief is about is a primitive intentional property of the belief rather than something determined by the web of theoretical connections to which the belief belongs. However, that difference between Reid and Churchland is not what I shall highlight as the key difference between them.

If the foregoing points are correct, Churchland says, “the possibility of a dramatic modification and expansion of the domain of human perceptual consciousness—without modification of our sense organs—becomes quite real” (15). He invites us to imagine an advanced scientific society in which children are taught to respond noninferentially to their sensations with terms from the best theories of the day. Where we respond with ‘loud noise,’ they are taught to respond with ‘large amplitude atmospheric compression waves’; where we respond with ‘red,’ they are taught to respond with ‘selectively reflects electromagnetic waves at 0.63×10^6 m,’ and so on. These children

do not sit on the beach and listen to the steady roar of the pounding surf. They sit on the beach and listen to the aperiodic atmospheric compression waves produced as the coherent energy of the ocean waves is audibly redistributed in the chaotic turbulence of the shallows. . . . They do not observe the western sky redden as the sun sets. They observe the wavelength distribution of incoming solar radiation shift towards the longer wavelengths They do not observe the dew forming on every surface. . . . they observe the accretion of reassociated atmospheric H_2O molecules as their kinetic energy is lost to the now more quiescent aggregates with which they collide. (29–30)

³² The one exception Reid mentions is the perception of visible figure, which he thinks is directly cued by retinal impressions rather than by sensations (IHM VI xxi, 176).

“O brave new world!” expostulates Jerry Fodor (1984) in reaction to these lines, “that has such children in it.”

Reid’s views do not afford such a dramatic extension of our perceptual horizons. Setting aside the question whether acquired perception is perception, the main point is that Reid does not let us get even as far as acquired perception of such things as the accretion of H₂O molecules. For Reid, we can come to have acquired perceptions only of properties that we already perceive in some fashion to begin with. This is because the mechanism by which acquired perceptions are acquired is induction, and as Hume taught, we can learn by induction that a correlation holds between two properties only by perceiving the properties independently. So we cannot have acquired perceptions of esoteric properties or entities that we first come to know about through the postulational methods of science.

A methodological question dividing Reid and Churchland now comes into the spotlight: whether explanatory postulation (also known as abduction or the method of hypothesis) is a legitimate method alongside enumerative induction in scientific inquiry. Reid takes a strongly disapproving line on what he calls hypotheses (see EIP I iii, 47–52). By a hypothesis he means a proposition whose only recommendation to our belief is that it would, if true, explain other things that we know to be true, but whose truth is not open to confirmation by any more direct method. An example is the Indian philosopher’s hypothesis of a great elephant supporting the earth on its back, offered to explain why the earth does not hurtle downward—“His elephant was a hypothesis, and our hypotheses are elephants” (IHM VI xix, 163). By what Reid takes to be proper Newtonian method, we may invoke a proposition to explain phenomena only if it is supported by induction from the phenomena themselves—either the phenomena to be explained or other related phenomena. His strictures thus rule out of play explanatory assumptions about entities that are never observed.

Reid’s prohibition of hypotheses would perhaps be faulted by some for putting a straitjacket on scientific inquiry. However, the point I am about to make does not depend on his blanket proscription of hypotheses. It only depends on his disallowing hypothetical reasoning as a mechanism of acquired perception.

Here is one of Reid’s key claims about acquired perception:

In acquired perception, the sign may be either a sensation, or something originally perceived. The thing signified, *is something, which, by experience, has been found connected with that sign.*

(EIP VI xxi, 237; emphasis added).

Note the implications of the italicized words. The finding by experience of a connection between sign S and feature X requires that we perceive X. So acquired perception of X requires prior perception of X, and if the prior perception were always itself acquired, there would be an impossible infinite regress. (Compare the regress involved in the supposition that there are indirect flights to Toronto, making a stop on the way, but no direct flights to Toronto from anywhere.) Therefore, we can have acquired perceptions only of those features that are original objects of perception for some sense. We now

perceive the convexity of the ball by sight, but only because we previously perceived it by touch.³³

For Reid, then, it is not the case that we can come to perceive new things under the sun. We can only develop new sensory routes to the same old things. Reid's world is not as brave or new as Churchland's.

And yet . . . alongside Reid's conservatism about what we may *come* to perceive is a radicalism about what we *might have been* able to perceive, even given our present sensory organs. That is because he holds that the links between what sensations we receive and what conceptions and beliefs we form in response to them are contingent:

Perhaps we might have been so made, as to taste with our fingers, to smell with our ears, and to hear by the nose. . . . We might perhaps have been made of such a constitution, as to have our present perceptions connected with other sensations. (IHM VI xxi, 176).

It is in the spirit of Reid's view to affirm the converse as well—that we might have been so constituted as to have our present sensations connected with other perceptions, including perceptions of properties of which we now have no notion. The very sensations that are the occasions of our perceiving redness might have been lawfully correlated with hardness, or some property altogether unknown to us, and they might have induced us to conceive of and believe in that property. In that case, we would have perceived a property undreamt of by us now. Had it so pleased our Maker, we might have been constituted so as to perceive a vastly different realm of things on the same sensory occasions we have now.

7 Problems

I close by discussing three inconsistencies that threaten to arise in Reid's philosophy on my interpretation of him.

To begin with, there is the following inconsistent tetrad, taking off from the proposition I used to distinguish Reid from Churchland:

1. We can have acquired perception only of things of which we also have original perception.
2. All perception of secondary qualities is acquired perception.

³³ Three supplementary remarks: (1) Nothing I say here rules out that perception might be multiply layered, S serving as the sign for the acquired perception of X, which serves in turn as the sign for the acquired perception of Y. Two-dimensional cues are the signs for the acquired perception of three-dimensional shape, which might in turn become the sign for the acquired perception of a ship or a barn. (2) Instead of saying any object of AP must be an object of OP for some sense, one should probably say that any object of AP must have a constellation of properties—a Lockean “nominal essence”—each of which is an object of OP for some sense. (3) If one wanted to allow (as I suspect that Reid would not) that acquired perceptions may be acquired by testimony as well as by personal experience, one should say that we can have AP only of objects of which *someone* has had OP.

3. We come to have acquired perception by sight of the coldness of the distant mountain and the hotness of the glowing poker.
4. Hotness and coldness are secondary qualities.

1 and 3 imply that there is original perception of hotness, while 2 and 4 imply to the contrary that all perception of hotness is acquired perception.

If my conjecture about localization is correct, we can avoid the inconsistency of 1–4 by denying 2: hotness and coldness are secondary qualities of which we do have original perception. However, that strategy would leave standing the following simpler contradiction:

1. We can have acquired perception only of things of which we also have original perception.
2. There is acquired perception of some secondary qualities (e.g., smells) that are never objects of original perception.

Here one could deny 2, for reasons brought forth in section 2. We do have original perception of the sheer existence of smell qualities, even if we do not have original perceptions of which objects they proceed from.³⁴

The third inconsistency is more vexing. In section 1, I floated the suggestion that we have genuine Reidian perception only of those objects and qualities with which we are *acquainted* in something like Russell's sense. Acquaintance is a relation to an object (or quality) rather than to a proposition, and it is a relation that is direct rather than being mediated by some description, such as *the woman I married* or *the quality that causes this sensation in me*.³⁵ This characterization permits us to say (what Russell himself did not allow) that we are acquainted with physical things or at least with some of their qualities. My suggestion was that it is for want of acquaintance with my wife that I do not see her when I see her keys, even though I do think of her. The problem I now want to air is this: by the acquaintance standard, it seems that I do not perceive secondary qualities, for according to Reid, I only conceive of them under descriptions such as *the quality that causes this sensation of color in me*. I have no conception of what red things are like in themselves, as a nave realist would have it. Yet Reid says we *do* perceive secondary qualities. In brief:

1. We perceive only those qualities with which we are acquainted.
2. We are not acquainted with secondary qualities (having only "relative notions" of them.)
3. We do perceive secondary qualities.

³⁴ This position is tenable only if the content of perception can be a bare existential proposition—that *there is* a quality causing such-and-such a sensation in me.

³⁵ Such descriptions express what Reid calls "relative notions." "A relative notion of a thing, is, strictly speaking, no notion of the thing at all, but only of some relation which it bears to something else" (EIP II xvii, 201).

References

³⁶ If I am alerted to the broken bridge by a shouted warning and you by a written sign, do I perceive it by hearing and you by sight? Or do we each have amodal perceptions? If we turn around before we reach the bridge, have we nonetheless both perceived it?

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Seeing White and Wrong

Reid on the Role of Sensations in Perception,
with a Focus on Colour Perception*Lucas Thorpe*

1 What Do We Perceive?

Reid commentators can be divided into those who offer what one could call more or less *liberal* accounts of perception. On the less liberal side of the divide are commentators such as Ryan Nichols, James van Cleve, and, perhaps, Todd Buras. The least liberal position, which I will call the narrow account of perception, is that of Ryan Nichols (2007). According to Nichols, we can only literally be said to perceive physical objects and primary qualities. Although James Van Cleve (2004) denies that what Reid calls ‘acquired perception’ is genuine perception, he recognizes that Reid has a more liberal account of what can be perceived than Nichols, accepting that Reid is committed to the position that we can literally perceive secondary qualities. However, I will argue that Van Cleve’s interpretation of Reid’s theory of perception implicitly commits Reid to the narrow account of perception, as it implies that for Reid we cannot literally perceive secondary qualities such as colours.

On the more liberal side of the divide we find commentators such as Laurent Jaffro, Rebecca Copenhaver, and myself. Jaffro, for example, argues that according to Reid we can literally perceive aesthetic qualities, such as the excellence of a work of art; Copenhaver has argued that what Reid calls ‘acquired perception’ is literally a form of perception.¹ Although the primary focus of this essay is on colour perception, the motivation is broader than this. The central claim that will be defended and explained here is that Reid is committed to the position that direct perception of an object or quality is compatible with an indirect, or what he calls “relative,” conception of the object or quality. This commitment is central to his account of colour perception, for he believes that, although we can directly perceive secondary qualities, our conception of

¹ See, for example, Jaffro, Chapter 8 in this volume and Copenhaver (2010).

these qualities, at least the conception that plays a role in the perceptual act, is relative. In defending such an account of colour perception, I hope to persuade other Reid scholars to adopt a wider or more liberal conception of perception in general. The thought here is that, if we open the door to colour, we are going to have to invite in all of colour's friends too. And given Reid's account of colour perception, colour has a lot of friends that some commentators do not want to invite to the perception party, such as moral qualities. If we accept Reid's account of colour perception and we believe that we can literally perceive colours, then it becomes difficult to provide a principled reason not to adopt an extremely liberal account of perception, an account that I am sympathetic to for ethical reasons, for I believe that we can literally perceive some moral qualities, such as the wrongness of an action and the moral worth of another human being.

Commentators committed to a less liberal interpretation of Reid's account of perception are at least implicitly committed to the position that Reid often uses "perception" or "perceive" in a non-technical, or what Reid might call a "figurative," sense.² And Reid's usage of this word, and perceptual language, is in general far broader than current philosophical usage. For example, Reid often talks of "perceiving" duties and the meaning of words and things such as "the weight of a ship."³ Now, commentators committed to narrow accounts of perception try to read away such usages of the word, and implicitly assume that Reid uses perceptual language either ambiguously or carelessly; and as a general interpretive principle, we should not rest too much of our interpretation on the single use of a particular word in a particular context. Reid's use of the word "perception," however, is far more precise and univocal than some commentators would have. Reid himself repeatedly stresses that philosophers need to be extremely careful in their use of words and even argues that "there is no greater impediment to the advancement of knowledge than the ambiguity of words" (EIP I i, 17). Given such claims, and his claim that much that is wrong with the philosophy of his day has to do with the tendency of philosophers to use the word 'perception' in an ambiguous way, one should be wary of attributing such ambiguous and loose usage to Reid. Unless we have good reasons to do otherwise, we should take what Reid says at face value. For example, it seems clear to me that when Reid talks of "perceiving" an obligation or duty, Reid is using his words carefully and means what he says.

² As an example of a "figurative" use of a word, Reid explains that "I might say, I perceive that such a person has had the small-pox; but this phrase is figurative, although the figure is so familiar that it is not observed. The meaning of it is that I perceive the pits in his face, which are certain signs of his having had the smallpox" (EIP I i, 23).

³ For example Reid writes that, "[Man] *perceives* it to be his duty to act the worthy and honourable part . . ." (EAP Introduction, 6; emphasis added). Similarly he writes that "It would be very strange indeed, if mankind had always used these words so familiarly, without *perceiving* that they had no meaning" (EAP I i, 13; emphasis added). And in talking about what he calls acquired perception, he argues that "[A] painter *perceives* that this picture is the work of Raphael, that the work of Titian; a jeweler, that this is a true diamond, that a counterfeit; a sailor that this is a ship of 500 ton, that of 600; these different acquired perceptions are produced by the same general principles of the human mind . . ." (IHM VI xxiv, 191–2; emphasis added).

Let us take a closer look at candidates for what can be immediately perceived by Reid. All Reid scholars accept that according to Reid we can immediately perceive:

1. physical objects;⁴
2. primary qualities (such as hardness).

In this essay, I will concentrate on defending the view that, according to Reid, we can also perceive:

3. secondary qualities, such as colours.

In defending this claim, I reject the explicit position of Ryan Nichols and the implicit position of James Van Cleve. I will explain Reid's account of what is involved in the perception of such qualities. I believe, however, that Reid's account of perception is far more liberal than this. For I believe that, given Reid's account of colour perception, if we accept that we can literally perceive colours, which seems to be a plausible common sense position, then, at the least, it makes it easier to argue for the claim that we can literally perceive four more types of thing:

4. moral objects and/or qualities, such as obligations, or the rightness/wrongness of an action;
5. the dispositions, mental states, and perhaps even the powers of other agents, such as embarrassment when someone blushes;
6. aesthetic qualities, such as grandeur and beauty; and,
7. things such as 'the weight of a ship' and 'its being by Picasso.'

There is good textual evidence to support the claim that Reid is committed to the view that we can literally perceive such objects. There is conflicting textual evidence, however, on Reid's position concerning two other putative objects of perception, namely:

8. other finite minds; and,
9. certain qualities of God, such as his grandeur.

In addition, Reid seems to be committed to the view that we literally perceive:

10. meanings (of, say, written words); and
11. changes.

Now I am not convinced that we, literally, perceive the meaning of words, although a case might be made that we do perceive the significance of things such as smoke

⁴ Although someone like Van Cleve, who believes that perception, strictly understood, requires what Reid calls a 'direct' conception of the object, might have a problem here as Reid is committed to the position that our conception of physical objects is 'indirect' or relative. Thus Reid claims that "*our notion of body is not direct but relative to its qualities*. We know that it is something extended, solid, and divisible, and we know no more" (EAP I i, 10; emphasis added). So Van Cleve is implicitly committed to the position that, according to Reid, we do not really perceive bodies, but only their primary qualities.

and tracks in the snow. In addition, although I agree with Reid that we immediately perceive changes, I think that given his own account of the nature of perception, Reid himself faces problems accounting for the perception of changes, and in particular motion. For Reid himself is explicitly committed to the view that the perception is quite distinct from memory and that, strictly speaking, we can only perceive what is present. Our perception of changes, however, involves not just awareness of something present but also of the past. Reid's inability to account for our perception of change is the biggest failing in Reid's account of perception. It is clear that we can, literally, see changes, and Reid accepts this. But, given the importance Reid places on the distinction between perception, which is necessarily of what is present, and memory, which is necessarily of what is past, Reid faces a problem explaining how the perception of changes is possible. At the very least, it is not obvious how a Reidian is to account for our perception of changes.

Now, although I think Reid's account of what can be perceived is extremely liberal, there are certain important classes of things that Reid believes that we cannot, strictly speaking, be said to perceive. Amongst those things that Reid claims are not objects of perception are:

1. my sensations;
2. my self, and the operations and powers of my mind;
3. the past.

As George Pappas points out, in the *Inquiry* Reid sometimes uses language that suggests that he thinks that sensations can be perceived (Pappas 1989, 158). I think, for once, we should regard these passages as slips of the pen on Reid's part. I am unaware of passages in his later works where Reid makes a similar claim. In his later works he explicitly argues that, strictly speaking, sensations are not perceived, although they can be consciously attended to.⁵ Of course, for Reid conscious attention is structurally very similar to perception, in that it involves a conception of the object and an existential belief, but consciousness is directed inwards whereas perception is directed outwards, and Reid clearly distinguishes consciousness and perception as distinct faculties.

2 The Role of Sense Organs and Sensations in Perception in General

Having briefly enumerated the types of things that Reid thinks can be immediately perceived, I will now turn to his account of the nature of perception. I will begin by examining his account of perception in general, before turning to his account of what is involved in our perception of secondary qualities, and particularly colours.

⁵ Thus Reid claims, in his discussion of the explication of words in the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, that "Perception is applied only to external objects not to those that are in the mind itself. When I am pained, I do not say that I perceive pain, but that I feel it, or that I am conscious of it. Thus *perception* is distinguished from *consciousness*" (EIP I i, 22).

⁹ It should be noted that there is a debate as to whether Reid thinks that sensations play a role in our perception of visible figure—that is, the apparent shape of objects.

been created with, the existence and well-functioning of our sense organs is necessary for perception. In contemporary terminology we can perhaps think of what I am calling contingent necessity as a form of nomological necessity.

It is interesting that the notion of sensation is not included in Reid's definition of perception. Where a philosopher today might talk of *sense*-perception, Reid talks of our perception of external objects. When speaking strictly, Reid identifies sensations with feelings and insists that the essence of feelings is to be felt. Thus he argues that

Sensation is a name given by Philosophers to an act of mind, which may be distinguished from all others by this, that it hath no object distinct from the act itself. Pain of every kind is an uneasy sensation. When I am pained, I cannot say that the pain I feel is one thing, and that my feeling it, is another thing. They are one and the same thing, and cannot be disjoined, even in imagination. Pain, when it is not felt, has no existence. (EIP I i, 36–7)

Reid also argues that sensations, understood thusly, are transparent to consciousness. This is not to say that we necessarily know the nature of our sensations, for knowledge of the nature of our sensations requires attentive reflection. However, he believes that we have the capacity to know our sensations perfectly.¹⁰ Thus Reid claims that

[I]t is essential to a sensation to be felt, and it can be nothing more than we feel it to be. If we can only acquire the habit of attending to our sensations, we may know them perfectly.

(IHM VI xxi, 175–6)

It is clear that he thinks that sensations normally play a causal role in perception. It is also clear that he thinks that it is only contingent that they play such a role, for God could have created us otherwise. If this is the only role sensations play in perception, this would seem to imply what Mark Johnston has called the 'Wallpaper View' of sensation (Johnston 2006). According to such a view, sensations are understood of as "*mere accompaniments of immediate perceptual judgments*" and "the deliverances of sensory awareness may be compared to the wallpaper or to the background music during a dinner" and it makes "sensory awareness a curious sideshow, a mere provider of sensation alongside the epistemically interesting perceptual act" (260–1). Of course, Reid thinks that sensations are more than "mere accompaniments" of our perceptual judgments, as he thinks that they actually do play a causal role in our perceptual judgments, and that it is the existence of the sensation that "suggests" the judgment. But Johnston wants to classify all views according to which sensations do not play an *essential* role in our perceptual judgments as versions of the Wallpaper View. And it is clear that he classifies theories that only allow sensations a causal role in the genesis of perceptual judgments as in the same ballpark as Wallpaper Theories,

¹⁰ Reid is thus committed to the position that sensations are what Timothy Williamson calls 'luminous.' Williamson defines luminosity in the following terms: "A condition C is defined to be luminous if and only if [the following condition] holds: For every case α , if in α C obtains, then in α one is in a position to know that C obtains" (Williamson 2000, 95).

For Reid, then, when it comes to our perception of secondary qualities, sensation plays a much more important role. For, although sensations do play only a causal, not a constitutive, role in our *perception* of secondary qualities, they do play an essential role in our *conception* of such qualities, in the sense that our actual conception of a particular secondary quality is partly determined by the sensation.¹³ To understand what this might mean we need to have a closer look at (a) Reid's account of our perception of secondary qualities and (b) his account of the type of conception that is required for perception. But before turning to this topic I will briefly discuss Reid's explication of perception in general.

Reid believes that there are many terms (including “to perceive,” “to remember,” “to be conscious of,” and “to conceive”) that cannot be *strictly* or *logically* defined, but

¹² Although it should be pointed out that Reid believes that sensations, as feelings, are the locus of pleasure and pain. Now, Johnston suggests that according to the Wallpaper View, sensations are like “*Tafelmusic*” in the sense that they do not play an essential role in “a diner’s ingestion of food” (261). On the Reidian view, however, the sensations can provide the main course, although not epistemically. For example, one might think that in the case of visual perception it is the reflective attentiveness to the sensation that is the main course in the case of our pleasure in the experience of beauty. And, although Reid does not make this point, we might have a similar view about sexual pleasure, especially if we have a view of sexual pleasure as involving reflective attentiveness to the sensation of touch. The motivational role of sensations might play an important role in a Reidian account of moral perception. If such perception is a type of sense perception, as Reid believes it is, the fact that the sensations can and do play a motivational role is not insignificant. For these reasons it seems a mistake to suggest that a position like Reid’s that downplays the epistemic role of sensations necessarily downplays the role of sensation in our lives.

¹³ The sensation does not play an essential role in the sense that we would be unable to conceive of the particular quality perceived without the particular sensation. There might be more than one way to conceive a particular quality. God could have created us in such a way that we conceived of colours (as objective qualities) with tactile sensations.

which can be “explicated.”¹⁴ Thus, although he thinks a proper logical definition of “perception,” in terms of its genus and species, is impossible, it is possible to offer an “explication” of its meaning, and given the way in which the use of the word has been perverted by philosophers committed to the way of ideas, such an explication is needed.¹⁵ Reid’s official explication has three elements. Thus in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, Reid explains that

If we . . . attend to that act of our mind which we call the perception of an external object of sense, we shall find in it these three things:—*First*, some conception or notion of the object perceived. *Secondly*, a strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence; and *Thirdly*, that this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (EIP II v, 96)

This passage has received a lot of analysis by Reid scholars. And most of this essay will focus on what sort of conception is required for perception. It is important to note that here, and elsewhere, Reid restricts perception to *external* objects, and it is an important part of my interpretation that Reid does not identify the *external* with the *physical*, for Reid believes that there are objects that are external to my mind that are non-physical—for example, God, other minds, and the dispositions of other minds. We could say that by the *external* Reid means something like what Fichte, who was clearly influenced by Reid, calls the not-I. Thus, the mere fact that perception, properly understood, is limited to *external* objects does not imply that we can only properly be said to perceive physical objects. Indeed, Reid himself frequently uses the language of perception when talking of our cognitive relationship to non-physical objects and qualities.¹⁶

Although it is fairly clear what Reid denies, it is not as obvious what his positive account of the relationship between perception and sensation actually is. Reid thinks that perception necessarily involves what he calls a conception or notion of the object perceived, and in order to fully appreciate Reid’s position it is important to distinguish between the role of sensation in our *conception* of the perceived object or quality and its role in the perception of the object.

One of the main claims I will argue for in this essay is that, for Reid, what is required for perception is a *distinct* but not necessarily a *direct*, conception of the object or quality perceived. Just because Reid believes that *perception* is, in some sense, direct, he

¹⁴ “A logical definition—that is, a strict and proper definition—must express the kind of the thing defined and the specific difference by which the species defined is distinguished from every other species belonging to that kind” (EIP I i, 18).

¹⁵ “To perceive, to remember, to be conscious and to conceive or imagine, are words common to philosophers, and to the vulgar. They signify different operations of the mind, which are distinguished in all languages, and by all men that think . . . and I think they are hardly capable of strict definition” (EIP I i, 22).

¹⁶ Todd Buras sometimes writes in such a way that suggests that he believes that Reid restricts perception, understood literally, to perception of *physical* objects and properties (see Buras 2009). Buras’ position, however, is closer to the view suggested here than it appears, for although he believes that one is unable to perceive unless one perceives something material, given the power of acquired perception this restriction does not rule out the perception of non-material things.

is not committed to the view that our *conception* of the perceived object or quality must itself be a direct conception. We should not confuse the notion of the directness of perception with the directness of conception, for Reid believes that direct perception is compatible with indirect, or what he calls “relative” conception. The main focus of this essay will be defending this claim both as an interpretation of Reid and as a coherent philosophical position.

Although, for Reid, sensation plays a merely causal role in our perception of primary qualities, in our perception of secondary qualities, the sensation plays a dual role. When it comes to our perception of primary qualities, I attribute to Reid what George Pappas has called a “double-tier” as opposed to a “single-tier” theory of perception.¹⁷ The essential difference between such theories is whether sensations are literally an *ingredient* in perception or whether they are merely an *accompaniment* of perception, or play a merely *causal* rather than a *constitutive* role in perception. As Pappas points out, there are texts from Reid that can be used to support either interpretation, and Pappas and some other commentators, such as P. Cummins, think that it is most plausible to attribute a single-tier theory to Reid, according to which sensations play a constitutive role in perception.¹⁸ I think that they are wrong when it comes to Reid’s account of our perception of primary qualities, for here I think it is clear that sensations have a purely causal rather than constitutive role in the perceptual act, but due to considerations of space, I will not engage in this debate here. Instead, I would like to focus on the role of sensation in Reid’s account of our perception of secondary qualities, for here Reid’s account is, I believe, more complicated. And it is worth noting that Pappas’ main argument for his single-tier interpretation of Reid’s theory of perception *in general* is based on examples of the perception of secondary qualities, namely the brownness of a chair and the smell of a rose (Pappas 1989, 164–5).

In the case of colours, although what we immediately perceive is a quality of an object, our conception of the quality is indirect, or relative, and logically involves the sensation. When I *perceive* the redness of a rose I am immediately perceiving a quality of the object in front of me. As we have seen, Reid believes that this act of perception requires a conception of the quality and the belief (or judgment) that the quality exists.¹⁹ In the case of our perception of a secondary quality, the sensation plays two roles. On the one hand, the sensation plays a causal role, being the cause of our

¹⁷ See Pappas (1989). Pappas explains the distinction between what he calls double- and single-tier theories of perception on pages 160–7. In this paper, Pappas defends a version of the single-tier theory which “takes the complex event consisting of the sensation and the belief about an external object which it causes to be the event of perception” (163).

¹⁸ See Cummins (1974, 327; 1990). See also Pappas’ reply to Cummins (Pappas 1990).

¹⁹ Although the standard reading is that both the conception of the object and the existential belief are constitutive of the act of perception, I think that Reid’s considered opinion is that the belief is not a constitute element of the act of perception. Thus, for example, Reid believes that it is possible that young babies are capable of perception, but not capable of forming existential beliefs, as they have not yet developed the concept of existence. This would suggest that Reid’s position is that, in human adults, acts of perception generally cause corresponding beliefs, but such beliefs are not necessary for perception.

perceptual belief. The sensation is the occasion of the judgment that the rose has a certain quality, and Reid thinks that this perceptual judgment/belief does not logically require the existence of any particular sensation, although as we are so constituted the sensation does necessarily play a causal role, being the cause of my belief that the rose has a certain quality. My *conception* of the redness of the rose, however, does logically involve the sensation, for my conception of the redness is of the cause of the particular sensation I am having. The *content* of the conception in veridical perception is an objective quality in the world, and the conception has a demonstrative element. We conceive of the rose as having *this* quality as opposed to *that* quality. The sensation plays an ineliminable role in fixing the reference of the demonstrative. We fix the reference of the belief by conceiving of the perceived secondary quality as “the purported cause of the particular sensation I am now having.” Our conception of, say redness, then, can be thought of in terms of a definite description that contains reference to a particular sensation.²⁰ This is, I believe, the point Reid is trying to make when he claims, for example, that

The sensations of heat and cold are perfectly known; for they neither are, nor can be, anything else than what we feel them to be; but the qualities in bodies which we call *heat* and *cold*, are unknown. They are only conceived by us, as unknown causes or occasions of the sensations to which we give the same names. (IHM V i, 54)

In this passage, in which he is discussing our perception of the secondary quality of heat, Reid distinguishes between three things: (a) the felt sensation, (b) the quality perceived and (c) the conception of the quality perceived, and he makes it clear that sensation plays an essential role in our conception of the quality perceived. Now, we can think of the conception involved in our perception of secondary qualities as analogous to a definite description. And Reid’s thought seems to be that in perceptual judgments/beliefs the description is functioning as a singular term. We can say that in our perception of a secondary quality our perceptual belief contains something like a definite description that contains the sensation as a proper part, but that, to use Donnellan’s terminology, in the belief this description is being used referentially not attributively, so that the belief is not really in any way a belief about the sensation (Donnellan 1966). This is what Reid means when he claims that secondary qualities “are conceived only as the unknown causes or occasions of certain sensations with which we are well acquainted” (EIP II xvii, 202). In our perception of secondary qualities, then, the role of the sensation is something more than causal but less than constitutive. The sensation is not a constituent of the belief, for the content of the belief is basically: “that quality exists.” Understood in these terms, the belief is not about the

²⁰ Now, although as far as I’m aware Reid himself does not make a distinction between original and acquired conception, I think that making such a distinction is the best way of developing Reid’s position. My original conception of the redness of the rose is of “the cause of this sensation,” the conception I have now is something like “the cause of sensations like this sensation” and obviously this conception is going to involve memory in some way.

sensation. From one perspective, then, the sensation is not contained in the content of the perceptual belief.²¹ However, insofar as we reflectively ask, “what quality?” the only answer we can give is “the quality that is causing this sensation.” As Reid himself makes clear, any reflective attention towards the perceptual belief forces us to attend to the sensation, but this does not make the sensation in any sense the object of the perceptual act.²² Having sketched the position I will try to defend in this essay, let us now turn to some of the details.

4 Secondary Qualities—The Case of Colours

In his recent book Ryan Nichols has argued that, according to Reid, we only perceive mind-independent bodies and primary qualities. Thus he claims that “Reid **defines** Perception to be an operation of the mind that takes mind-independent bodies and primary qualities as its intentional objects” (Nichols 2007, 27; emphasis added) and he argues that “Reid’s primary/secondary quality distinction implies that we cannot directly perceive secondary qualities” (162). And in the following chapter he claims that “Reid is up front that secondary qualities are not perceived directly. When perceiving secondary qualities the immediate object of mental awareness is a sensation and not its physical base, i.e., not the Reidian secondary quality” (187).

I believe that Nichols’ account is mistaken. Reid is clearly committed to the view that we immediately perceive secondary qualities, and I believe that Nichols confuses the question of whether our *conception* of something is direct with the question of whether our *perception* of it is so. And that, perhaps as a consequence of this, he mistakenly thinks that, for Reid, the difference between our perception of primary and secondary qualities is that they essentially involve “different process.”²³ I shall argue that the essential difference for Reid has to do with whether our conception of the quality is direct or relative, and that this is a logical distinction, having to do with the *content* of the conception, rather than essentially having to do with the process of origin.

²¹ Todd Buras makes a similar point in Buras (2008). In discussing our perception of a white page, he argues that “no objects of thought other than the page enter as necessary conditions into Reid’s account of the epistemology, reference, or descriptive content of the belief you form about the page in perception” (609) but this does not imply that sensations, for example, cannot play a role in the way in which these objects are described, nor that these sensations cannot themselves become objects of reflection. On the account of colour perception offered here, no object of thought other than the objective quality of redness (whatever this is) enters into the descriptive content of the perceptual belief formed about the redness of the rose. But this does not mean that sensation cannot be contained in the way in which the object of reference is described.

²² Thus Reid claims that in the case of a secondary quality “[w]e conceive of it only as that which occasions such a sensation, and therefore cannot reflect upon it without thinking on the sensation which it occasions” (EIP II xvii, 204).

²³ “Reid describes the process through which we perceive qualities of bodies in two different ways, depending upon whether the quality perceived is primary or secondary” (Nichols 2007, 161).

Reid fully accepts a distinction between primary and secondary qualities but obviously rejects the Lockean account of the distinction in terms of whether or not our idea of the quality resembles the quality. For Reid thinks that in the case of both primary and secondary qualities there is no resemblance between the sensation that occasions the perception and the quality perceived. For example, the sensations of touch do not, Reid thinks, resemble the quality of hardness. As a result he needs to give his own account of the essential difference between these two types of quality. He argues that the essential distinction is that our conception (or notion) of primary qualities is direct and distinct whereas our original notion of secondary qualities is relative and (comparatively) obscure.²⁴ This is not to say, of course, that our notions of such qualities must remain relative and obscure. One of the main goals of natural philosophy (what today we would call the natural sciences) is to achieve direct and clear conceptions of such qualities.

According to Reid, then, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is epistemic rather than metaphysical.²⁵ Thus Reid argues that,

There appears to me to be a real foundation for the distinction; and it is this—that our senses give us a *direct* and a *distinct* notion of the primary qualities, and inform us what they are in themselves. But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a *relative* and *obscure* notion. They inform us only that there are qualities that affect us in a certain manner—that is, produce in us a certain sensation; but as to what they are in themselves, our senses leave us in the dark.
(EIP II xvii, 201)

Our conception of a secondary quality is relative in the sense already explained. But what does Reid mean by a notion being obscure? Obscurity is normally contrasted with clarity or being a clear notion, and Reid explains that something is clear if “the thing itself is understood perfectly.” In claiming that our notions of secondary qualities are obscure, he is making the point that we do not know the nature or essence of the property itself. So the obscurity of a conception is a logical consequence of its relativity.

Although our conception of secondary qualities is relative and obscure, Reid insists that our perception of them is immediate. Thus he begins the next chapter of the same work by claiming that “besides primary and secondary qualities of bodies, there are many other immediate objects of perception” (EIP II xviii, 211).²⁶ Our original

²⁴ On my reading Reid uses ‘notion’ and ‘conception’ interchangeably. Nichols glosses “notion” here as “the means by which we become aware of qualities” (165). This seems to give notions some sort of causal or instrumental role. I am not sure that this is Reid’s position. I think that a notion or conception is, perhaps, better thought of as actually *being* our awareness of qualities; it is perhaps something like the mode of presentation of the quality or object.

²⁵ For a recent defence of the claim that Reid’s account of the primary/secondary quality distinction is epistemic rather than metaphysical, see McKittrick (2002); McKittrick argues that, for Reid, “[t]he difference between primary and secondary qualities is a matter of a difference in human epistemic access to these qualities. We have substantial, direct knowledge of primary qualities. We only have limited, indirect knowledge of secondary qualities.” This view is also defended in Borge (2007).

²⁶ And a little later he explains that “we say that we *feel* the toothache, not that we perceive it. On the other hand, we say that we *perceive* the colour of a body, not that we feel it” (EIP II xviii, 212; Reid’s italics). Indeed,

conceptions of colours in perception are obscure because, although they allow us to distinguish between different colours, we have no understanding of what colours are—though it is possible that we may discover what colours are through natural science, and in so doing develop a clear and direct conception of colours. However, even if through developments in colour science we did develop such a direct conception of the nature of colours, it is not clear that it would become the conception of the colour terms that would play a role in colour perception.

It is clear, then, that Reid is committed to the view that we immediately perceive secondary qualities of objects, even though our conception of them is relative and indirect. The question, then, seems to be whether this position is coherent and plausible. Reid himself suggests that there might be something paradoxical about his position when he asks, “does it not appear a contradiction, to say that we know that the fire is hot, but we know not what the heat is?” (EIP II xvii, 204). I believe that this paradox is easy to resolve, especially if we remember that in addition to perceiving what things are, we are also capable of perceiving distinctions, and in the case of secondary qualities what we possess is a capacity to distinguish between things that have distinct qualities, without knowing the true nature of these qualities. The true nature of these differences we can perceive is a topic of scientific enquiry, not immediate perception. So Reid’s position is that, although our conception of secondary qualities does not allow us to immediately perceive the nature of the thing perceived, it does allow us to immediately distinguish between things and it is this distinctness that is known immediately about colours by perception. Thus, in the *Inquiry*, Reid, borrowing the language of Locke, distinguishes between what he calls “the idea” or “appearance” of colour, which he suggests can refer either to the impression on the sense organ or to the sensation, and what he calls “the colour itself,” and explains that

[t]hat idea which we have called *the appearance of colour*, suggests the conception and belief of some unknown quality in the body which occasions the idea; and it is to this quality and not to the idea that we give the name colour. **The various colours, although in their nature equally unknown, are easily distinguished when we think or speak of them, by being associated with the ideas which they excite . . .** Colour is not a sensation, but a secondary quality of bodies, in the sense we have already explained; that it is a certain power or virtue in bodies, that in fair daylight exhibits to the eye an appearance which is very familiar to us, although it has no name. (IHM VI iv, 87; bold added)

Reid thinks that part of what we immediately perceive when we open our eyes is the colour of bodies, and what is central in Reid’s account is that, although we have no immediate conception of the nature or essence of colour, we can immediately perceive

in the *Inquiry*, Reid claims that our perception of colours is an original rather than an acquired perception, arguing that, “in all our senses, the acquired perceptions are many more than the original, especially in sight. By this sense we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only, and their visible place” (IHM VI xx, 171). There is abundant textual evidence that Reid is strongly committed to the position that we immediately perceive secondary qualities.

differences in colour. I immediately perceive that this book has a different colour from that one. Although I do not know in what this difference really consists, apart from the fact that the two books have the power to affect me in different ways, I am immediately aware of a real objective difference and it is this difference that I immediately perceive. And it is the fact that I am naturally constituted to originally perceive such differences in colour which allows me over time to acquire other perceptions. *What* we perceive in veridical colour perception, then, are real differences in the world. But we conceive of these differences in a way that essentially involves our felt sensations. Thus, in the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* Reid explains that

We may see why the sensations belonging to secondary qualities are an object of our attention, while those which belong to the primary are not.

The first are not only signs of the object perceived, but they bear a capital part of the notion we form of it. We conceive it only as that which occasions such a sensation, and therefore cannot reflect upon it without thinking of the sensation which it occasions: we have no other mark whereby to distinguish it. The thought of a secondary quality, therefore, always carries us back to the sensation which it produces. (EIP II xvii, 204)

I have suggested that our notion of a secondary quality can be thought of in terms of a definite description, perhaps of the form “the cause of this sensation.” In the act of perception this description functions referentially to pick out the quality perceived, by allowing us to distinguish it from other distinct qualities. In the perceptual act, then, the definite description functions referentially not attributively. Now, in the perceptual act what we are thinking of is not the sensation but the objective quality that is the cause or occasion of the sensation. This is the object of thought in perception. However, in the case of my perception of secondary qualities, if I reflectively attend to what I perceive, I cannot but attend to the sensation because the sensation is part of my conception of what is perceived. I believe that we can get clearer on Reid’s account here if we have a clearer conception of what Reid means by distinctness.

5 What is it to have a Distinct Conception?

In order to perceive an object, we need a conception of it. And Reid insists that what is required for perception is that our conception is “more or less distinct.” But, what does this mean? Reid’s understanding of the notion of distinctness can be traced back to Locke. And to understand his position it is important to understand how he rejects the definition of distinctness found in Descartes and Leibniz.

Descartes famously distinguishes between clearness and distinctness. An awareness is *clear* if it is “present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye’s gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility.” Our awareness is *distinct* if it is both clear and “so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear” (*Principles* I, 45; CSM I, 207–8).

Locke rejects Descartes' account of the distinction between clearness and distinctness, explaining that a "*clear Idea* is that whereof the Mind has such a full and evident perception, as it does receive from an outward Object operating duly on a well-disposed Organ," and a "*distinct Idea* is that wherein the Mind perceives a difference from all other" (Locke 1690/1975, II xxix, 4). This Lockean definition of distinctness needs to be sharply distinguished from Leibniz's. For what Locke here calls distinctness, Leibniz calls clearness. Thus in his *New Essays*, Leibniz quite explicitly rejects Locke's definition of distinctness, arguing that

According to this notion you [Locke] give of a *distinct* idea, I do not see any way of distinguishing it from a *clear* idea. That is why I have been in the habit here of following the language of M. Descartes, according to whom an idea can be clear and confused at the same time, as are the ideas of sensible qualities . . . like those of color and warmth. They are clear, because we recognize them and easily tell them from one another; but they are not distinct, because we cannot distinguish their contents. . . . Thus, although according to us [Descartes and I] distinct ideas do distinguish one object from another, so also do ideas which are clear though in themselves confused; so we do not call *distinct* all the ideas that are well distinguishing i.e. that distinguish objects, but [only] those which are well distinguished, that is, which are in themselves distinct and which distinguish in the object the marks which make it known. . . . Ideas which are not like this we call 'confused.' (Leibniz 1982, 255)

For Leibniz, then, an idea is *clear* if we can recognize its object and distinguish its object from other things. Clear ideas can be either distinct or confused. A clear idea is *distinct* if it allows one to state the distinguishing marks of the object, otherwise the idea is *confused*. According to Leibniz, then, if we have a distinct idea of something, we have some grasp of the nature of the things that allows us to understand what it is that makes it different from other things. One way of doing this is by being able to give a definition. Thus Leibniz claims that our ideas of sensible qualities "are clear, because we recognize them and easily tell them from one another; but they are not distinct, because we cannot distinguish their contents" (255–6).

Reid clearly sides with Locke against Leibniz in this dispute over the proper use of terms, for Reid makes it clear that the notion of distinctness essentially involves the capacity to distinguish between two or more things. For Reid, our conception of an object or quality needs to be 'more or less distinct' for us to be able to perceive it. What is meant by this is that our capacity to distinguish one thing from another is essential to our capacity to perceive a thing. If we can distinguish one object from another, we have a distinct conception of something, or at least a conception that is somewhat distinct; the more objects we can distinguish from the one conceived, the more distinct the conception is. And, in order to distinguish one object or quality from another, we do not need to know anything about the true nature or essence of the object or quality.

To modify one of Leibniz's favorite examples, imagine sitting on the beach listening to someone play the guitar and hearing the sound of the sea in the background. We cannot distinguish between, and so do not have a distinct conception of, the sound of the individual waves, and so Reid, in opposition to Leibniz, would have to

claim that we do not perceive the sounds of the individual waves. We can, however, distinguish between the sound of the sea and the sound of the music, and so have distinct conceptions of the sound of the sea and the sound of the guitar, and so we can rightfully be said to perceive the sound of the guitar and to perceive the sound of the sea. To change our example, according to Reid's account, if we are listening to a symphony, we can only properly be said to perceive the (sound of the) second violin if we can distinguish this sound from others. An interesting implication of Reid's insistence that in perception we need a distinct conception of the quality perceived is that it entails a rejection of Leibniz's notion of *petites perceptions*.²⁷

Now, Reid argues that in order for us to have a distinct conception of something does not imply that this conception needs to be what he calls "direct." Thus, Reid makes a distinction between "things of which we have a direct, and others of which we have only a relative conception." And he explains this distinction in the following terms:

Of some things, we know what they are in themselves: our conception of such things I call *direct*. Of other things, we know not what they are in themselves, but only that they have certain properties or attributes, or certain relations to other things: of these our conception is only *relative*. (EAP I ii, 9)²⁸

Reid attempts to clarify this distinction by his discussion of the chiliagon, arguing that our direct conception is indistinct, whereas our relative conception can be distinct. Thus he argues that when thinking of a chiliagon directly,

I find it so indistinct that it has the same appearance to my eye, or to my direct conception, as a polygon of a thousand and one, or of 999 sides. But when I form a relative conception of it, by attending to the relation it bears to polygons of a greater or lesser number of sides, my notion becomes distinct and scientific. . . . Our relative conceptions of things are not always less distinct, nor less fit materials for accurate reasoning than those that are direct, and . . . the contrary may happen in a remarkable degree. (EAP I i, 11)

Reid's point here seems to be that, although the conception of the chiliagon we have in perception is fairly indistinct as we are unable to distinguish immediately between a figure with 999 sides and a chiliagon through sight, we are capable of forming a

²⁷ For example, in a letter to Wolff, Leibniz explains: "I hold that in our confused thoughts there are many things of which we are not conscious, since a confused thought consists of innumerable small perceptions, which, on account of their vast number, it is not possible to distinguish, even if we are aware of their result" (Leibniz 1963, 32). Similarly, in a letter to Remond he explains that "I grant to the Cartesians that the soul actually always thinks, but I do not grant that it apperceives all these thoughts. For our large perceptions and our appetites, which we apperceive, are composed of an infinity of small perceptions [*petites perceptions*] and small inclinations which we cannot apperceive. And it is in the insensible perceptions that the reason is found for what occurs in us; as the reason for what takes place in sensible bodies consists in insensible movements" (Leibniz 1875–90, III 657). Reid rejects this Leibnizian notion of indistinguishable perceptions.

²⁸ And he argues that "[p]ower belongs to the latter class" (EAP I i, 9). Later in the same text he repeats that "the weakness of human understanding . . . gives us only an indirect and relative conception of power" (EAP I v, 28). However although our conception of power is indirect and relative, it is distinct. Thus Reid explains that "we have a distinct notion of power, and may reason about it with understanding, though we can give no logical definition of it" (EAP I i, 12).

distinct conception of chiliagons, and it is this distinct conception that we used in mathematical reasoning.²⁹ It would seem, however, that although we are capable of forming a distinct conception of a chiliagon, we do not seem able to use such a conception in perception. Although I possess a distinct conception of a chiliagon, I am not able to immediately recognize chiliagons as such.

Reid is careful to point out that a conception's being indirect and relative is compatible with its being distinct, and it is clear that Reid thinks that what is required for perception is merely a "more or less" *distinct* conception of the perceived object. This seems to be a coherent and plausible position.

In saying this I disagree with Van Cleve's reading. Van Cleve distinguishes between "a merely conceptual apprehension of an object" and "some sort of apprehension or acquaintance" and argues that the "conception involved in Reidian perception" must be of the latter kind (Van Cleve 2004, 108). Van Cleve concludes that "[a]n experience does not qualify as perception unless it involves conception of the acquaintance variety" (127) and suggests that it follows from this that "most cases of acquired perception probably do not count as perception by this standard" (128). Van Cleve's account, then, entails that we cannot literally perceive secondary qualities, for in the case of secondary qualities we have no "acquaintance" with the nature or essence of the quality, but are only able to individuate the quality in terms of its sensory effect. Now, given that Reid includes both acquired perception and the perception of secondary qualities as genuine cases of perception, it is clear that Van Cleve is offering an unnecessarily revisionary reading of Reid.

One of Van Cleve's main arguments here is that, whereas "the conception involved in perception can be *more or less distinct*," our "merely conceptual apprehension of an object" cannot be subject to this sort of variation.³⁰ And, apparently assuming that a conception must be either "merely conceptual" or "some sort of acquaintance," he concludes from this that the conception involved in perception must be some sort of acquaintance (presumably with the nature of the object or quality perceived). Laying behind Van Cleve's argument is the thought that "Reidian conception carries information in analogue form, whereas conceptualization, judgment, and belief carry information in digital form" (130).³¹

²⁹ Although Reid does not make this clear, I assume that his position would be that our conception of a chiliagon in perception is only fairly indistinct. We are able to use it to perceptually distinguish between, say, chiliagons and triangles.

³⁰ Thus, Van Cleve argues that "the conception involved in perception can be *more or less distinct*. We see an object more distinctly at a small than a great distance, and more distinctly on a clear than a foggy day. Can the merely conceptual apprehension of an object be subject to this sort of variation? . . . I do not think that greater distinctness of conception is to be *analyzed* as greater conceptual determinacy. Rather, it is the former that makes the latter possible" (108).

³¹ Van Cleve's argument here is inspired by Dretske's account of the way in which conceptualization involves the digitalization of analogue information (see Dretske 1981). It is not clear, however, that Van Cleve is using the term "digitalization" in the same sense as Dretske.

Now, it seems to me that Van Cleve is setting up a false dichotomy here. On my reading, our conception of a quality can be (in some sense) non-conceptual but not involve acquaintance with the quality in the way in which Van Cleve suggests is necessary. This, as we shall see, seems to be the case in Reid's analysis of our conception of secondary qualities. In the case of our perception of primary qualities, Reid believes that we have what he calls a "direct" conception of the quality, and this type of conception might be something like what Van Cleve calls acquaintance. Even this is not clear, however, as Reid thinks that the essential difference between direct and indirect conception is that direct conception involves knowledge of the *essence* or *nature* of the thing perceived whereas indirect conception does not. In explaining what is involved in direct conception, Reid does not use anything like the language of acquaintance.

In the case of secondary qualities, however, Reid believes that although our perception is direct, our conception is indirect, or "relative." Our conception of secondary qualities, for example, will be something like "the cause of this feeling/sensation" (or perhaps "the cause of feelings like this"). In the case of our perception of secondary qualities, the conception involved does not involve any grasp of their nature or essence. Now, what is important in the current context is that Reid thinks that in such cases, our conception is relativized to something that is not a concept and of which we are immediately conscious (or perhaps, to use Van Cleve's language, of something with which we are acquainted). The suggestion, then, is that a Reidian conception of a secondary quality is a non-digitalized conception, but that this does not involve anything like acquaintance with the thing (the quality) conceived. Many philosophers today want to make a radical distinction between feelings and concepts. And one way of expressing this distinction might be to say that feelings have a rich analogue phenomenal content whereas concepts do not; they are in a sense digital.³² Reid is not thinking of a "conception" as a "concept" in this sense. Our conceptions of secondary qualities are in no way phenomenally less rich than sensations, because the feeling (the sensation) is in a sense *part* of the conception. So our conception of secondary qualities, required for perception, is neither "merely conceptual" nor does it involve any "acquaintance" with the essence of the quality perceived.³³

³² This is not, I think, how Dretske uses the notion of digitalization. He does not claim that the process of digitalization involves the transformation of an analogue representation to a digital one. For Dretske, digitalization merely implies the loss of information.

³³ Such an account "bypasses the need for digitalization" in a way analogous to a proposal recently made by Jesse Prinz. Prinz argues that Dretske's account of digitalization "entails that we can epistemically see forks only if we have representations that abstract away from forky appearances. This strikes me as terribly implausible. I think we can visually recognize forks . . . by means of fork images: representations that encode features of forky appearances" (2006, 437). Later he argues that his "alternative to the digitalization story" involves the idea that "we directly perceive abstract things by means of directly perceiving concrete things," in the sense that "our images of concrete things constitute our perceptions of abstract things; they are not merely instrumental causes of these perceptions" (449). Now, if we equate what Prinz calls an 'image' with what Reid calls a 'sensation,' we can see how the Reidian can offer a similar, and I believe more plausible, account of the way in which our conception of secondary qualities bypasses digitalization. From the Reidian

Secondly, in claiming that all I know of the colour difference between two objects is that “they have the power to affect me in different ways,” I am not at all suggesting that Reid is committed to a dispositional account of the ontology of colour. According to the dispositionalist about colours, “the colours of objects *are* dispositions of their surfaces to produce perceptions of certain sorts, under standard conditions in normal perceivers” (Levin 2000, 151). Reid is perhaps committed to a dispositional account of our original *conception* of colours. But colours themselves are, Reid believes, non-dispositional. Red and blue are, for Reid, non-dispositional properties of objects, we conceive of these qualities, and the difference between red and blue, in terms of their capacity to affect us in different ways. But, how we conceive of colours, and what they really are, are two distinct things.

³⁴ See Johnston (1992, 223); McGinn (1996, 11); Levin (2000, 152–3).

³⁶ However, it should be pointed out that Reid explicitly excludes colour terms from the scope of this claim, arguing that “colour differs from other secondary qualities in this, that whereas the name of the quality is sometimes given to the sensation which indicates it, and is occasioned by it, we never, as far as I can judge, give the name of colour to the sensation, but to the quality only” (IHM VI iv, 87).

Reid then believes that, although our perception of colour is direct, immediate, and original, our conception of colour is indirect; we are able to pick out and distinguish particular qualities, but we do not know the nature of the qualities themselves—although perhaps we will be able to discover the nature of these qualities through scientific investigation. Thus Reid argues that “when we think or speak” of any particular colour our notion of it is

really in some sort compounded. It involves an unknown cause and a known effect. The name of colour belongs indeed to the cause only, and not to the effect. But as the cause is unknown,³⁷ we can form no distinct conception of it but by relation to the known effect . . . When I would conceive those colours of bodies which we call *scarlet* and *blue*—if I conceived them only as unknown qualities, I could perceive no distinction between the one and the other. I must therefore for the sake of distinction, join to each of them, in my imagination, some effect or some relation that is peculiar; and the most obvious distinction is, the appearance which one and the other makes to the eye (IHM VI iv, 86–7).

This should make it clear that, although Reid does in a sense hold a dispositional account of our *conception* of colours, he does not think this settles anything when it comes to the ontology of colours and he rejects a dispositional account of the nature of colours. Now, Reid himself thinks that it is the task of science to discover the true nature of colours; however, he seems to believe that science had or would show that colours are properties of the surfaces of physical objects. Unfortunately, developments in colour science strongly suggest that such an account of the ontology of colour is untenable.³⁸

Reid himself did seem to tie his colour realism to the view that colours are properties of surfaces of objects; however, there is no reason why a contemporary Reidian cannot take account of the advances in colour science since Reid’s time. Given these advances, I believe that the most plausible position for a Reidian to take on the ontology of colours is that at present we really do not know what colours are, but perhaps at some point in the future colour science will develop to a point where we have a good understanding of what colours are. Perhaps a reductive account of colours in terms of other properties is not possible for beings like us, but there is no good reason to assume that such a reductive account is impossible.³⁹

Thirdly, it should also be noted that, although Reid is a realist about colours, this does not imply that he must reject a relational account of the ontology of colour. According to Jonathan Cohen’s account of the distinction between relational and

³⁷ And here Reid must mean that the essence or nature of the cause is unknown, rather than the existence of the cause.

³⁸ See Hardin (2003, 191–202) for a convincing refutation of the claim that colours should be identified with surface spectral reflectances.

³⁹ So, I think there is no reason why a Reidian could not advocate what Alex Byrne and David Hilbert have called realist colour primitivism. But I think that there is also no reason to assume that a realist reductive account of colour is impossible. And so a Reidian should be ontologically agnostic. See Byrne and Hilbert (2007).

non-relational accounts of the nature of colour, it would seem that colour realists like Reid are necessarily committed to a non-relational account of colour.⁴⁰ Thus Cohen explains that

On the nonrelational side of the distinction are those who understand colours as objective and mind- or perceiver independent; in particular, they insist that colours are not constituted in terms of relations to subjects or minds. A typical account of this sort is one that takes colours to be physical properties—usually some kind of reflectance property of surfaces, transmittance property of transparent surfaces and volumes, emittance property of luminous sources, or some combination of these . . . On the other side, there are views according to which colours are constituted in terms of relations between objects and subjects (and possible other parameters, such as viewing conditions). (Cohen 2004, 453)

The suggestion that there is a dichotomy between subjective relational and objective non-relational accounts of colour perception is inadequate. For although Reid would reject any account of the nature of colours according to which colours are constituted in terms of relations between objects and subjects or perceivers, there is no principled reason for a Reidian to reject a view according to which colours are constituted in terms of the relations between, say, surfaces, context (which might include viewing conditions), and bodily sense organs. There is no reason for a Reidian colour realist to rule out a priori a non-subjectivist relationalism. There is no reason why a relationalist account of the metaphysics of colour has to think that one of the relata has to be some sort of mental state. Indeed, Reid himself seems to offer such an objective but relational account of the ontology of the visible figure (or perspectival or apparent shape) of an object. The visible figure of a body, which is the object of our conception of the apparent shape of a body, is relational as it depends upon the relationship between the object and the eyeball. Thus Reid claims that “as the real figure of a body consists in the situation of its several parts with regard to one another, so its visible figure consists in the position of its several parts with regard to the eye” (IHM VI vii, 96).⁴¹ Both the body perceived and the eye are real physical things and so the relations between them are as well. Visible figure is both relational and objective and real. There is no reason why one cannot tell a similar story about colours. Reid himself thought that colours were probably a feature of the surface structure of objects, and so were not to be understood relationally. Modern colour science has shown that such an understanding of colour is untenable as a scientific account.⁴² However, the fact that colour science has shown that colours are not to be identified with surface spectral reflectances does not mean that we have to reject colour realism, for this does not rule out the possibility

⁴⁰ See, for example, Cohen (2009, 2004).

⁴¹ For a good discussion of this, see Yaffe (2002).

⁴² See Hardin (2003). Hardin seems to assume that a realist about colours is committed to the position that colours are to be identified with surface spectral reflectances. But there is no good reason to make this assumption. Colours may be objective and real, but extremely complex, relational qualities involving, say, the relations between surfaces, light and eyeballs, and the surrounding surfaces.

that colours are complicated relational qualities. But discovering the nature of colours is a task for scientists, not philosophers. Given the current state of colour science, we really do not know what colours are, but perhaps we will find out one day. This is a plausible, and Reidian, position to take.

Up to now, I have described Reid's account of our capacity to perceive white, but what about our capacity to perceive wrong? Reid himself is quite explicit about the similarities between (external) sense perception and what one could call *moral perception*. Thus, in a section of the *Essays on the Active Powers* called "On the Sense of Duty" he argues that "[B]y an original power of the mind, when we come to years of understanding and reflection, we not only have the notions of right and wrong in conduct, but perceive certain things to be right and others to be wrong" (EAP III vi, 175). And he points out that the notion of a moral *sense* is a common notion. The ancients had the idea of a *sensus recti et honesti* and we often speak of our sense of duty which, Reid argues, defending common sense and common usage, no doubt "got this name from some analogy which it is conceived to bear to the external senses." And he argues that "if we have just notions of the office of the external senses, the analogy is very evident." Indeed, after giving a brief account of what is involved in (external) sense perception,⁴³ he argues that if his account is correct, "our moral faculty may, I think, without impropriety, be called the *Moral Sense*" (EAP III vi, 176). And he also claims that "to reason about justice with a man who sees nothing to be just and unjust . . . is like reasoning with a blind man about colour, or with a deaf man about sound" (EAP III vi, 178). I believe that a plausible account of our perception of the rightness and wrongness of action can be modeled on Reid's account of colour perception, with moral feelings playing the role of sensations, and moral theory playing the role of scientific enquiry into the nature of colours.

If we model our perception of moral qualities on our perception of secondary qualities, then this suggests an important task for moral philosophy. Just as a goal of colour science is to discover the true nature of colours and in so doing provide us with a direct conception of a quality that we originally only conceive distinctly, one task of moral philosophy is to provide us with a direct conception of moral qualities, qualities that we are capable of recognizing and distinguishing but of which we do not originally have a direct conception. But developing this suggestion will have to wait until another essay.

⁴³ These passages are quite interesting, especially given the question of whether Reid believes that we perceive secondary qualities, and so are worth quoting in some detail: "By my eyes I not only have the ideas of a square and a circle, But I perceive this surface to be a square, that to be a circle.

By my ear I not only have the idea of sounds loud and soft, acute and grave, but I immediately perceive and judge this sound to be loud, that to be soft, this to be acute, that to be grave . . . These are judgments of the senses. They have always been called and accounted thus by those whose minds are not tinctured by philosophical theories. They are the immediate testimony of nature by our senses; and we are so constituted by nature that we must receive their testimony, for no other reason but because it is given by the senses" (EAP III vi, 176).

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6

Thomas Reid on Aesthetic Perception

Rebecca Copenhaver

1 Introduction

According to Thomas Reid, “a philosophical analysis of the objects of taste is like applying the anatomical knife to a fine face” (EIP VIII ii, 578).¹ As a good scientist of the mind, Reid nonetheless does just that in “Essay VIII” of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, in which Reid states his theory of art. He claims that the beauty of objects resides in their ability to *express* certain emotions and mental traits rather than causing those emotions or traits in the beholder. Moreover, whether a thing expresses such excellences of mind is an objective feature of that thing, wholly independent of judgments of taste. Although Reid’s theory is well known, many remain puzzled by apparent tensions in it.² How, for example, can he reconcile the *variety* he ascribes to aesthetic judgment with the objectivity of aesthetic properties? And just how objective are these aesthetic properties? Beauty and grandeur are in objects only derivatively, insofar as they express excellences of mind. According to Reid, *original* beauty and grandeur are properties of mind. Is Reid’s theory ultimately subjectivist, despite his best intentions? Such puzzles arise when Reid’s theory is detached from its context, when critics forget that “Essay VIII” is primarily a theory of aesthetic *perception*. Reid’s theory must be understood in the wider context of his theory of perception, particularly his theory of acquired perception. Once we understand Reid’s account of how we *acquire* perception of aesthetic qualities, we can resolve the metaphysical perplexities of his interpreters.

¹ The present treatment examines Reid’s published works on aesthetics. Reid’s lectures on the fine arts (Kivy, 1973) are most likely a set of student notes and should be treated with caution. See Broadie (2004, xlv).

² For work on Reid’s aesthetics, see: Gallie (1998); Gracyk (1987, 465–82); Walter J. Hipple (1957, 149–57); Kivy (1970, 1973, 1976, 1978, 1989, 2003, 2004); Manns (1988, 127); Nauckhoff (1994); Robbins (1942); Robertson (1975); Townsend (2003).

2 Original Perception and Acquired Perception

Central to Reid's account of perception is his distinction between sensation and perception: material objects and qualities *occasion* sensations, and sensations *suggest* perceptions.³ Sensations constitute the phenomenal, felt quality of perceptual experience; perceptions constitute the intentional, representational content of perceptual experience. Reid uses 'occasion' and 'suggest' in order to avoid causal language. He owes much of his theory of perception to Berkeley's *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*. Like Berkeley, he took Newton's lessons to heart: the natural philosopher seeks explanations not from causes but by inductive ascent to increasingly general laws, including laws of the human mind.⁴ The perceptual process is governed by a natural law of the human constitution that connects types of material objects or properties with types of sensations. When a normal perceptual system is presented with a token material object or property, a normal perceiver immediately enjoys a token sensation of the type with which it is connected by a law. Though the events come about in accordance with the law necessarily, the laws themselves are contingent. We might have been constituted to enjoy sensations qualitatively different from the ones we currently enjoy (IHM V ii, 57).

Reid also takes his notions of 'suggestion' and 'natural signs' from Berkeley. Sensations *by themselves* are not signs: they have no intentional, representational content. Absent the laws that govern the perceptual process, a person with sensations and reason alone could not conceive of the material objects or qualities with which the sensations are connected in normal adults.⁵ However, those same sensations *suggest* mental states distinct from sensations, and it is those states—perceptions—that have intentional, representational content. Sensations suggest perceptions immediately, without inference. Because sensations suggest perceptions, sensations acquire a second-hand intentionality; but if they did not suggest perceptions, they would not signify at all.

Perceptions consist in a conception of an object and a belief or judgment about the object conceived (EIP II v, 96; IHM V viii, 74, VI xxi, 177). The term 'conception' is pre-Kantian; conceptions are not products of concept application (Van Cleve, 2004; Wolterstorff, 2001). They are 'simple apprehensions,' non-propositional, non-conceptual presentations of individuals (EIP IV i, 295). The beliefs that partially constitute perceptions, on the other hand, are products of concept application. The belief component in perception presupposes the conception component: the conception

³ For extended treatments of Reid's theory of perception see: Copenhaver (2004); Nichols (2007); Van Cleve (2004). For an extended treatment of Reid's theory of acquired perception, see Copenhaver (2010 and 2013). Some material in this section is similar to Copenhaver (2010, 2013), though these represent more thorough treatments.

⁴ Berkeley (1948). The *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* appears in Volume I.

⁵ This is exemplified in Reid's famous *experimentum crucis*. Although Reid uses '*experimentum crucis*' at IHM V vii, 70 to refer to the test by which he judges the success of the theory of ideas, most commentators use the phrase to refer to the thought experiment at IHM V vi, 65–6.

provides a non-conceptual presentation of an object, and the belief predicates features of the object conceived by way of concept application. The belief component is not independent of perception; it is not a judgment formed non-inferentially on the basis of perception.

Reid's distinction between sensation and perception is central to understanding his theory of perception. Another, less studied distinction is equally central: the distinction between *original* and *acquired* perception. Reid teaches that a law of nature makes the human mind form and deploy some concepts immediately upon having certain sensations (IHM V ii, 57, 58). These *original* perceptions are modality-specific (IHM VI ii, 79, VI ix, 105; EIP II xiv, 181, II xxi, 235–6). Immediately upon having tactile sensations, for example, a normal adult will form and deploy concepts of hardness, softness, extension, figure, and motion (IHM V ii–vii, 55–76). Immediately upon having visual sensations, concepts of color, and also of what Reid calls visible figure and position, are formed and deployed (IHM VI i–iv, 77–87). Original perceptions require no previous experience of any kind, they are “original and unlearned, but neither inborn nor a priori” (Falkenstein 2004, 160).

Acquired perceptions, by contrast, require previous experience. Through repeated experience and cross-modal correlations we *acquire* perceptual abilities that we did not possess originally. We acquire such abilities when features originally confined to one sense modality—say, vision—acquire additional significance by being regularly associated with features originally confined to another—say, touch. We then come to see things in terms of how they would feel were we to touch them. We may also acquire such abilities when features presented in original perception become signs of features not original to any sense modality: features like ‘being a tomato,’ or ‘being a Pinot Noir.’ The redness and roundness of tomatoes are original to perception, but perceiving the red, round thing as a tomato is acquired. Such acquired perceptions are not judgments made *on the basis of perceptual experience*. Acquired perceptions are not inferences or acts of judgment independent from perceptual experience. Rather, the features presented in acquired perception are represented in the content of perceptual experience itself.

From what has been said, I think it appears, that our original powers of perceiving objects by our senses receive great improvement by use and habit; and without this improvement, would be altogether insufficient for the purposes of life. The daily occurrences of life not only add to our stock of knowledge, but give additional perceptive powers to our senses . . .

(EIP II xxi, 239)

The leading case of acquired perception in Reid is *visual* perception of distance, magnitude, and three-dimensional figure, which Reid calls “real figure.” Beginning in infancy, humans associate features presented originally in visual experience such as light, color, shading, and illumination, with features presented in tactile experience, such as three-dimensional shape, distance, and other spatial relations. An infant who is shown a red ball, for example, would have visual experience of a two-dimensional

colored surface illuminated in a certain way at some position in her visual field. Once handed the ball, the infant would have a tactile perception of the ball as smooth and spherical. Playing with the ball, the infant learns to associate visible figure with real figure—to associate what she sees with what she feels. In this way, visible figure becomes a sign of tangible figure. A keen observer of children, Reid noted that much of what we would call play is learning:

From the time that children begin to use their hands, nature directs them to handle every thing over and over, to look at it while they handle it, and to put it in various positions, and at various distances from the eye. We are apt to excuse this as a childish diversion . . . But if we think more justly, we shall find, that they are engaged in the most serious and important study . . . They are thereby every day acquiring the habits of perception, which are of greater importance than anything we can teach them. The original perceptions which Nature gave them are few, and insufficient for the purposes of life; and therefore she made them capable of acquiring many more perceptions by habit. (IHM VI xxiv, 201)

People acquire perceptual sensitivity to features not present in original perception when the features presented in original perception acquire additional significance. Our ability to recognize the spatial significance of visible features is a kind of literacy: once we gain the ability to see a ball as spherical and smooth, it becomes increasingly difficult to attend to features such as shading and illumination as anything but spatially significant.

According to Reid, the acquired perceptions of normal adults include much more than visual experience of three-dimensional figure. Features such as ‘being a carrot’ or ‘being a cat’ are not original to any sense modality in the way that hardness and illumination are. Still less are such features as ‘being a carburetor’ or ‘being a Cabernet.’ Whether and to what degree a person becomes perceptually aware of features like these is contingent and circumstantial (IHM VI xx, 171–2, VI xxiv, 191–2). It depends both on the prevalence of the feature in one’s environment and on the amount and significance of one’s practical engagement with the feature. A person in an environment full of cats will acquire perceptual sensitivity to them. A person who lives in a feline-free environment might still be able to tell whether something is a cat, but such recognition will not be *perceptual*—she might identify cats on the basis of perception but may not be able to see cats as cats just as I—a lifelong inhabitant of the Americas—cannot see a wombat as a wombat.

The difference between being perceptually sensitive to a feature rather than intellectually astute about it is clearer for carburetors and Cabernet. The mechanic simply sees the carburetor for what it is. The rest of us identify it only by inference. The sommelier recognizes a Cabernet by taste. The rest of us conclude that it is only by reasoning from the wine’s color, density and flavor.

When a painter perceives, that this picture is the work of Raphael, that the work of Titian; a jeweler, that this a true diamond, that a counterfeit; a sailor, that this is a ship of five hundred ton, that of four hundred: these different acquired perceptions are produced by the same general

principles of the human mind, which have a different operation in the same person according as they are variously applied, and in different persons, according to the diversity of their education and manner of life. (IHM VI xxiv, 191–2)

Almost every employment in life, hath perceptions of this kind that are peculiar to it. The shepherd knows every sheep of his flock, as we do our acquaintance, and can pick them out of another flock one by one. The butcher knows by sight the weight and quality of his beeves and sheep before they are killed. The farmer perceives by his eye, very nearly, the quantity of hay in a rick, or of corn in a heap. The sailor sees the burthen, the built, and the distance of a ship at sea, while she is a great way off. Every man accustomed to writing, distinguishes his acquaintance by their handwriting, as he does by their faces. And the painter distinguishes in the works of art, the style of all the great masters. In a word, acquired perception is very different in different persons, according to the diversity of objects about which they are employed, and the application they bestow in observing them. (IHM VI xx, 171–2)

The contingent and circumstantial nature of the conditions under which normal perceivers acquire perceptual abilities is best exemplified by Reid's own long list of things to which people may become perceptually sensitive through repeated experience: the weight and quality of cattle, the weight of ships, the manner of an artistic work, kinds of jewels and whether they are counterfeits, the taste of cider and brandy, the smell of apples and oranges, the noise of thunder and ringing of bells, and the famous case of a coach passing (IHM VI xx, 171–2, VI xxiv, 191–2; EIP II xiv, 182). How strange Reid's list is! How many of us can see sickness in a cow, or whether a ship is laden with goods? Reid's examples do not persuade because they come to us from another century, just as Reid would not see the power of a Ford Mustang, hear a ringtone or smell a hamburger.

Original perception is a productive precondition for acquired perception. It provides traction for acquiring an expanded conceptual repertoire and an opportunity for applying these concepts to yield perceptual experiences that are ever more sensitive to a variety of features in an environment. Such sensitivity has nothing to do with being astute; it comes with the normal development of the human cognitive system.

3 Aesthetic Perception, the Psychological Story: Instinctive and Rational Judgments

Reid's theory of aesthetic perception rests on two further distinctions; one is psychological, the other is metaphysical. Psychology distinguishes *instinctive* from rational judgments of beauty (EIP VIII iv, 595–6, 598–9, 607, 613). Aesthetic experience itself has two elements: an emotional or otherwise affective mental state and a judgment or belief (Reid uses these terms interchangeably) to the effect that the object experienced exhibits some perfection or excellence (EIP VIII iv, 592). The aesthetic judgment may either be *instinctive* in the sense that all properly functioning humans are disposed to form it regardless of previous experience, or else it may be a *rational* judgment, acquired through repeated experience (EIP VIII iv, 595–596, 598, 605, 607, 613).

Recalling Reid's analogy between the external senses and the internal sense of taste, this distinction evokes something like Reid's distinction between original and acquired perception, which illuminates the developmental aspects of aesthetic perception and accounts for the variety of aesthetic judgment among persons (EIP VIII i, 573). As with the external senses, repeated experience allows us to acquire more, more sensitive, and more sophisticated aesthetic abilities. Differences among experiencing subjects and among their environments yield variation among aesthetic sensibilities.

Reid's second distinction is metaphysical, *original* and *derived* beauty. "As the sense of beauty may be distinguished into instinctive and rational; so I think beauty itself may be distinguished into original and derived" (EIP VIII iv, 599, 602). Many ordinary objects of perception display both beauty and grandeur, and to these we are instinctively drawn. But these aesthetic properties of objects are derived from *original* beauty and grandeur, which are properties of minds not objects. The beauty or grandeur of an object is a reflection or expression of the original beauty and grandeur of the mind that fashioned it. In artifacts, beauty or grandeur are signs of an excellence in the artist or craftsman (EIP VIII iv, 599, 601, 604). In Reid's cosmology, however, the distinction between natural objects and artifacts makes no sense: there are no uncreated objects. The beauty or grandeur of natural objects is, for Reid, a sign of the excellence of their maker: the Author of Nature: "The invisible Creator, the Fountain of all perfection, hath stamped upon all his works signatures of his divine wisdom, power, and benignity, which are visible to all men" (EIP VIII iv, 603). While Reid repeatedly insists upon the "real excellence" of objects and, as against the sentimentalists, upon the objectivity of beauty and grandeur, such excellences are ultimately derived, for "every object of sense is beautified, by borrowing attire from the attributes of mind," preeminently the divine mind (EIP VIII iv, 603).

Reid begins his essay "On Taste," by drawing an analogy between the external senses and the internal sense. The external senses would have been familiar to readers of the previous seven essays—they are the traditional five senses by which we directly perceive material objects and their qualities. Readers would also be familiar with Reid's general account of perception, including his distinctions between sensation and perception and original and acquired perception. The internal sense is the "power of the mind, by which we perceive what is beautiful" (EIP VIII i, 573). The external senses and the internal sense are structurally similar: sensations are distinct from the qualities in objects that occasion them. Types of qualities in objects occasion types of sensation by a law of the human mind—by our constitution, not theirs. Because the relationship between qualities and sensations is regular and uniform, sensations are about qualities in a derivative sense. Sensations are *signs*.

Just as Reid distinguishes sensations from the qualities that occasion them, he also distinguishes the qualitative character of aesthetic experience from aesthetic qualities in objects. Recall that aesthetic perception consists of something felt—emotions—and something by which we experience the world as being a certain way—as beautiful or grand, for example. These agreeable emotions are distinct from the qualities in objects

that occasion them (EIP VIII i, 574, 578, also VIII iv, 592). Different kinds of beauty and grandeur occasion different kinds of agreeable emotions; grand objects occasion admiration, while beautiful objects occasion love and esteem (EIP VIII iv, 601). These emotions can be said to be about the qualities of beauty and grandeur that occasion them, but only derivatively. They are *signs* of beauty and grandeur insofar as laws governing the proper functioning of the human cognitive system regulate them. By being so regulated, our emotions are attuned to basic features of the environment—in this case, the beauty and grandeur of objects. Like perception by the external senses, perception of aesthetic qualities may become disordered:

The intention of Nature is no less evident in this internal taste than in the external. Every excellence has a real beauty and charm that makes it an agreeable object to those who have the faculty of discerning its beauty; and this faculty is what we call good taste. A man, who, by any disorder in his mental powers, or by bad habits, has contracted a relish for what has no real excellence, or what is deformed and defective, has a depraved taste . . . (EIP VIII i, 575–6)

Reid identifies the second ingredient in aesthetic perception—*aesthetic judgment*—using a problematic term: *belief* (EIP VIII i, 577, 578, VIII iv, 592). One might regard the belief or judgment that is central to ordinary and aesthetic perception as distinct from and independent of perceptual experience (Winkler, 2006, 264). Beliefs might be higher-order acts in which the mind delivers a judgment or verdict on a proposition. While using ‘belief’ in this way, Reid also used it for first-order acts of judgment predicating of objects conceived that they are thus-and-such—for what we would now call the representational or intentional content of perceptual experience. Thus understood, the beliefs involved in ordinary and aesthetic perception are not distinct from the content of perceptual experience itself; they are part of it.

Judgments of taste may be instinctive or rational. Upon having certain tactile sensations, a normal human will form and deploy concepts of hardness, softness, extension, figure, and motion. Upon having visual sensations, she will form and deploy concepts of color and visible figure. Likewise, immediately upon having certain emotions, a normal human will form and deploy concepts of beauty and grandeur—*instinctive* judgments of taste. This is why children like brilliant colors, regular figures, gaudy ornaments, mirth, glee, and cheerful faces (EIP VIII iv, 598, 613). Their ability to perceive the beauty in objects is original, part of our constitution.

Our determinations with regard to the beauty of objects, may, I think, be distinguished into two kinds; the first we may call instinctive, the other rational . . . Some objects strike us at once, and appear beautiful at first sight, without any reflection, without our being able to say why we call them beautiful, or being able to specify any perfection which justifies our judgment. Something of this kind there seems to be in brute animals, and in children before the use of reason; nor does it end with infancy, but continues through life. (EIP VIII iv, 596)

Reid’s *rational* judgments of taste are *acquired* rather than *original* aesthetic perceptions. Such instinctive aesthetic judgments correspond to what Reid would call

judgments of nature—a judgment formed in accordance with a law of our constitution (EIP VI i, 412; see also EIP II xiii, 169). Reid’s use of the term ‘rational’ bears watching, however—the judgments are not the product of reason, inference, or any other discursive act of mind. They are as much products of habit, custom, learning, and association as other acquired perceptions. ‘Rational’ in this case describes acquired aesthetic perception because in forming rational judgments of taste we no longer merely sense “the beauties of the field, of the forest, and of the flower-garden” but understand their significance (EIP VIII iv, 607). We no longer merely enjoy beautiful and grand objects; we understand them: we apprehend what makes them beautiful and grand—we become responsive to the reasons that ground our judgments of taste (EIP VII iv, 595, 596, 598, 607, 613).

This distinction between a rational judgment of beauty and that which is instinctive, may be illustrated by an instance. In a heap of pebbles, one that is remarkable for brilliancy of colour and regularity of figure, will be picked out of the heap by a child. He perceives beauty in it, puts a value upon it, and is fond of the property of it. For this preference, no reason can be given, but that children are, by their constitution, fond of brilliant colors, and of regular figures . . . Suppose again that an expert mechanic views a well constructed machine. He sees all its parts to be made of the fittest materials, and of the most proper form; nothing superfluous, nothing deficient; every part adapted to its use, and the whole fitted in the most perfect manner to the end for which it is intended. He pronounces it to be a beautiful machine. He views it with the same agreeable emotion as the child viewed the pebble; but he can give a reason for his judgment, and point out the particular perfections of the object on which it is grounded.

(EIP VIII vi, 598)

What is the significance of beautiful and grand objects? What does the mechanic see or the sommelier taste that we cannot? The answer rests with Reid’s distinction between original and derived beauty and grandeur. We are naturally attuned to beauty and grandeur in objects. The infant delights in beautiful faces and reaches for shiny objects. But the beauty and grandeur in objects is *derived*. The excellence of an object is an instance of an original excellence in the author, artist, craftsman, and creator (EIP VIII iv, 599, 602, 603). It is a *sign* of an excellent mind (EIP VIII iv, 599, 601, 603, 604). We make rational judgments of taste, according to Reid, once we “begin to discern beauties of mind” (EIP VIII iv, 613). By an instinctive judgment of taste we perceive the beauty or grandeur of an object, but by a rational judgment of taste we perceive its significance—we understand *how* the object expresses and exemplifies the virtues of the craftsman.

A work of art may appear beautiful to the most ignorant, even to a child. It pleases, but he knows not why. To one who understands it perfectly, and perceives how every part is fitted with exact judgment to its end, the beauty is not mysterious; it is perfectly comprehended; and he knows wherein it consists, as well as how it affects him. (EIP VIII i, 574)

Children perceive beautiful objects as beautiful, but their experience remains ineffable and superficial—they cannot see *what* the work expresses or *how* it expresses it. A

person who is aesthetically literate, however, will be sensitive to the original aesthetic properties expressed in and signified by the work of art.

As in other cases of acquired perception, whether and to what degree a person becomes sensitive to original beauty will be contingent and circumstantial. The mechanic sees what we do not because she is able to see the purposes for which the machine is wrought and the economy and elegance of how it serves those purposes. She sees the machine's "fitness of form for the end intended" (EIP VIII iv, 606). She sees the precision, creativity, imagination, and skill that the machine represents—she understands it as a sign, as having significance. To the rest of us, however, it is just a pretty object. The judgments of taste in acquired aesthetic perception of original beauty are rational not because they are products of reason but because they make reasons available. In perceiving original beauty and grandeur, we perceive not merely that something is elegant; we perceive how its elegance expresses the intentions of the artist.

But some have argued that aesthetic perception is confined to derived beauty and grandeur. According to James Manns, "original beauty is removed from the realm of the visible or audible and placed within the domain of the moral and intentional, while *derived* beauty—the beauty we see or hear—acts as a sign of original beauty" (Manns, 1988, 127). Reid's words are ambiguous, however: "Thus the beauties of mind, though *invisible* in themselves, are *perceived* in the object of sense, on which their image is impressed" (EIP VIII iv, 603; emphasis added). Because aesthetic perception is a case of acquired perception, phrases such as "the visible or audible," and "the beauty we see and hear," are misleading. The perceptible is not limited to the visible or audible (or tangible, etc.)—to what is given to the senses. And though derived aesthetic qualities are indeed signs of original beauty, it is precisely by signs that we perceive. Signs do not obstruct perception in the case of original and acquired perception, since there is no reason to suppose they do in the case of aesthetic perception.

In original perception, sensations are signs that suggest such qualities as hardness, figure, motion, color, and illumination. In acquired perception, qualities presented in original perception become signs of tangible figure, the quality of cattle, the manner of an artistic work, whether jewels are counterfeits, and the taste of cider and brandy (IHM VI xx, 171–2, VI xxiv, 191–2; EIP II xiv, 182). In all cases, the qualities signified are directly perceived. If the beauty and grandeur of objects are signs of the original beauty and grandeur possessed by the minds that fashioned them, then original beauty and grandeur are possible objects of perception. The aesthetically illiterate may not perceive Botticelli's grace in *La Primavera*. But original beauty and grandeur are as familiar objects of perception to the aesthetically literate as are the sheep to the shepherd, the quality of beef to the butcher and the quantity of corn in a heap to the farmer (IHM VI xx, 171–2).

Is there a tension between Reid's objectivism about aesthetic qualities and his admission that judgments of taste admit of variety (EIP VIII i, 576)? According to James Manns, this part of Reid's aesthetics is the weakest: "His confidence that the

enormous variety in tastes from one culture to another can ultimately be ironed out or explained away now looks hopelessly naïve, to an age such as ours which no longer neatly divides the world into ‘us and the savages’” (Manns, 1988, 128). But understanding Reid’s theory of aesthetic perception as part of his theory of acquired perception makes clear how he can accommodate variety in aesthetic judgment while resisting the notion that beauty is a subjective state of the apprehending subject. Differences in perceptual sensitivity depend on differences of circumstance (IHM VI xx, 171–2, VI xxiv, 191–2). Whether one becomes perceptually sensitive to a feature depends both on the prevalence of the feature in the environment and on the amount and significance of practical engagement with the feature. The difference between the sommelier and the customer is a difference in experience—the sommelier has tasted more wine and has become perceptually sensitive to features of wine that the customer cannot detect. So too, perceptual sensitivity to the beauty or grandeur of an object will depend on contingent factors that vary among individuals. Differences in aesthetic sensitivity depend on common and ordinary differences among individuals and environments.

Were we confined to original and instinctive perception, we could never advance beyond the sign to significance. Experience and education allow people to see farther than the surface of things and to acquire perceptual sensitivity to a variety of features not presented in original perception—including aesthetic features.

4 Aesthetic Perception, the Metaphysical Story: Original and Derived Beauty

The analogies between external and internal taste are obvious to Reid (EIP VIII i, 573). Most obvious is the analogy between sensations and qualities of objects, on the one hand, and agreeable emotions and excellences in objects, on the other (EIP VIII i, 573–4). Both have been obscured by the theory of ideas, however, which Reid associates with Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. The theory of ideas resolves all properties of objects into mere sensations or feelings in the mind (EIP VIII i, 574, VIII iii, 582–3). We perceive properties of objects like shape, sound, color, flavor, etc., by our external senses. The properties *perceived* are properties of objects, the sensations *enjoyed* are mental contents. We perceive *aesthetic* properties such as beauty and grandeur by our internal sense (EIP VIII i, 575–6). There is something it is like to perceive beauty and grandeur: “a certain agreeable emotion or feeling in the mind” (EIP VIII iv, 592). Such feelings are constitutive of the *experience* of beauty and grandeur, but not of beauty and grandeur themselves. Beauty and grandeur are metaphysically independent of feelings, emotions, and other affective mental states of a subject (EIP VIII iv, 595). Properly functioning humans will respond to beauty and grandeur with various affective states, by a law of our constitution. But the relationship between such states and the properties of beauty and grandeur is nomological rather than constitutive.

Reid presents several arguments against the theory that aesthetic qualities are states of a subject. First, while emotions are part of ordinary aesthetic perception, they are insufficient for it. Emotions alone do not represent objects as beautiful or grand and so cannot be the basis of our aesthetic judgments. Like sensations, emotions are only nomologically connected with aesthetic qualities and judgments. They underdetermine judgments of taste and so cannot ground such judgments epistemically. Hence, we cannot explain or justify judgments of taste by appeal to the emotions typically enjoyed in aesthetic experience, as the subjectivist would have us do.

Second, the surface grammar of judgments of taste indicates that they represent *the world* as being a certain way, not that they represent an emotion in the mind of the person making the judgment. Judgments of taste typically take material objects as their grammatical objects and predicate aesthetic properties to such objects: “when a man pronounces a poem or palace to be beautiful, he affirms something of that poem or palace” (EIP VIII i, 577, VIII iii, 584). If beauty and grandeur were feelings or emotions enjoyed by a subject, judgments of taste would be either false because they predicate properties of objects that no objects in fact have, or neither true nor false but mere expressions of emotion.

If it be said that the perception of beauty is merely a feeling in the mind that perceives . . . the necessary consequence of this opinion is, that when I say VIRGIL’s *Georgics* is a beautiful poem, I mean not to say any thing of the poem, but only something concerning myself and my feelings.

(EIP VIII i, 577, VIII iv, 594)

Third, recall that judgments of taste are not judgments made on the basis of perception, but form part of the content of aesthetic perception itself. Hence, I do not merely judge that a poem is beautiful or that a canyon is grand; I hear the beauty of the poem and see the grandeur of the canyon. My experience represents the beauty and grandeur displayed throughout the natural and man-made world. If beauty and grandeur were reducible to the emotions enjoyed by a subject then not only must we regard judgments of taste as categorically false or without truth-value, we must also regard the internal sense of taste as globally fallacious. On such a view, objects cannot be beautiful or grand. If experience represents them as such, the senses mislead and mislead globally.

To say that there is in reality no beauty in those objects in which all men perceive beauty, is to attribute to man fallacious senses. But we have no ground to think so disrespectfully of the Author of our being; the faculties he hath given us are not fallacious; nor is that beauty, which he hath so liberally diffused over all the works of his hands, a mere fancy in us, but a real excellence in his works, which express the perfection of their Divine Author. (EIP VIII iv, 595)

Alternatively, beauty and grandeur are real qualities of objects—what Reid calls *real excellences* (EIP VIII iv, 595). Objects possess beauty or grandeur independently of whether an apprehending subject experiences them as beautiful or grand (EIP VIII iv, 595). Whether an object is beautiful or grand is a function of the nature of the

object itself. “It depends no doubt upon our constitution, whether we do, or do not perceive excellence where it really is: But the object has its excellence from its own constitution, and not from ours” (EIP VIII iii, 584) The beauty or grandeur of an object consists in its being an expression of the virtues of the mind that created the object (EIP VIII iii, 587). It may fail to express the virtues of its author, as in the case of a poorly written poem or a poorly executed painting. So too, it may successfully convey the artistry and virtuosity of its author. Whether it does so or not is a property of the object itself.

The beauty and grandeur of objects is derived from the original beauty and grandeur of minds. “I apprehend, therefore, that it is in the moral and intellectual perfections of mind, and in its active powers, that beauty originally dwells; and that from this as the fountain, all the beauty which we perceive in the visible world is derived” (EIP VIII iv, 602). Like excellence in objects, a mind’s wisdom, virtue, magnanimity, innocence, gentleness, fortitude, self-command, etc. depend on the nature of the mind and not upon the judgment of an apprehending subject (EIP VIII iv, 601). But unlike excellence in objects, the virtues of mind are intrinsic to mind (EIP VIII iii, 585). Were there no minds, there would be no beautiful or grand objects; were there no objects, minds would still be excellent. Nevertheless, the beauty and grandeur of objects and minds are equally real and objective. The former is derived from the latter but is no less real and objective than that from which it is derived. The aesthetic properties of objects are relational properties: mind-dependent but not subjective. They depend on the existence of subjects for their existence, but not upon the experiences of apprehending subjects.

The real and objective nature of the beauty and grandeur of objects can be tested by a thought experiment, but with conditions that Reid could not have entertained. On some vast plain, natural, non-divine forces produce a rocky outcropping that is property-identical to Michelangelo’s *David*, with the exception that it lacks the property of having been created by Michelangelo or any other agent. This object could not be beautiful according to Reid. Were an aesthetically literate person well acquainted with Michelangelo’s *David* to come across this accident of nature, she would see it as beautiful: she would experience the features of the objects as aesthetically significant. But she would be wrong.

This is just what one would expect if aesthetic perception is a kind of acquired sensitivity to features that are signs of excellent artistry and authorship. In counterfeit conditions, perceptual sensitivity will produce false beliefs and misperceptions. Such false beliefs and misperceptions no more tell against the objective and real nature of aesthetic properties than fool’s gold tells against the existence of gold.

Reid would not have entertained this thought experiment because it requires an uncreated object. But he considers something like it by noting that we can adopt a point of view that obliterates the possibility of recognizing beauty and grandeur:

When we consider matter as an inert, extended, divisible and moveable substance, there seems to be nothing in these qualities which we can call grand . . . Upon the whole, I humbly apprehend

that true grandeur . . . is found originally and properly in qualities of mind; that it is discerned in objects of sense only by reflection, as the light we perceive in the moon and planets is truly the light of the sun; and that those who look for grandeur in mere matter, seek the living among the dead. (EIP VIII iii, 591)⁶

A number of interpreters have failed to recognize Reid's position that original and derived aesthetic properties are equally objective and real. Noticing that the derived beauty and grandeur depend for their existence on qualities of mind, some have suggested that Reid's account commits him to the very position against which he was concerned to argue: subjectivism (Manns, 1988). This interpretation is motivated by Reid's analogy between aesthetic qualities and secondary qualities. On such an interpretation, original beauty and grandeur are real properties in the manner of primary qualities; they are qualities of objects. By parity, derived beauty and grandeur are not in the objects but rather in what we feel when presented with some quality we know not what. But the analogy between aesthetic qualities and secondary qualities is misleading. First, Reid does not draw a strict analogy between the two. Instead, he compares aesthetic qualities to primary and secondary qualities *both*.

In objects that please the taste, we always judge that there is some real excellence, some superiority to those that do not please. In some cases, that superior excellence is distinctly perceived, and can be pointed out; in other cases, we have only a general notion of some excellence we cannot describe. Beauties of the former kind may be compared to the primary qualities perceived by the external senses; those of the latter kind, to the secondary.

(EIP VIII i, 578)

Second, emphasizing the analogy between aesthetic qualities and secondary qualities implies that Reid adopts the traditional ontology and epistemology of secondary qualities. But much of Reid's *Inquiry* and *Essays* is devoted to the distinction between sensation and perception, the very distinction that allows him to insist that secondary qualities such as taste, smell and color are not sensations but qualities in objects. The force of Reid's discussion of secondary properties in Essay VIII is directed *against* the traditional conception and it makes the subjectivist position absurd (EIP VIII iii, 583–4, VIII iv, 594–5).

As in the case of secondary properties, “the name of beauty belongs to this excellence of the object, and not to the feeling of the spectator” (EIP, VIII iv, 595). To those who claim that neither aesthetic nor secondary qualities are properties of objects, Reid answers that he “had occasion to show, that there is no solid foundation for it when applied to the secondary qualities of body; and the same arguments show equally, that it has no solid foundation when applied to the beauty of objects . . .” (EIP VIII i, 574, VIII iv, 594). Aesthetic properties cannot be resolved into mere feelings or sensations: “we must be convinced that there is real excellence in some things, whatever our feelings or our constitution may be” (EIP VIII iii, 584).

⁶ For more on ‘reflection,’ see EIP VIII iv, 599.

Reid's discussion of secondary properties eliminates the subjectivist position by taking its premises seriously. Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities encouraged his successors to regard secondary qualities as modifications of mind rather than bodies—as sensations or feelings rather than properties of objects (EIP VIII iii, 583–4, VIII iv, 594–5). Once the distinction was drawn along these lines, it became increasingly difficult to defend the ontological independence of primary qualities. Idealists such as Berkeley “found that extension, solidity, figure, and all the primary qualities of body, are sensations or feelings of the mind” (EIP VIII iii, 584). Treating aesthetic qualities in the same manner—as mere modifications of mind—is a natural extension of the theory of ideas. Hume, claims Reid, “put the finishing stroke to it,” by including moral qualities, truth, error, and belief as operations of “the sensitive part of our nature” (EIP VIII iii, 584). Far from basing his account of aesthetic qualities on an analogy with secondary qualities, Reid's discussion of secondary qualities in this context is an instance of his opposition to the theory of ideas. That theory leads inevitably to skepticism or idealism, and demoting aesthetic qualities to the status of secondary qualities results from this inevitability.

5 Conclusion

The difference between an excellence distinctly perceived and one of which “we have only a general notion we cannot describe” is the difference between the instinctive perception of derived beauty and the acquired perception of original beauty. In other words, derived beauty is the proper object of instinctive judgments of taste. Children at play and the sommelier's customers have only general and relative notions of the beauty and grandeur of objects. By contrast, original beauty is the proper object of rational judgments of taste. The person who is aesthetically literate comprehends the reasons why an object is beautiful or grand—she understands how the form and function of the object reflects the skills and intentions of its creator.

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7

Thomas Reid's Expressivist
Aesthetics*Rachel Zuckert*

1 Introduction

In a recent article, Peter Kivy has argued that Thomas Reid ought to be recognized as a forerunner to the expression theory of art of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, proposed by thinkers such as Leo Tolstoy, R. G. Collingwood, and John Dewey.¹ Kivy argues that, though Reid does not explicitly define “fine art,” he recognizes the category of the fine arts, and takes expressive properties to be distinctive, perhaps defining, characteristics of artworks. Reid certainly does claim that successful expression is a, perhaps the, source of artistic value, not only because it constitutes moving portrayal of human emotion (of characters, depicted figures in paintings, etc.), but also because it manifests or (in Reid’s terms) is a “sign of”—expresses—the artist’s qualities: his emotional states (the focus of much later expression theory), as well as his intelligence, acuity of observation, skill, greatness of conception, and so on. Thus, Kivy argues, Reid is a pioneer in aesthetics, one of the first to propound an expression theory of art, anticipating this important movement by over a century (a distinction he shares with Johann Gottfried Herder).

In concentrating on the philosophy of art narrowly speaking, however, Kivy does not discuss the most striking and unusual role of expression on Reid’s view, indeed perhaps the most striking and unusual claim in Reid’s aesthetic theory overall: his analysis of beauty itself—or, as we might now put it, of aesthetic value itself—as expression. In fact, it is likely that for Reid an expression theory of art just follows from his more fundamental aesthetics of expression or (as I have called it in my title) his “expressivist aesthetics.” For, given that his discussion of the arts occurs in the context of a discussion of aesthetic value (beauty, sublimity, novelty), it seems probable that Reid—like the majority of his contemporaries—understands “fine art” as that set of artifacts intended, made, to be beautiful (or sublime), or, in a common phrase of the

¹ Kivy (2004); see also his earlier essay: Kivy (1978).

period employed also by Reid, they are objects “whose end is to please” (EIP VI viii, 535). If beauty (or sublimity) is expression, then artworks—which aim at beauty—will aim at, be valuable insofar as they achieve, expression. (Reid propounds, then, a theory of art that is *both* a theory of art as expressive and as “fine” or as intended to be beautiful.)²

This fundamental Reidian claim—that all beauty, not just artistic value, lies in expression—is the focus of the present essay. It is a claim that is not only striking and unusual, but also puzzling and, many have thought, problematic.³ Indeed, Kivy may well restrict his attention to *artistic* expression precisely because of the problematic character of Reid’s broader expressivist claim. For, difficult as it is to understand what artistic expression is, it still seems quite plausible to think that art is an expressive activity or a product thereof, that the artist aims to present his or her emotions or attitudes towards the world and communicate them to the audience, and that art serves these purposes more directly than do other activities or products. It is considerably less obvious why one would wish to analyze *beauty* thus. Indeed, later expression theorists often turned to expression as a value for art that was precisely to be contrasted with beauty (or aesthetic value more generally). It is, for one thing, not so clear *who* might be expressing *what* in many cases of beauty, especially natural beauty; it is not obvious to many of us (as it was to Reid) that there is an intelligence, a mind, an express-er “behind” nature. It is also not entirely clear whether or how the phenomenology of the (experience of the) beautiful is properly understood as expressive: as finding something to be a manifestation, a sign, an externalization of something else. Do we not, for example (and as formalists have contended), simply find a certain arrangement, structure, appearance of an object pleasing, admirable, elegant, etc.—that is, beautiful? Does beauty not lie in appearance—rather than in (a relation to) that which is beyond appearance?

The aim of this essay is to investigate what such an expressivist claim about beauty might mean, and why one might—and why Reid did—hold it. The essay will not defend this view against all objections, and there are a good number, some of which will be canvassed, but is, rather, more exploratory in character. I will propose, however, that Reid’s expressivism in aesthetics is meant (among other things) to take account of a certain functional role of beauty in human life, in the human economy of values, judgments, and activities: that it is what one might call, following Stendhal (and then Nietzsche, and then Nehamas (2007)), a “promise of happiness.”

I shall begin by presenting two central elements of Reid’s aesthetic theory—realism, and his distinction between instinctive and rational judgments of beauty—that are important for understanding his expressivist aesthetics. I then turn to present and

² See also Demoor (2006), which emphasizes the role of imitation, the most traditional definiens of art, in Reid’s philosophy of art.

³ See, for example, Gracyk (1987, 478–9) and Kivy (2003, 333–4).

discuss Reid's doctrine of expression proper or (in his terms) his view concerning the nature of "original" and of "derived" beauty.

2 Reid's Basic Claims

Reid's aesthetic theory is presented primarily in his "Essay on Taste," the eighth and final essay of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* of 1785. Since Reid's lectures on the fine arts (Kivy 1973) add little to the view presented in "Essay on Taste," I concentrate solely on the published work. Following Addison, Reid discusses three aesthetic qualities appreciated by taste: novelty, grandeur (or sublimity), and beauty. With respect at least to the second and third of these qualities, Reid is a realist. Against what he takes to be the view of Hutcheson (and others), he claims that beauty and sublimity (or grandeur) do not lie in the eye of the beholder, but are "real excellences" belonging to objects independently of our subjective responsiveness to them. (I shall concentrate here on beauty, but draw from Reid's discussion of grandeur also, on points common to the two accounts.)

In support of this realist claim, Reid appears primarily to proffer the following argument:

When I say VIRGIL'S *Georgics* is a beautiful poem . . . [m]y language, according to the necessary rules of construction, can bear no other meaning but this, that there is something in the poem, and not in me, which I call beauty. . . . No reason can be given why all mankind should express themselves thus, but that they believe what they say. It is therefore contrary to the universal sense of mankind, expressed by their language, that beauty is not really in the object, but is merely a feeling in the person who is said to perceive it. (EIP VIII i, 577; cf. VIII iii, 584)

Reid asserts, that is, that "all mankind" believes that beauty is in the object, is not merely an idea or feeling "in the person," and takes ordinary language to testify to this belief (and to its prevalence, or even universality).

Read as an attempt to establish aesthetic realism, this argument prompts obvious objections. Why should we believe either that language (invariably) reflects belief, or that common, even universally shared beliefs are always true? After all, as Reid himself notes, we speak of "sunrises" and "sunsets," for example, though we do not believe that the sun moves. As Reid likewise acknowledges, throughout history, and across cultures, human beings have had many various, and often false, beliefs. He notes too that language can encode such errors, or, more generally, mislead.⁴

But, I suggest, this argument may be understood somewhat differently, in concert with Reid's views concerning common sense (or, as he puts it in the quotation above, "universal sense") in general: not as an argument meant to be determinative, to *establish* aesthetic realism, but rather as an argument intended to indicate where the

⁴ See, e.g., EIP I ii, 41 and 44, EIP VI viii, 527–41, especially 538, and EAP I ii, 14–17.

burden of proof in the debate concerning it lies.⁵ Thus, Reid continues from the above passage, “Philosophers should be *very cautious* in opposing the common sense of mankind; for, when they do, they rarely miss going wrong” (EIP VIII i, 577; emphasis added). Reid thus suggests, then, that aesthetic realism lies in the province of common sense, and thus (in accord with Reid’s views concerning common sense principles in general) arguments against it may be offered, but ought to be scrutinized severely.

Reid allows, that is, that philosophers *may* (albeit cautiously) challenge common sense beliefs, indeed (he writes elsewhere) are “entitled” to do so, even concerning those beliefs that are reflected “in the structure of all languages” (EIP I i, 26). But the considerations intended to lead us to reject the views of common sense must be very compelling, and must provide a satisfying explanation of the “prejudice common to mankind” that led to the formation of this (purportedly) “vulgar error” (27; cf. EAP V ii, 278). This is, moreover, no easy task. For the beliefs of common sense are our most fundamental beliefs, our first principles, those which we automatically, naturally endorse, and which ground and structure our practices, other beliefs, and modes of reasoning. More specifically, according to Reid’s characterization of the criteria for common sense beliefs, they are (or concern propositions that are) “self-evident” (or: are automatic, unquestioning natural beliefs, and/or ones that garner immediate assent when proposed); “necessary in the conduct of life”; agreed upon by all men; and foundational for all reasoning (EIP I ii, 39). As such, these beliefs are not, indeed, amenable to proof, on Reid’s view, for there are no “more evident” principles from which they could be derived (39). But neither does philosophical theory-making usually amount to a strong enough consideration to overturn such beliefs, Reid contends. Except in cases of skepticism so global as to prevent any making of claims whatsoever, philosophical arguments are always in fact themselves based on one or more of such beliefs (in order to get “off the ground”). It appears, Reid suggests then, arbitrary to privilege one such belief over others, since we do and must believe all of them on trust. Thus it is rational, he holds, to endorse these first principles—and, again, the burden of proof lies with those who wish to overturn them.⁶

The above-quoted passage from the “Essay on Taste” can be read, I propose then, as an (abbreviated) argument to the effect that the belief that beauty is a real quality—*aesthetic realism*—is one such first principle (and thus, a fortiori, is not meant to be a proof thereof). It is less clear in the case of aesthetic realism than in the case of other first principles discussed by Reid (such as the belief in the existence of the external world) that the criteria listed in the previous paragraph are satisfied (nor does Reid devote as much effort as one might like to showing that they are). As we have seen, Reid does argue that “all mankind” endorses aesthetic realism. But—as Hume, for example, notes in his “Of the Standard of Taste”—it is not only philosophers, misled by their abstruse theories, who hold that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”; this is,

⁵ See Pouivet (2005), however, for an attempt at a much stronger reading of Reid’s “linguistic” argument.

⁶ I rely here on the account given in DeRose (1989).

rather, a quite widespread opinion among the populace at large. Nor, then, is it clear that aesthetic realism is self-evident, or in what way it might be foundational for all reasoning.

Though Reid does not explicitly address such issues, one might suggest on his behalf that the reality of beauty *is* the first, automatic, “natural” belief, that it is most natural to think that beauty is a property of objects—as, for example, the history of thinking about beauty also suggests—and that it is only after being confronted by deep disagreements about beauty (or other puzzles about beauty, as will be discussed presently) that people come to doubt this original belief, or to profess the more relativistic, subjectivist position. Moreover, a belief in aesthetic realism might be taken to be a basic, underlying first principle for many people’s actual practice (despite avowals of aesthetic subjectivism)—from the attempt to possess, protect, and preserve certain objects (which practices seem to suggest that the objects themselves are valuable) to the kinds of special treatment given to beautiful people (i.e., as if they themselves were valuable in virtue of their beauty). A belief that at least some objects really do have value, really are worthy of pursuit (e.g., by being beautiful) might also be “necessary in the conduct of life,” by making possible the whole-hearted commitment to certain goods and pursuit of ends in life as themselves, in fact, good, not merely as apparently good by virtue of projection of one’s pleasurable responses. Finally, though aesthetic realism is not (at least not obviously) foundational for all reasoning, it might be for the “science” of art criticism: it is (arguably) on the grounds of this belief that one looks more carefully at the object, in order to identify particular aspects or qualities of it as responsible for that beauty. (Reid suggests that the first principles of common sense might be foundational for certain particular sciences, not necessarily for *all* reasoning, at EIP I ii, 40.) Such critical practice or, more broadly, practices of reasoning concerning beauty—practices to which Reid himself draws attention, as will be discussed further below—also might provide a way to account for (and to adjudicate) aesthetic disagreements without recourse to aesthetic subjectivism: some are right, see the true beauty of the object properly, and others do not.⁷ There is, in sum, some reason to consider aesthetic realism a common sense principle and perhaps one could say that Reid is gesturing at such reasons in the “linguistic argument” passage quoted above.

Reid’s case for aesthetic realism in his essay on taste as a whole (not just in that passage) comprises, I suggest finally, precisely the sort of vindication of aesthetic realism one would expect for a common sense belief (on his view). That is, as I have been suggesting, Reid takes it that aesthetic realism is a “baseline” or default position. It may not, therefore, be directly proven, but may be vindicated by showing that the opposing (philosophical) position, exemplified again mostly by Hutcheson, cannot meet its higher burden of proof. And so Reid in fact argues in much of the “Essay on

⁷ See Rebecca Copenhaver’s essay in Chapter 6 of this volume on Reid’s conception of improved and/or superior aesthetic perception.

Taste.” In particular, Reid in effect identifies two considerations that would purport to show that beauty does not (as we are naturally inclined to believe) lie in the object: the role of pleasure in our recognition of beauty, and the apparent fact that there are no identifiable qualities that all beautiful objects share. And he aims to show that these two considerations may be accommodated by a realist view, as I shall proceed to discuss in the remainder of this section, and in the next.⁸

Thus, first: the role of pleasure in our recognition of beauty seems to suggest that beauty is not in objects, but rather in our subjective responses to them. For pleasure is, of course, not a characteristic of the object, but a sensation “in us.” The subjective character of pleasure (and hence of our “idea” of beauty)—as Hume makes clearer than Hutcheson—appears to be one of the central ideas underlying the Hutchesonian view that beauty is similar to secondary qualities, or (as Reid quotes Hutcheson) is “an idea raised in us” and not “any quality supposed to be in the object . . . without relation to any mind which perceives it.”⁹

Against this view, Reid deploys his much-discussed analysis of secondary qualities. Just as “red” refers both to our sensation *and* to some quality in the object (which causes our sensation, and which may not resemble the qualitative redness we sense), so too, Reid argues, does “beauty” refer both to the pleasure we receive from a beautiful object *and* to some quality in the object responsible for that pleasure (which need not resemble our pleasure). Thus, Reid writes:

When a beautiful object is before us, we may distinguish the agreeable emotion it produces in us, from the quality of the object which causes that emotion. When I hear an air in music that pleases me, I say, it is fine, it is excellent. This excellence is not in me; it is in the music. But the pleasure it gives is not in the music; it is in me. Perhaps I cannot say what it is in the tune that pleases my ear, as I cannot say what it is in a sapid body that pleases my palate; but there is a quality in the sapid body which pleases my palate, and I call it a delicious taste; and there is a quality in the tune that pleases my taste, and I call it a fine or an excellent air.

(EIP VIII i, 573–4; cf. VIII iv, 594–5)

Or, as Reid also puts this point, and again on parallel with his account of perception, when we find an object beautiful, we not only feel pleasure (a sensation), but also *judge* that the object has some quality responsible for this pleasure, a judgment that may be true or false (595).

So far, however, Reid’s view may not seem fundamentally different from Hutcheson’s, and his criticism of Hutcheson may seem, correspondingly, somewhat unfair.¹⁰ For, though Hutcheson does state (as Reid quotes) that beauty is an idea in us, and does not use the language of judgment, he of course holds that there is (to use Reid’s language) a “quality in the object” that “pleases” or “causes that emotion”—namely, uniformity amidst variety. Thus, it might not be a major revision of Hutche-

⁸ I return to the issue of aesthetic disagreement or variation in taste further below.

⁹ EIP VIII iv, 593, quoting L.i.9 of Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*.

¹⁰ For example, at EIP VIII i, 574. On this point, see Kivy (2003, 69–71).

son's view to say that by "beauty," we mean that quality of objects (whatever it might be, e.g., uniformity amidst variety) that causes our sensation of pleasure or idea of beauty.

Reid's attack on the view of "modern philosophers" (notably Hutcheson) goes further, however. They are wrong, Reid contends, to think that "the *worth and value* we put upon things is only a sensation in our minds [viz., pleasure], and not anything inherent in the object" (EIP VIII iii, 582–3; emphasis added). Rather, Reid contends, "[i]n objects that please the taste, we always judge that there is some real excellence, some superiority to those that do not please" (EIP VIII i, 578). Or, more strongly, "we put a value on [objects we judge to be beautiful] *because* they are intrinsically valuable and excellent" (EIP VIII iii, 582; emphasis added). "It depends no doubt upon our constitution," Reid sums up, "whether we do, or do not perceive excellence where it really is: But the object has its excellence from its own constitution, and not from ours" (584). Hence (as in these passages) Reid identifies the qualities of the object appreciated by (good or correct) taste as *excellences*. When we find something beautiful, on Reid's view, it is not just that something in objects causes pleasure in us—as Hutcheson too claims—nor just that we judge that there is some such something—as Hutcheson might also agree—but that the object is in some way *good, worthy* of being approved, and we judge it to be so. (In this way, judgments of beauty are in fact significantly different from judgments that an object is red, though Reid does not quite acknowledge this: in both cases, we judge that the object has some property, independently of how it might appear to us or affect us, and thus both judgments are subject to norms of correctness, of truth or falsity. In the case of beauty, and not of red, however, the property we attribute to the object is itself an evaluative or normative property.)¹¹

Moreover, and relatedly, though Reid often characterizes the excellence of the objects as the "cause" of aesthetic pleasure—just as some quality in the object causes the sensation of red in us—the relationship of objective or real quality (excellence) to pleasure on Reid's account should not, I suggest, be understood primarily as causal. The objective quality in the object (or our recognition thereof) may cause our pleasure, indeed, but, more importantly, its value *justifies* that pleasure. (Or: we *claim* that there is some excellence in the object, and if the object is thus excellent, this makes our judgment true, and would justify our pleasure.) The emotions with which we respond to an object may, Reid claims, be "just" or (alternatively) "in no degree justified" (EIP VIII iii, 586), according to whether they reflect the true worth of an object or not. Or, as Reid writes more extensively:

Our moral and rational powers justly claim dominion over the whole man. Even taste is not exempted from their authority; it must be subject to that authority in every case wherein we pretend to reason or dispute about matters of taste; it is the voice of reason that *our love or our admiration ought to be proportioned to the merit of the object*. When it is not grounded on

¹¹ For further discussion of the (dis)analogy between beauty and secondary qualities, see Nauckhoff (1994).

(EIP VIII iv, 614; emphasis added)

In sum: these two Reidian points—that (we judge that) the beautiful object has real excellence, and that the judgment of taste (and the pleasure associated with it) is justified if the object is truly excellent—do constitute real differences between Reid's

and Hutcheson's views. For Hutcheson *does* seem to deny that our pleasure is *justified* by the fact that objects have some quality (such as uniformity amidst variety). Rather, it is the opposite: we approve of uniformity amidst variety *because* it is pleasing. For Hutcheson, pleasure (of a certain kind, naturally had by all human beings in "ordinary" circumstances, untainted by distorting customs or associations) *establishes* that objects are beautiful—and then it is an inductive project to discover which qualities these pleasure-causing objects might have in common. If some objects cause such pleasure, but prove not to be characterized by uniformity amidst variety, we would need to formulate a new inductive hypothesis about which *other* qualities of objects might cause such pleasure. The pleasures themselves cannot be "corrected," or justified, for they just are the standards for what will count as beautiful.¹²

For Reid, by contrast, the pleasure of taste is more like a promise or (in his terms) a sign: it signals to us that the object is good in some way. The pleasures of "internal" (aesthetic) taste are, Reid suggests, like the pleasures of "external" (gustatory) taste: just as the pleasures of external taste indicate to us which foods are fit for human consumption, and lead us to seek them out, so too the pleasures of internal taste signal, and lead us to affirm, the goodness of the object. Because they are, or function as, such signs, however, our pleasures may also be "corrected," shown to be false indicators—if the object is found not to have the promised good qualities. Thus, Reid writes,

A man, who, by any disorder in his mental powers, or by bad habits, has contracted a relish for what has no real excellence, or what is deformed and defective, has a depraved taste, like one who finds a more agreeable relish in ashes or cinders than in the most wholesome food.

(EIP VIII i, 575–6)

It is not, in other words, that the person of "depraved" taste appreciates a different or unusual sort of beauty (as a Hutchesonian account might have it, even if Hutcheson himself attempts to resist this conclusion), but rather that he (as it were) suffers from faulty signs that misdirect, promises of worth that are not fulfilled—just as he who loves ashes and cinders is not seeking out food in fact good for him. This (I contend) is the sense in which aesthetic qualities are supposed to be entirely independent of us on Reid's account: they render an object *good* independently of our pleasurable response.

This contention (that beautiful objects are good—"excellent"—independently of our pleasurable responses) may be confirmed, Reid suggests, by recognizing the possibility, indeed the fact, of what he calls "rational" taste. (I now briefly turn, that is, to the other of Reid's basic concepts I shall discuss—namely, the distinction between instinctive and rational taste.) When we find something beautiful, it may be that we simply find an object pleasing without being able to articulate why, without "being able to specify any perfection which justifies our judgment" (EIP VIII iv, 596). We find such an object beautiful *instinctively*. In other cases, however, we can articulate reasons for our

¹² At least according to a Reidian interpretation (which is not unreasonable) of Hutcheson's view. See, however, Shelley (2007) for a cogent defense of a cognitivist reading of Hutcheson.

pleasure, excellences that lie in the object (598). Such excellences might include, to use some of Reid's examples, an artifact's design for a purpose; the orderly rational laws that govern the stars and planets; the role of the healthy flower in the plant's flourishing, and so on. In these cases, the judge not only feels pleasure, and not only judges, in general, that the object has *some* excellence—as in the case of instinctive judgments of beauty—but also can articulate what that excellence *is*. With respect to these judgments, then, appreciators who disagree may engage in explicit dispute, concerning whether the asserted reasons for beauty do indeed hold of the object, are indeed sources of excellence, and so forth. At least in some cases, moreover, our instinctive appreciation of beauty—our pleasure in the object, taken as a sign of its unknown excellence—can be transformed into rational appreciation or (in the terms I have been using) can be known to be justified through rational understanding of the object's excellence, as we come to learn more about the object, see its virtues more clearly, and so forth (598).

3 Reid's Doctrine of Original and Derived Beauty (Expression)

Reid's suggestion that aesthetic pleasure might be a corrigible "sign" of goodness allows him to accommodate, within his realist view, the aspect of aesthetic appreciation that perhaps most inclines to a subjectivist view: the centrality of pleasure in taste. But Reid also attempts to address another common (though not particularly Hutchesonian) reason for a subjectivist view—namely, that we are incapable of identifying some quality that all beautiful objects share, to which we are responding, and about which we can be right or wrong. Reid's answer to this worry is expression.

Reid grants that there is no one quality—analogous to a certain propensity to reflect light rays in the case of red—that renders objects beautiful. Rather, he suggests, all beautiful objects have in common that they are excellent, though this excellence takes different forms, or is based on different properties, in different kinds of objects. So, for example, a snake, a marble table, and a cat may all be beautiful because each has the excellence of its kind (on Reid's view); for the snake and the marble table, but not the cat, however, a high degree of smoothness will contribute to this excellence, and thus is partially responsible for the object's beauty.

Reid claims, however, that such excellence takes two *basic* forms, which he calls "original" and "derived" beauty: "As some objects shine by their own light, and many more by light that is borrowed or reflected; so I conceive the lustre of beauty in some objects is inherent and original, and in many others is borrowed and reflected" (EIP VIII iv, 599). Original beauty, Reid claims, belongs to minds, to mental perfections such as the moral and intellectual virtues, wisdom, kindness, etc., qualities that are intrinsically excellent. "Derived" beauty, by contrast, belongs to material objects, those which bear the marks, the signs, the effects of original beauty—as, to take Reid's

favorite example, the beautiful functionality of a machine bears the marks of design by an intelligent—i.e., originally beautiful—mind. *What* we find pleasing, what is of objective value, is the excellence of minds or, in beautiful material objects, their expression of it.

This claim, of course, is the focus of the present essay. But it may appear that I have mischaracterized it in denominating Reid's aesthetics an expressivist aesthetics. Derived beauty, on Reid's view, is indeed expression. But Reid seems to think that much beauty—in fact, the most fundamental type of beauty, original beauty—lies not in expression but rather simply in mental qualities. Thus it would appear that Reid's aesthetics is not completely—or even fundamentally—an expressivist aesthetics.

But this impression is not really correct. For, immediately after Reid introduces the concept of original beauty, he writes:

But neither mind, nor any of its qualities or powers, is an immediate object of perception to man. We are, indeed, immediately conscious of the operations of our own mind; and every degree of perfection in them gives the purest pleasure. . . . Other minds we perceive only through the medium of material objects, on which their signatures are impressed. It is through this medium that we perceive life, activity, wisdom and every moral and intellectual quality in other beings. The signs of those qualities are immediately perceived by the senses; by them the qualities themselves are reflected to our understanding. (EIP VIII iv, 602–3)

Reid suggests here that, apart from the exceptional case of judging one's own mental qualities, an appreciator is never aware of original beauty, the beauty of mental qualities, *except* through their expressions. For, this passage implies, taste is not simply *like* perception (e.g., in combining sensation and judgment), as Reid argues explicitly throughout the essay, but it is also dependent upon or enacted within sense perception. Thus, because we are aware of mental qualities in sense perception *through* their signs, through the "medium of material objects," so too are we aware of their beauty only through such signs.

The premise employed here—that taste is accomplished or exercised by means of sense perception—is an assumption that Reid never explicitly states, nor, a fortiori, defends, in his essay on taste. It might be defended as necessary to explain why or how judgments of taste differ from other kinds of approving judgments of objects' real excellence (a task seemingly incumbent upon Reid, though never taken up by him explicitly). Such an argument lies beyond the scope of this essay, however. For our purposes, it is important to note that this premise, and Reid's conclusion from it, mean that there is a weaker distinction between original and derived beauty than first appears. Reid indeed continues his discussion thus:

The beauties of mind, though invisible in themselves, are perceived in the objects of sense, on which their image is impressed.

If we consider, on the other hand, the qualities in sensible objects to which we ascribe beauty, I apprehend we shall find in all of them some relation to mind. (603)

The difference between original and derived beauty appears, then, actually to be a difference in emphasis or aspect in our experience of expressions. Original beauty is the mental excellence “perceived in” its expression, while derived beauty is the excellence of the expression (of the same). They are, one might say, the beauty of the *expressed*, as opposed to the beauty of the *expressing*, respectively.

Thus Reid does hold that (nearly) all beauty lies in expression. Hence too Reid’s claims (in other works) that the capacity of taste is based on the human ability to read what he calls “a natural language common to mankind”—i.e., to interpret facial, gestural or vocal expressions as signs of mental passions and dispositions (EAP III vi, 141; see also IHM V iii, 59–61). For (nearly) all perception of beauty—whether original or derived—comprises “reading” that “natural language,” interpreting material signs as expressive of mind. Our appreciation of such expression must, moreover, be understood as a “natural”—automatic, unlearned (though also improvable)—capacity as well: as Reid notes, an infant both perceives his nurse to be kind, and appreciates that kindness instinctively, without any explicit or rational recognition thereof (EAP III ii, 79).

If it is in fact the case that all taste is appreciation of expressive objects as expressive, one might wonder why Reid makes the distinction between original and derived beauty; I will return to this question below. Before doing so, however, one must first investigate Reid’s grounds for endorsing his expressivist aesthetics in general.

4 Why an Expressivist Aesthetics?

Reid’s reasons for this view—or his strategies for defending it—are of two kinds: experiential or inductive, and theoretical. I discuss them in turn.

4.1 *Experiential/Inductive*

First, and most obviously in the text, Reid surveys the objects actually found beautiful, suggesting that analysis of them will show that in each case, we find the object beautiful as expressive. Unsurprisingly, human beauty and art (both fine art and artifacts) figure largely in this survey. As already noted, the beauty of a well-designed machine (or any sort of artifact), resting on its manifest fitness for purpose, is one of Reid’s key examples. Reid suggests also about music (the fine art he discusses most extensively) that not only melody, but also harmony, are beautiful because expressive (of emotions, and of human concord respectively) (EIP VIII iv, 604–5). Reid is clearly also struck by the transformative, beautifying effect of the expression of (positive) emotions and dispositions in human faces, gestures, or motions, suggesting that expression is both necessary and sufficient for human beauty:

There is a great difference in the same face, according as the person is in a better or worse humour, or more or less lively. The best complexion, the finest features, and the exactest shape, without anything of the mind expressed in the face, is insipid and unmoving. The finest eyes in

the world, with an excess of malice or rage in them, will grow shocking. The passions can give beauty without the assistance of colour or form, and take it away when these have united most strongly to give it. (EIP VIII iv, 611)

These are, of course, the easier cases. As Reid recognizes, there are many non-human and non-human-made beauties in the animate and inanimate world. Even here, in discussing human beauty, Reid mentions color and form, “fine features,” and so on—not obviously expressive properties—as possible sources of beauty.

In his treatment of animal and plant beauties, Reid makes clear that he has a generous view of the nature of the mind or—perhaps better—the soul, a conception that is clearly influenced by ancient philosophy. “Mind” includes, for Reid, animal instincts, appetites, even animal “sagacity” and so on, as well as “life,” and so too vigorous, flourishing life, or activity and health (see, for example, the passage quoted above from 602–3). Thus all manifestations of health, as well as animal and plant forms that promote and manifest successful activity, count for Reid as expressions of “mental” excellences. (Contra Kivy, then, and in contradistinction to later expression theorists, Reid’s expressivism does not focus particularly on emotions as that which is expressed. Reid’s view is, however, also in one way narrower than Kivy suggests, for uniqueness, to which Kivy extensively refers as a valued characteristic of artists/artistic expression, is not among the expressed mental qualities appreciated as beautiful, on Reid’s view; it alone would constitute mere novelty, not a positive excellence (Kivy 2004, 284–6).)¹³

Reid employs his expansive conception of the mental/the expressed to interpret many further cases or possible sources of beauty as expressive, beyond the more obvious cases of human bodily expression or expression in artifacts. As evolutionary psychologists today also contend, Reid claims, for example, that proportion and symmetry in human bodies, the color of complexion, and so on—that is, beauty-making but not obviously expressive qualities—are in fact expressive: they are signs of fitness or health in humans, as in other animals, and are found beautiful as such, even if we are not explicitly or rationally aware of that which they express (609–10). (Presumably such qualities are to be taken as similarly expressive in other contexts as well—e.g., as connoting solidity in buildings.) For Reid, such manifestations of purpose are also, of course, signs of God’s “wise contrivance,” as is the fitness of the inorganic world for organic life. Reid asserts too, against Hutcheson, that regularity, or uniformity amidst variety—order and lawfulness in the inorganic and organic worlds—is appreciated as a sign of design.

In the course of his empirical survey of beauties, Reid thus manages to incorporate far more of those objects commonly taken to be beautiful (or properties taken to be responsible for beauty) within his expressive view than might initially have seemed possible, through his expansive conception of “mind” and his proposed

¹³ For other critical remarks concerning Kivy’s claim, see Gallie (1998, 174–80).

interpretations of apparently non-expressive properties as, in fact, expressive. There are limits, however, to the success of this defense of expressivism. As one might expect, the (re)interpretation of apparently non-expressive properties is plausible to different degrees in different cases; Reid's attempts to interpret a fine voice (in music) and sunsets as beautiful because expressive are particularly unpersuasive, for example. (See 604, 606; in both cases, one is tempted to reply to Reid that these objects are expressive or "signs" of perfection in virtue of their beauty, not vice versa.) Even in the cases of more plausible proposals, the expressivist interpretation may seem somewhat arbitrary: it *might* identify the source of the object's beauty, but it could also be capturing merely one beauty-relevant aspect of the object, or simply be providing an explanation where none is necessary (as, e.g., Hutcheson might argue about uniformity amidst variety: it is not pleasing because it is a sign of design, but it is simply, as such, pleasing). For these reasons, I suggest, Reid's empirical defense of his expressivism must be seen as supplemented, indeed as both constrained and motivated, by more strictly theoretical grounds, to which I now turn.

4.2 *Theoretical*

Reid's aesthetic expressivism is not just meant to account for our experiences of beauty, but is also supported on theoretical grounds—namely, as entailed by his aesthetic realism. Reid's realism may in fact be part of his motivation for engaging in his (relatively detailed) inductive survey of beautiful objects itself: realism would seem to dictate close attention to the character of objects actually found beautiful. But it is also an independent ground for his expressivism, and as such constrains his inductive procedure (as will be discussed in a moment). As noted above, on Reid's view, the source of an object's beauty is its real excellence, its value independent of pleasure taken in perceiving it. Now we may add that, on Reid's view, matter as such, seen merely as "an inert, extended, divisible, and moveable substance" (EIP VIII iii, 590; cf. VIII iv, 603)—thus form, shape, movement, and we might add color here too, it would seem—does not seem to have any inherent excellence. By contrast, the moral and intellectual virtues, life, and health are, Reid contends, intrinsically, inherently good (EIP VIII iii, 585). (And matter and mind exhaust the kinds of things that there are.)

In typically realist fashion, Reid seems to appeal simply to intuition in support of his contention concerning the inherent value of mental virtues and the lack thereof of the merely material. He does, however, attempt to "pump" such intuition through a thought experiment (which also is meant to make clear that emotions can be "just" or not):

Let us suppose, if possible, a being so constituted, as to have a high respect for ignorance, weakness and folly: to venerate cowardice, malice, and envy, and to hold the contrary qualities in contempt. . . . Could we believe such a constitution to be anything else than madness and delirium? (EIP VIII iii, 584)

Reid asks us to judge this imagined entity, and proposes that we will simply not be willing to allow that its responses track some other sort of value than ours do, but

rather will insist that these responses are a sign of insanity, of failure to recognize that which is, simply, inherently good (here: wisdom, courage, benevolence). Though Reid does not propose the correlative thought experiment concerning matter merely as such (not seen as expressive), he would presumably suggest that we would *not* find a being who preferred (say) dull to bright colors, or slight asymmetry to pure symmetry—or who was just indifferent concerning brightness or dullness, symmetry or asymmetry—similarly insane. For (Reid would contend) we recognize that these properties, in themselves, have no comparable intrinsic excellence, and may be unproblematically subject to personal preferences.

What I am calling Reid's theoretical argument for his expressivism runs, then, as follows. If aesthetic judgments mean to identify real excellences, and if mental qualities are the only qualities that *have* or ground such real excellence, then aesthetic judgments—if they are correct, justified—must judge objects positively on the grounds of such qualities. And, again, such mental qualities are perceptible—and thus appreciable by taste—only through their effects or “signatures” in material objects. Correspondingly, insofar as they *are* (seen as) effects or manifestations of such mental excellences, otherwise meaningless or valueless material qualities—including apparently “purely formal” properties such as uniformity amidst variety—attain meaning and value. Therefore: objects are beautiful in virtue of their expression of mental excellences.

To be clear: in support of this position, Reid is in effect asking his reader to engage in a somewhat complex act of philosophical analysis and imagination. The reader must, that is, on the one hand imagine “merely” or purely material qualities—arrangement, form, color, etc.—as entirely shorn of any expressive meaning, as entirely devoid of relation to mind; and she is to conclude, on the ground of such a thought experiment, that such qualities are, in and by themselves, indifferent, not of intrinsic value. She is then, however, also asked to recognize that we do (she does) actually appreciate those very qualities (or ones like them), but that when they are thus appreciated, such qualities are not taken purely as material, but rather are taken as a sign of mental qualities. Thus, for example, uniformity amidst variety by itself is merely an arrangement of color or shape, with no inherent value, but *as* a manifestation of intelligence (as a sign of design), it has meaning, is connected to that which is inherently valuable. (This Reidian anti-formalist contention may also be given some intuitive plausibility by reflecting on the transformation of aesthetic sensibilities, with respect precisely to uniformity amidst variety, wrought by the progress of the industrial revolution: symmetry and other sorts of order have, arguably, been transformed—for us, in aesthetic appreciation—from signs of skill and design on the part of the human maker that produce delight and admiration, to signs of machine-made uniformity that produce indifference, boredom, or even alienation.)

Reid's theoretical consideration thus motivates his interpretation of merely formal qualities as expressive in his survey of beauties: the expressive connection to true value explains and justifies our attribution of value to such properties (or objects that have them) in aesthetic judgments. It also constrains his treatment of beauties in his

inductive survey, or (more strongly) dictates whether objects taken to be beautiful (on an empirical survey) will “count” as beauties at all. As I have been discussing, Reid holds that there is much commonly recognized beauty in the world that supports his expressivist claim, and he proposes, as we have just seen, that some apparently non-expressive beauties in fact are expressive. But he also recognizes that some apparent pleasures in beauty—in colors, for example—do not seem amenable to an expressivist analysis. In line with what I am calling his theoretical consideration, however, Reid concludes *not* that his expressivism ought to be corrected by such counterexamples, but rather that (for example) “*nothing* . . . can be called beauty in the color of the [human] species, but what expresses perfect health and liveliness and in the fair sex softness and delicacy” (EIP VIII iv, 610; emphasis added). Thus, again, some colors may in fact be appreciated as beautiful inasmuch as they are expressive (of health or liveliness etc.)—and so fit Reid’s account—even if we do not at present know that or how they are expressive, or which excellences they express. (That is, we appreciate them instinctively, not rationally.) But other color preferences (as well as Reid’s own views about the “fair sex,” perhaps) are to be traced instead to “fashion, habit, associations, and perhaps some peculiarity of constitution” (610). They are not, that is, truly pleasures in *beauty*, because they are not responses to a real excellence. So too Reid judges concerning disagreements in taste across different cultures or historical periods: many of these disagreements do not concern beauty proper, but rather concern that which is not truly of value, that which is admired by particular people because of their parochial habits or concerns (or, of course, some parties to the dispute may be simply wrong, as well).

(At best, such preferences for qualities that cannot be traced back to [expression of] intrinsic mental excellence may count as instinctive judgments of beauty in a secondary or merely “courtesy” sense [though it is not explicitly identified as such by Reid]. That is, the central type of instinctive judgments of beauty on Reid’s view must be those that claim that the object has real value, but without identifying what that real excellence is. Reid also, however, suggests that there are instinctive judgments of beauty in which the object has *no* real excellence; rather, it is simply [objectively, really] good *that* the appreciator takes pleasure in such an object. Thus, for example, Reid suggests that children’s cognitive development is promoted by their love of “gaudy” ornaments and other such things—which attract children’s attention, and prompt them to exert their cognitive powers (EIP VIII iv, 613). It is doubtful, however, whether Reid is entitled to term such objects/judgments cases of beauty or judgments of taste, proper. For they fit Hutcheson’s account of beauty rather than Reid’s: the objects in such cases have no real excellence, but are good insofar as they are pleasing, which pleasure is, in turn, good for us, just as Hutcheson argues that the pleasure in uniformity amidst variety is good because it promotes our search after knowledge. A discussion of the role of such judgments in Reid’s account must await another occasion, however.)

To return to and sum up the main thread of argument here: Reid’s commitment to realism grounds his aesthetic expressivism—and constrains the significance of the

empirical evidence we think we have concerning what is beautiful, for some of it will prove—subject to theoretically governed scrutiny—not to count as beautiful at all. Here we may see the sophisticated structure of Reid's "common sense" methodology: common sense is, all things being equal, to be endorsed concerning first principles, but this endorsement may well be consistent with, or even, as in this case, corrective of, many particular commonly made—and in this sense "common sense"—judgments.

5 The Promise of Happiness

Reid thus does provide reasons for his expressivist views. But his two lines of argument also re-raise the questions raised above in the introduction. Reid's expansive conception of what may be expressed (to include life, health, and activity) does help to make aesthetic expressivism a more plausible doctrine concerning natural beauty. Reid's frequent reference to "God's wise contrivance" to account for natural beauty may nonetheless give pause: if God does not exist, and so God's mental qualities are not expressed in the forms of nature, does this entail that all natural beauties are not, in fact, real beauties? (This I shall refer to, in brief, as the "God-problem.") Second, and more broadly: is Reid's account accurate to beauty as it presents itself in our experience? Do we, really, find objects beautiful *as* in some sense pointing beyond themselves, as signs or manifestations of something else? Or: despite Reid's eloquent treatment particularly of human beauty, is this not a theory that (mostly) sacrifices the experience of beauty, beauty as it in fact manifests itself, to (in a way) external theoretical considerations? To these questions posed above, a third question concerning Reid's doctrine of expression, which may have arisen along the way, could also be added: why must the "real excellence" of the beautiful object ultimately be a different excellence (not beauty)? Why must aesthetic value be reduced to another form of value?

The answer to these questions, I suggest—in a somewhat speculative and exploratory vein—lies in Reid's understanding of beauty (and/or taste) as fundamentally "progressive," to use his terms from the conclusion to the "Essay on Taste" (EIP VIII iv, 613–14). Here Reid means in part and most immediately that taste makes claim to rightness, and so may be, indeed often is, corrected and improved over the course of one's life. But progressiveness actually pervades Reid's account of beauty, of individual experiences of beauty, as well. The idea—roughly put—is this: beauty is that which points beyond itself; its value is (to be) intrinsically suggestive of (further) value. Correspondingly, the experience of beauty is one that prompts us to progress, to find out more about the object, to get to its "heart," to seek its ultimate, most fundamental value.

Such progressiveness is, for example, suggested in Reid's discussions of instinctive and rational judgments of beauty and their relation. As noted above, Reid suggests that instinctive appreciation may be transformed into rational appreciation: we may come to see why it is, how it is precisely, that the object *is* excellent, as we instinctively judge

it to be.¹⁴ But Reid also suggests that instinctive appreciation “draws our attention” (EAP II iii, 62), prompts us to seek to understand the object better:

The beauties of the field, of the forest, and of the flower-garden, strike a child long before he can reason. He is delighted with what he sees, but he knows not why. This is instinct, but it is not confined to childhood; it continues through all the stages of life. It *leads* the Florist, the Botanist, the Philosopher, to examine and compare the objects which Nature, *by this powerful instinct*, recommends to his attention. (EIP VIII iv, 607; emphasis added)

Such further investigation is, Reid claims as well, rewarding, providing greater, more extensive beauties for appreciation—the “expert Anatomist,” for example, “sees numberless beautiful contrivances in the structure of the human body, which are unknown to the ignorant” (EIP VIII iv, 595).

Our appreciation of beauty is, thus, both perceptual (i.e., an “intellectual power”) and also a prompt to action, to exerting ourselves. Hence, perhaps, Reid’s placement of the “Essay on Taste” at the end of his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*—as a transition to his subsequent *Essays on the Active Powers*, as reflecting the transitional, prompting, activity-oriented nature of (our appreciation of) beauty. In the context of our exercise of our active powers proper, moreover, the appreciation of beauty can also function as a prompt or promise, in this case towards moral activity.

On Reid’s view, as on Kant’s, morality proper consists in doing the right thing because it is right and thus requires rational recognition of the morally good, and comprises explicitly reason-guided behavior. However, Reid also—unlike Kant—holds that affective, even instinctive responses such as natural benevolence are (as it were) proto-moral, worthy of praise and encouragement, as they are signs that we are naturally disposed towards virtue, and natural compensations for failures of full virtue: human beings are fallible and not fully intelligent beings; benevolent feelings and instincts “supply defects” (i.e., make up for defects) of reasoning in leading us to act in morally good ways, even when reason fails us or is ineffective alone (EAP III ii, 82).

Our pleasure in beauty, in turn, has a moralizing effect, in encouraging us to develop such proto-moral sentiments and dispositions:

The emotion produced by beautiful objects is gay and pleasant. It sweetens and humanizes the temper, is friendly to every benevolent affection, and tends to allay sullen and angry passions. It enlivens the mind, and disposes it to other agreeable emotions, such as those of love, hope, and joy. (EIP VIII iv, 592)

Our liking for beauty in persons, indeed, itself *is* benevolence towards those persons (593)—literally wishing those people well—which is a central component and spring of virtue on Reid’s view (as on that of many of his contemporaries).

¹⁴ See Rebecca Copenhaver’s essay in Chapter 6 of this volume for a more extensive treatment of the progression from instinctive to rational perceptions/judgments of taste.

It is not simply these softening effects on our feelings that render beauty an impetus to morality, however, but also (as it were) the “content” of beauty—namely, that beauty in human beings *is* the manifestation (expression) of goodness, including “benevolent affection.” Thus, in a lovely passage, Reid writes:

It is owing . . . to the great force of pleasingness which attends all the kinder passions, that lovers not only seem, but really are, more beautiful to each other than they are to the rest of the world; because, when they are together, the most pleasing passions are more frequently exerted in each of their faces than they are in either before the rest of the world. (EIP VIII iv, 610–11)

More broadly—and not just in the case of lovers—our natural attraction to the outward expression of benevolent affections (our taste for beauty, instinctive as well as rational) encourages us to seek out the company of people of good moral character, and even to aspire to being thus moral ourselves. For our appreciation for these moral qualities attracts us, Reid claims, to proper and right behavior (EAP III vii, 185); the pleasure we take in the manifestations of virtue in others promises us an even greater pleasure in our own virtue (EAP III vii, 183).

Thus, beauty instinctively appreciated—taken to have an unknown excellence—may be understood to be a somewhat mysterious, beckoning promise, one that leads the appreciator to pursuit of the object. Reid's expressivism itself amounts, I suggest moreover, to an incorporation of this promissory character of beauty into the very *metaphysics* of beauty—and thus here for the rational, as well as the instinctive, sense of beauty. For if beauty is expression—a beauty of the expressing material object, as “signature” of the expressed—then beauty, by its very nature, points beyond itself. That which is expressed, the mental excellence, is always both in some sense present, manifested, in the object, and beyond it as well, for it is an ability to produce further such signatures, not exhausted only in this very one.¹⁵ The reasons for beauty that we recognize in rational taste (on Reid's view) also, likewise, point beyond the perception of this very object: its order here points us towards a prior, ordering principle or power, its signs of health, life, activity, or virtue to those higher, more broadly active principles. Expressivism means, in other words, that even in rational appreciation of beauty there is always something elusive, something beyond this experience of this object, that grounds its value.

This promissory, elusive character to beauty might too—to return to another question left unanswered above—be a reason why Reid identifies original beauty as belonging to mental excellences, as inherent but “invisible” excellence, as the ultimate, real beauty, even though it is ever inaccessible. For the distinction between original and derived beauty opens a gap between the present object and that to which it points us, that which it is expressing—or, perhaps better, captures the way in which the expression is beautiful precisely as an expression of something (valuable, promised)

¹⁵ See Laurent Jaffro's essay in Chapter 8 of this volume on Reid's metaphysics of power, specifically of the power of the soul as manifested in its effects.

beyond it. Moreover, if beauty simply *is* such a pointing-beyond, an elusive promise, to some ultimate excellence, this excellence will have to be another *kind* of excellence. By its own lights, as it were, beauty will not be the highest value, for its value is to point beyond itself to ultimate, to-be-sought value.

This suggestion may seem to accentuate the God-problem, however. For if beauty is the promise of an original, but at least partly inaccessible beauty, a value beyond itself, then absent God, it seems that natural beauties will, by and large, be false promises, expressions in fact of nothing. (It should be noted that if God does exist, then even atheists' judgments of natural beauty would, on Reid's view, be justified—albeit as “instinctive” judgments; on a Reidian account, it matters only that there really is the requisite sort of excellence in the object, not that the judge recognizes the excellence explicitly or accurately. This problem arises for Reid, then, only if God does not in fact exist.)

Though Reid, of course, does not consider the atheistic possibility, and himself asserts (against Hutcheson, for example) that natural order and purposiveness always are in fact effects of design (and thus expressive of God's agency), it would seem that, were he to consider the atheistic possibility, the dismissal of natural beauty would not be his conclusion. For he writes about human beauty:

It cannot indeed be denied, that the expression of a fine countenance may be unnaturally disjoined from the amiable qualities which it naturally expresses: But we presume the contrary, till we have clear evidence; and even then, we pay homage to the expression, as we do to the throne when it happens to be unworthily filled. (EIP VIII iv, 613)

Reid also claims, similarly, that we appreciate the signs of moral excellence in fictional characters, precisely because ordinarily, in reality, they *are* signs of moral excellence—even if, in this case, they are not signs of any actually existing excellence (EAP III vii, 183).

It seems that this approach might apply to the case of natural beauty (without God) as well. Human beings are inclined to read formal order and fitness for purpose *as* expressions of well-meaning intelligence—and, in many cases, they are expressions thereof (they might be “natural signs” in Reid's terms). Such signs in nature may thus receive warranted “homage” even if they are not in fact, in this case, veridical signs. They might, in other words, constitute cases of “derivative” beauty proper: they are beautiful *solely* as “expressing,” without actually standing for, being produced by, a relevant “expressed” (in the terms introduced above); if rightly appreciated, they are appreciated as dependent on, derivative from, the actual cases in which such expressions *do* express the relevant “expressed” (original beauty). In identifying derivative beauty as a type of beauty, Reid does suggest, however, that such appreciation is legitimate, such value is true value (even if a somewhat attenuated form thereof).

Appreciation of such signs could still have, moreover, the progressive, indicative character of beauty on Reid's account. For our understanding of the natural order can always be broadened and deepened, the experience of natural beauty could always point beyond itself, promise further discoveries, of further complexity and order—

prompt us, in Reid's words, to discover more of "the structure of [works of Nature], of their mutual relations, and of the laws by which they are governed," and thus find "more delightful marks of art, wisdom and goodness" (EIP VIII iv, 595)—even if there may be no person who made those marks.

Thus, to conclude: I suggest that Reid's expressivism is meant to capture a significant aspect of the phenomenology of the beautiful: namely, its prompting, beckoning, elusive character, its role as an enticement or promise, its function—celebrated by Plato (and then Nehamas), as well as Reid—as an inducement to love. Indeed, I am almost tempted to fold Reid's commitment to realism itself into the attempt to capture this phenomenology: the experience of beauty is of a value outside of us, beyond that experience—and thus it cannot be reduced to the pleasures I take now in experiencing this object.

On the other hand, this view also may seem to undermine a robust aesthetic realism, in that it reduces the value of beauty, renders it merely instrumental, a mere step along the way to the true values. Strictly speaking, such a result would still amount to realism, so long as the instrumental value of beauty is independent of our affective response (in terms of the characterization of realism suggested above). And in one sense, such an interpretation of Reid's view seems accurate: for Reid, beauty is the expression of (other) real excellences and thus is no self-standing or ultimate value. Yet precisely as a promissory, transitional phenomenon, as one that prompts, indeed in a way metaphysically incarnates progressiveness, beauty may also, on Reid's view, be understood in fact as a central, perhaps paradigmatic value and experience in human life. For, Reid writes:

We can perhaps conceive of a being so made, that his happiness consists in a continuance of the same unvaried sensations or feelings, without any active exertion on his part. Whether this be possible or not, it is evident that man is not such a being; his good consists in the vigorous exertion of his active and intellectual powers . . . ; he is made for action and progress, and cannot be happy without it. (EIP VIII ii, 580)

Beauty as progressive, as a pointing-beyond, and thus as a prompt to "vigorous exertion," is, then, indeed a promise of happiness—and, as Reid suggests here, human happiness in part consists, somewhat paradoxically, in the receipt and the pursuit of such promises.¹⁶

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¹⁶ I am grateful to the editors and to Les Harris for comments, and to audiences at the British Society for Aesthetics Annual Conference and the Enlightenment Aesthetics and Beyond conference (both in Edinburgh, Scotland, 2011) for interesting discussions, which have helped me to improve this essay. All mistakes are, of course, my own.

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8

Reid on Aesthetic Response and the Perception of Beauty

Laurent Jaffro

1 Introduction

In our reading of Thomas Reid, we often tend to be more sensitive to the way in which he breaks with the mainstream of early modern philosophy than to his indebtedness to his predecessors. This focus on discontinuities, in the construal of Reid's relation to the history of philosophy, is due partly to his taste for dramatization, but also to our own biases. In fact, Reid is an eclectic philosopher who knows how to draw from the Modern and Ancient traditions, and this is even more the case with Reid's account of our sense of beauty and grandeur. Here his philosophical innovations cannot be dissociated from the background of his numerous English and French predecessors. As he puts it in a manuscript of his lectures on fine arts: "These Authors may seem to have exhausted the Subject & I rather chuse to refer to them than to recapitulate what they have said" (AUL MS 2131/4/I/28, in LRF, 286).

Reid tries to combine existing views, notably those of Francis Hutcheson and the third Earl of Shaftesbury, to which I will limit myself in this essay. I do not mean that Reid's contribution to the debate on the status of aesthetic qualities and on the epistemology of aesthetic taste is not original, but that the originality lies in the synthesis rather than in the elements. Reid was fully aware of the eclectic nature of his approach to the subject of taste. For him, it is necessary to reconcile apparently divergent theories about the perception of beauty, since it is impossible to account for the richness of aesthetic perception with only a handful of principles. I quote from *Intellectual Powers*, Essay 8, "Of Taste":

As there is such diversity in the kinds of beauty as well as in the degrees, we need not think it strange that Philosophers have gone into different systems in analysing it, and enumerating its simple ingredients. They have made many just observations on the subject; but, from love of simplicity, have reduced it to fewer principles than the nature of the thing will permit, having had in their eye some particular kinds of beauty, while they overlooked others.

(EIP VIII i, 575)

So we do not need a single-minded and exclusive account. On the contrary, we need to keep what is phenomenologically relevant in the diversity of aesthetic theories. Hutcheson's causal theory about the sense of beauty is locally true. It is a good description of what Reid calls animal taste or the instinctive judgement of beauty. As to Shaftesbury's Platonic views about the scale of beauties, they are also locally true. They correctly account for the way in which the aesthetic judgement is concerned with various forms of objective "excellence". Of course, we need something to cement those heterogeneous elements and it is here that Reid provides a new synthesis, which is grounded in his philosophy of perception and his views on natural signs.

I will deal mainly with the essay on taste in the *Intellectual Powers* and will make three points: the first about the nature of aesthetic perception, 'taste'; the second about its content, what is tasted, the objective side of beauty which Reid terms 'excellence'; and the third about the location of beauty in the forms of nature or works of art, "where" excellence is expressed. Since for Reid the knowledge of other minds (human or divine) is a paradigm for our perception of beauty, aesthetic perception should be viewed as a social operation of the mind. In some cases, it involves a communication from God to human beings. My main claim is that the psychological approach to aesthetic perception must be complemented by a metaphysical account of what makes us feel the beautiful or the grand.

2 The Nature of Taste: A Two-Component Account of Aesthetic Perception

We must first address a question of vocabulary. In the perception of beauty, there are two ingredients, a feeling and a judgement. We might be tempted to call 'sense of beauty' or 'taste' the whole. We would then say that taste has two ingredients. Indeed, Reid occasionally uses the term 'taste' to designate the whole process. For instance, he writes in chapter 1: "If we speak accurately and strictly, we shall find, that, in every operation of taste, there is judgement implied" (EIP VIII i, 577). In this passage, it is clear that Reid is referring to his general account of perception and that he uses 'taste' and 'sense of beauty' as synonymous for the power to perceive, not for the power to sense. But it also happens that his use of the terms 'taste' or 'sense of beauty' is restricted to feeling and pleasure: "Our judgement of beauty is not indeed a dry and unaffected judgement, like that of a mathematical or metaphysical truth. By the constitution of our nature, it is accompanied with an agreeable feeling or emotion, for which we have no other name but the sense of beauty" (578). In that case the sense of beauty and the judgement of beauty are the two ingredients of the 'perception of beauty' (577). To perceive that x is beautiful consists in jointly feeling pleasure upon the consideration of x and judging that x is beautiful.

The two ingredients, the sense of beauty and the judgement of beauty, are distinct, although they are constantly conjoined in the perception of beauty, the pleasure we

sense being a sign pointing to the existence of the quality which the judgement attributes to the object. The fact is that I cannot judge that *x* is beautiful without feeling pleasure. The fact is that I cannot feel pleasure without judging that *x* is beautiful. As Reid puts it: “In objects that please the taste, we *always* judge that there is some real excellence . . .” (emphasis added). One might object that there are cases in which I feel pleasure when considering a beautiful object without knowing what is beautiful in it. In fact, for Reid, judging that *x* is beautiful implies “an opinion of *some* quality in the object which occasions that feeling” (578), but it does not necessarily imply that we know *what* is beautiful in the object or which kind of beauty it has. This analysis of the perception of beauty leaves room for a non-epistemic (in Kivy’s sense: characterized by our ignorance of what causes our pleasure) experience of beauty, even though Reid’s aim is to show that an account, such as that of Hutcheson, that reduces the perception of beauty to a non-epistemic experience, is deeply wrong.

To appreciate why, we should note that Reid’s outline of the perception of beauty covers two different types of perceptual situations. In the first case, the pleasure or emotion we feel and our judgement that the object has some quality that is responsible for that pleasure are conjoined in such a manner that the pleasure points to the quality, but our judgement happens to be limited to “a general notion of some excellence which we cannot describe” (578).

In the second perceptual situation, pleasure and judgement are conjoined in a more complex way, since the judgement highlights the quality to which the pleasure points. We are pleased because we distinctly perceive not only that there is some beauty in the object, but also what kind of beauty it is, so that we are able to describe it. Here the pleasant feeling is dependent on the judgement in the sense that in this case the judgement is not only an occasion, but a reason for the feeling. As Reid puts it in Essay 6, chapter 6: “our love and admiration is guided by that judgement” (493). In Reid’s own terms, the pleasure is “regulated” by the judgement.

In both cases, pleasure is conjoined with judgement as an effect is linked to its cause, or a sign to what is signified. But in the second case, the judgement does not only supply the cause, but also the accessible justification for our pleasure, so that we can tell why we are pleased (574). This makes a big difference: in the case of “rational natural taste” (EIP VI vi, 493) or of a “rational judgement of beauty” (EIP VIII iv, 598), critique is possible, and also necessary, whilst in the case of sheer “animal natural taste” critique is impossible, because there is no other accessible justification for our preferences than the fact that something pleases us. In the first case, we would not feel pleasure if we had not judged that there is some beauty in an object or event, but the judgement remains implicit, indeterminate, and confused, and it cannot “regulate” our pleasure. In animal taste, what pleases us is also what justifies our pleasure, but we grasp it only as that which pleases us.

In both cases, but in a very different manner, it is possible to identify the qualities that cause the pleasure and that the judgement ascribes to the object. When perception is mainly instinctive, it is not the perceiver, but the philosopher, who proceeds to

the identification of qualities. For instance, Hutcheson was correct in identifying one quality responsible for the pleasure of children, that of uniformity amidst variety, which acts as an “occult quality”—i.e., without being distinctly perceived by the perceiver (EIP VIII i, 574, VIII iv, 596). In mainly rational perception, the perceiver proceeds in the first person to the identification of the cause of his or her emotion, which then also serves as a justifying reason for that pleasure.

Reid insists that those two cases should be viewed not as two disjunct classes, but rather as two limits between which every aesthetic perceptual situation lies. The conceptual distinction between the two does not prevent aesthetic perception, in the real world, from being “mixed”: “Although the instinctive and the rational sense of beauty may be perfectly distinguished in speculation, yet, in passing judgement upon particular objects, they are often so mixed and confounded, that it is difficult to assign to each its own province” (EIP VIII iv, 598). In Essay 6 (494), he also says that “natural taste,” as opposed to acquired taste, is “partly animal” and “partly rational.”¹

One important question is about the nature of the connection between pleasure and the quality that causes it. Pleasure is produced in the mind by the belief that the object, which gives pleasure, has “excellence.” When Reid writes that the judgement of excellence is “fitted by Nature” to produce an agreeable feeling, ‘Nature,’ here, means providence. The relation between pleasure and judgement involves not two, but three terms: pleasure, the judgement of excellence, and “the constitution of man by the appointment of Nature” (EIP VIII ii, 580). God is behind the seeming two-term relation between pleasure and the judgement of excellence. The causality from the object to the subject appears to be contingent insofar as it depends on the divine providence.

However, Reid’s views on this subject may be construed in different ways, since he refuses to take a definitive stand on the matter: “Whether the pleasure we feel in contemplating beautiful objects may have any necessary connection with the belief of their excellence, or whether that pleasure be conjoined with this belief, by the good pleasure only of our Maker, I will not determine” (EIP VIII iv, 592). He is indeed attracted by Richard Price’s anti-Hutchesonian strong realism. Price, in the second chapter of his *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (1774), goes so far as to assume that there is, at least in some cases, a necessary connection between aesthetic pleasure in the subject and a “natural aptitude to please” in the object. Price rejects Hutcheson’s concept of an internal “sense”—i.e., a faculty adapted by God to the

¹ The important claim that there is no break in continuity between the two would be better argued, I think, if Reid had appealed to something like Leibniz’s ‘minute perceptions’: the clear, but implicit and confused, perceptions that are responsible for our taste. The point is made in the Preface to *New Essays*. In an appendix to his *Theodicy*, Leibniz also says that minute perceptions make us relish (‘goûter’) one thing more than the other. There is no discontinuity between the epistemic and the non-epistemic. We need a reason for Reid’s statement that rational aesthetic judgement and instinctive judgement are distinguished only in speculation: a Leibnizian psychology would provide all that is necessary to fill the gap and to account for the continuity in the degrees of aesthetic perception. However, this is a dead end. For Reid’s understanding of perception as necessarily conscious precludes him from taking the Leibniz–Baumgarten road to aesthetics.

qualities it is intended to detect. We might say that Reid's views on the topic are somewhere between Hutcheson and Price; close to Price in intent, but not so distant from Hutcheson in his recourse to the concepts of sense and of qualities.

Although he applies his own philosophy of perception to the perception of beauty, Reid's use of the vocabulary of qualities does not commit him to a causal account of the perception of beauty in the Hutchesonian manner. The "qualities that please a good taste," in some cases, "resemble the secondary qualities of body . . ." (EIP VIII i, 574). In other cases these pleasing qualities do not resemble the secondary qualities, and "may be compared to the primary qualities perceived by the external senses" (578). Here Reid draws on Hutcheson's distinction between qualities which are distinctly grasped and qualities which are confusedly sensed. Depending on whether the perception of beauty is more or less "animal" or more or less "rational," the causes of the perception of beauty may be more or less distinctly conceived, and consequently they would more or less resemble secondary qualities. I believe that the claim that an instinctive perception of beauty may be transformed into a rational perception of beauty rules out any interpretation that would give aesthetic properties the status of secondary qualities in Hutcheson's sense. The fact that it may happen that I eventually distinctly perceive the quality of which, at first, I had only a confused and relative notion through the pleasure it causes in me, shows that it cannot be a secondary quality in Hutcheson's sense (a "purely sensible idea," as he terms it in his *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, section 4) and it should be compared to a primary quality. Therefore it is perfectly understandable that Reid cautiously says that in some cases the qualities responsible for our aesthetic response *resemble* secondary qualities, which entails that they are not identical with secondary qualities. But why, then, does Reid not add that the qualities involved are *primary* qualities? He just says that they "may be *compared* to the primary qualities perceived by the external senses." One simple way of understanding that qualification would be to stress that here Reid is referring to external senses and he means that between the internal sense and the external senses there is no identity, but only an analogy. However, I prefer a stronger interpretation: it seems to me that Reid has good reasons not to consider aesthetic properties as primary qualities without any qualification.

It is a characteristic of the perception of aesthetic properties that it is always accompanied by some emotion, even though they are distinctly perceived. To return to a passage I have already cited: "Our judgement of beauty is not indeed a dry and unaffected judgement, like that of a mathematical or metaphysical truth. By the constitution of our nature, it is accompanied with an agreeable feeling or emotion, for which we have no other name but the sense of beauty" (578). Even the most rational judgement of beauty is characterized by its being "not dry and unaffected." So it is clear that for Reid aesthetic properties are objective and also dependent on the response—i.e., "the agreeable feeling or emotion." This is why it seems to me that "excellence" and "beauty" are not completely synonymous in Reid. "Excellence" is the quality in the object. "Beauty" is the excellence *as being affecting*. As I understand Reid, an object

may be excellent in itself without any observer; but it cannot be beautiful in the absence of any observer, since beauty is the manifestation of excellence to an observer.

What is special about aesthetic properties, in Reid's view, is that they are often only the object of a relative notion—i.e., an instinctive perception through pleasure, without a distinct conception; and that, when they are the object of a distinct conception (in the case of the expert who knows all the reasons why such and such a thing is beautiful), they are *still* simultaneously the object of a relative notion through pleasure: "To one who understands it perfectly, and perceives how every part is fitted with exact judgement to its end, the beauty is not mysterious; it is perfectly comprehended; and he knows wherein it consists, as well as how it affects him" (574).

So we could say that aesthetic properties are those primary qualities that can never be the object of a distinct conception without being also the object of the kind of access we have to secondary qualities; and that could be the reason why Reid refuses to call them primary qualities. Drawing on a distinction I make sharper than Reid does: excellence *per se* resembles a primary quality; excellence as affecting or pleasing (beauty) resembles a secondary quality. Pleasure (or a more specific aesthetic emotion) is not just what triggers our perception of aesthetic qualities; it is also a part of that perception that cannot be detached from it. This is why even when they are distinctly perceived, aesthetic properties still resemble secondary qualities, since it is typical of a secondary quality that we "cannot reflect upon it without thinking of the sensation which it occasions" (EIP II xvii, 204). We always think of excellence as pleasing, although, contrary to what happens in the case of a secondary quality proper, it is not true that we have "no other mark whereby to distinguish it" (204). Since the same aesthetic properties may be distinctly perceived by the expert and instinctively perceived by other people, the distinction between aesthetic properties resembling secondary qualities and aesthetic properties resembling primary qualities is only epistemological.

One consequence is that Reid cannot give up the idea that aesthetic emotion is *sui generis* and that without the reference to aesthetic emotion the primary quality would still be there, but it would be the object of a dry and unaffecting judgement, which is not aesthetic judgement. This suggests that our emotions help us in identifying which objects are beautiful. As Josefine Nauckhoff says: "The aesthetic response, then, is primary in Reid's account not in the sense that it makes objects beautiful, but in the sense that it indicates to us the nature of beautiful objects: they must be excellent, or related to excellence, in some way" (Nauckhoff 1994, 185). I agree with that claim, although I do not see why she says that the aesthetic response is "primary." According to the two-component view, as I understand it, the two ingredients stand on an equal footing.

One of my aims in this exposition is to qualify the interpretation offered by Peter Kivy. He stresses the "epistemic" scope of the perception of the beautiful, namely the knowledge of what causes aesthetic emotions in us: "The nature or structure of the object is what I must perceive, epistemically, prior to my pleasurable emotion

or sensation of the beautiful” (Kivy 2003, 353). Claiming that for Reid “aesthetic perception is through and through epistemic,” Kivy downplays the significance of the instinctive perception of beauty. He is certainly correct when he notices that in most cases instinctive perception of beauty “occurs along with rational perception,” but he insists so strongly on the necessity of contrasting Reid’s cognitivism with Hutcheson’s causal account that he seems to falsify Reid’s text. Kivy says that sheer instinctive perception “in the complete absence of the rational perception of beauty,” “occurs only, as Reid puts it ‘in brute animals, and in children before the use of reason’” (Reid quoted by Kivy). Kivy ends the quote with ellipses (353). Now the end of Reid’s sentence implies just the contrary of what Kivy wants to argue for: “nor does it end with infancy, but continues through life” (EIP VIII iv, 596; cf. 607)! We should rather say, against Kivy, that sheer *rational* perception, in the complete absence of the *instinctive* perception of beauty, *never occurs*. Indeed Reid’s text, in full, does not perfectly fit Kivy’s way of reading the history of philosophical aesthetics in the British Enlightenment, according to which “the direction of thought was obviously from the non-epistemic to the epistemic” (Kivy 2003, 340).

It is significant that in one of his lectures on taste, which is obviously the model of what will be the essay on taste in his 1785 work, Reid first wrote “in most matters” before substituting ‘many’ for ‘most’:

In [most] {many} matters of Taste a good Reason can be shewn why the mind is so constitute as to relish some things & to receive disgust from others. Tho in matter of Taste the Relish we have for some things preferably to others often preceeds reflection yet upon reflection we can shew a good Reason for the judgement we passed, and our Reason approves that judgement which was dictated by our Taste. (AUL MS 2131/4/I/28, in LRF, 286)

Let us return to the passage that Kivy quotes in a quite partial way. In Essay 8: “Our judgement of beauty is *in many cases* more enlightened” (EIP VIII i, 574). Here ‘in many cases’ means ‘in less cases than in all cases,’ since Reid has just declared in the preceding sentence that it is not “always the case” that the effect is felt without having more knowledge of the cause. If we refer to another passage, a few pages below (EIP VIII i, 578), we discover that “in most” now becomes a more modest “in some cases”: “In some cases, that superior excellence is distinctly perceived, and can be pointed out. In other cases we have only a general notion of some excellence which we cannot describe.” This is the kind of statement that contradicts Kivy’s thesis that Reid’s account is “*unqualifiedly* epistemic” (Kivy 2003, 338). Even if Reid does indeed make a claim about the strong epistemic scope of the perception of beauty, so that, contrary to Hutcheson, for him beauty is a matter of knowledge as well as of pleasure, it remains true of a very large portion of our aesthetic experience that the perception of beauty does not have the epistemic scope Kivy claims it has. In my view, Reid’s argument against Hutcheson is not that he was wrong in stressing the non-epistemic aspects of the perception of beauty, for there are indeed such aspects in that perception, but rather that he was wrong in construing the phenomenology

of the instinctive perception of beauty as the only and exclusive account of aesthetic perception. Hutcheson's account is phenomenologically true *in many cases*.

Now I turn to the status of “excellence” and especially to the distinction between the situations in which an object *is* excellent and the situations in which it pleases because it is a *sign* of excellence. I will briefly situate Reid's account of that distinction in the context of British early modern aesthetics, especially Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Thomas Reid borrows concepts and arguments from both authors, but he also significantly modifies their views.

3 The Nature of “Excellence” and the Distinction between Original Beauty and Derived Beauty

In his 1725 *Inquiry* Hutcheson distinguishes between comparative beauty and original beauty in the following way: an object has original or absolute beauty when it is considered as beautiful independently of its being compared to another object; an object has comparative or relative beauty when it is considered as beautiful because of its being an “imitation” or “picture” of an original (Hutcheson 2004, 27), whether the original be an object or a notion (42), and whether the original has absolute beauty or not. It is crucial to stress that—from the beginning of section IV of the *Inquiry*—“to obtain comparative Beauty alone, it is not necessary that there be any Beauty in the Original.” It is obvious that Hutcheson's relative beauty is very different from Reid's derived beauty, simply because Hutcheson's relative beauty is not *derived* from the beauty of the original. Relative beauty implies a structural relation to the original: the object is considered as beautiful insofar as it imitates, expresses, or signifies the original. The beauty is drawn from that structural relation, not from the original. According to Reid's account, the object is beautiful insofar as it expresses or signifies the beauty in the original. Contrary to Reid, Hutcheson still had in mind the Aristotelian concept of the beauty of *imitation*, which does not necessarily imply the beauty of the imitated (although in many cases the latter might improve the former). In section IV Hutcheson asserts: “By the *Moratae Fabulae*, or the *ēthē* of Aristotle, we are not to understand virtuous Manners in a moral Sense, but a just Representation of Manners or Characters as they are in Nature” (43).

Thomas Reid's claim is utterly different since he argues that the beauty of expression depends on the beauty of the expressed. Derived beauty is ‘beautified’ by original beauty.² Here the inspiration is taken from the Platonic revival and especially from Shaftesbury. As Theocles, one of Shaftesbury's characters in his 1709 “Philosophical Rhapsody,” says: “the Beautifying, not the Beautify'd, is the really Beautiful” (*The Moralists*, 226; in Shaftesbury 2001, II). There is a moral or mental perfection that causes beauty in the object that expresses it.

² “Every object of sense is beautified, by borrowing attire from the attributes of mind” (EIP VIII iv, 603).

Another way to put it is to say that Hutcheson's approach to the "division of beauty" is only epistemological and psychological, whereas Reid's approach is also metaphysical and specifically physico-theological. Reid understands the division of beauty as a "scale of perfection" in the objects—the highest on the scale, the Creator, being called in Essay 8 the "fountain of all perfections" (603), which echoes Shaftesbury's "fountain of all beauty" (*The Moralists*, 228). In the same passage, Reid writes: "I apprehend, therefore, that it is in the moral and intellectual perfections of mind, and in its active powers, that beauty originally dwells; and that from this as the fountain, all the beauty which we perceive in the world is derived" (EIP VIII iv, 602). Reid mentions that this "was the opinion of the ancient philosophers before named [namely, Socrates, Plato, Xenophon]; and it has been adopted by Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Akenside among the moderns."

Hutcheson also has recourse to a fountain, but a very different one, since it is not a fountain of perfection or of being, but of pleasure. From a note to the first section of his *Inquiry*:

This division of Beauty is taken from the different Foundations of Pleasure to our Sense of it, rather than from the Objects themselves: for most of the following Instances of relative Beauty have also absolute Beauty; and many of the Instances of absolute Beauty, have also relative Beauty in some respect or other. But we may distinctly consider these two Fountains of Pleasure, Uniformity in the Object it self, and Resemblance to some Original.

The passage makes clear that, in the case of beauty, being absolute or relative depends not on intrinsic features in the object (although there are qualities in the object that play a causal role), but on the way the mind looks at the object. We also learn that instances of one kind of beauty may also be instances of the other kind. Both Hutcheson and Reid assume that structures which may be described as a mixture of regularity and variety are responsible for producing the aesthetic response. For Hutcheson, structures of this kind are the hallmark of absolute or original beauty, even though they may be viewed also as an instance of relative beauty, insofar as regularity, in *many* cases, is a sign of design and contrivance. But we should pay attention to the fact that Reid goes further than Hutcheson, since in a passage in which he mentions Hutcheson, he writes (in my opinion *against* him): "Here it ought to be observed, that regularity, *in all cases*, expresses design and art. For nothing regular was *ever* the work of chance; and when regularity is joined with variety, it expresses design more strongly" (EIP VIII iv, 606). Since regularity, mixed with variety, *always* points to some design, it is for Reid a form, not of original beauty, but of derived beauty. The original beauty is intrinsic to the designing activity. This also is a major shift. According to Hutcheson, an object that offers "uniformity amidst variety" is beautiful in the sense of original beauty, even though it may also be considered as beautiful in the sense of relative beauty—i.e., beautiful insofar as it expresses some design. For Reid, an object that has such a structure is beautiful in the sense of derived beauty. Reid construes "uniformity amidst variety" as a sign, not as a quality, of original beauty.

My first conclusion here is that, whilst for Hutcheson the design argument (what Kant calls physico-theological considerations) merely hover in the background of his analysis of beauty, according to Reid they take centre stage: the immediate inference to design is embedded in the perception of beauty.

Of course, there is no inconsistency in saying of beauty that it is a quality that is inherent in the object *and* that it is discernible only from a “proper” point of view. “Every excellence has a real beauty and charm that makes it an agreeable object to those who have the faculty of discerning its beauty” (EIP VIII i, 575–6). The excellence is intrinsic to the object in the following sense: it does not depend on the perceiver, although it is a platitude that its being perceived depends on the perceiver. This is how Reid understands the objectivity of excellence in a passage in which he deals with grandeur: “It depends no doubt upon our constitution, whether we do, or do not perceive excellence where it really is: But the object has its excellence from its own constitution, not from ours” (EIP VIII iii, 584). Of course, whereas excellence is intrinsic in that sense, beauty *as a pleasing quality* is real rather than subjective, but *extrinsic*, since it appears as such only to the taste. When Reid speaks of excellence as “having its beauty,” this does not entail that excellence and beauty are utterly identical, but rather the converse. So we might construe excellence as an intrinsic property and beauty as an extrinsic property, real but dependent on the aesthetic response. Another possible reading is that there is but one real property, which is intrinsic—i.e., excellence—and that beauty is not a property strictly speaking, but excellence plus pleasure. It is not clear whether for Reid beauty is an extrinsic property supervening on excellence or the name we give to excellence for the pleasing response it triggers in us. This hesitation seems to be connected with the question whether there is a conceptual link between judgement and pleasure, founded in the nature of things, or a merely nomological link that depends on the will of God.

Now, is *derived* excellence intrinsic to the object, or does it depend in a strong sense on the imagination of the perceiver? I think that for Reid derived excellence is intrinsic, but I must confess that there are several passages that suggest that Reid goes in the other direction, or at least hesitates. Grandeur is not inherent in the work that suggests it: “Power, wisdom and goodness, are properly the attributes of mind only: they are ascribed to the work figuratively, but are really inherent in the author: And, by the same figure, the grandeur is ascribed to the work, but is properly inherent in the mind that made it” (587). There is a close analogy with the fact that according to Reid moral value is inherent in the agent, not in the action. “When a man exerts his active power well or ill, there is a moral goodness or turpitude which we figuratively impute to the action, but which is truly and properly imputable to the man only” (EAP V iv, 298). The analogy between the ascription of goodness and the ascription of grandeur or beauty may give us a clue as to how we should construe Reid’s view. Being properly inherent in the agent, not in the action, does not prevent moral goodness from being intrinsic to the action, in the sense defined above: the action is morally good independently of its being perceived as morally good (this is why it seems to me that there is a dissymmetry

between beauty and moral goodness, although Reid stresses the symmetry, if not the identity, between excellence and moral goodness). However, the picture becomes more confused when Reid writes that “when we consider the *Iliad* as the work of the poet, its sublimity was really in the mind of Homer”; “The grandeur of his thoughts is *reflected to our eye* by his work, and therefore it is *justly* called a grand work.” How can it be “justly called a grand work,” if the grandeur does not belong to the work, but only to the thought of the artist? Here Reid is not Platonic enough. He does not say that the effect is grand insofar as it participates in the grandeur of the cause. He seems rather to take a Humean line when appealing to the impact of the association of ideas, and especially of resemblance, on the imagination, in order to account for our ascribing grandeur to the objects of senses: “Besides the relations of effect and cause, of sign and thing signified, there are innumerable similitudes and analogies between things of very different nature, which leads us to connect them in our imagination, and to ascribe to the one what properly belongs to the other” (EIP VIII iii, 589). That line of argument leads Reid to claim that ascribing grandeur to the objects of the senses “may be an error” (590). The resemblance between the emotions produced in us by two different objects, between which there is no resemblance, might induce us to consider, wrongly, that they share the same attributes. The explanation here is typically associationist and is quite close to Hume’s views about the genesis of illusions from psychological causes. As Hume puts it in *A Treatise on Human Nature*: “It is plain, that, in the course of our thinking, and in the constant revolution of our ideas, our imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that resembles it, and that this quality alone is to the fancy a sufficient bond and association” (Hume 2007, I, I, 4).

In the face of such a difficulty, we may adopt two different attitudes. First, we may consider the analysis of grandeur as a paradigm for the whole aesthetic experience, including the perception of beauty (I leave aside the case of novelty, which is not a quality of the thing, but a relation to the knowledge of the person (EIP VIII ii, 579)). Second, we may hold that analysis to be partially true—i.e., true only in the case of grandeur. I would prefer the latter stance because there are several arguments, latent in Reid, that favour the view that what is true of grandeur might not be true of beauty. Here is one argument: in a sense, the way in which something is beautiful is specific, since it is the excellence of an object in its kind. On that topic Reid is Aristotelian: a beautiful horse is a horse that perfectly embodies equinity. Whereas this particular poem is a beautiful instance of a sonnet, and this particular animal is a beautiful instance of a horse, so that it would be utterly absurd to claim that the sonnet and the horse are two different instances of the same beauty, the picture is very different as far as grandeur is concerned. A mountain, the ocean, this peculiar sunset on the shore, the immense variety of living creatures, may be different instances of the same grandeur, that of God. Another significant difference between the case of grandeur and that of beauty is that grandeur cannot belong to the objects of the senses (EIP VIII iii, 590–1)—spatial greatness is, at best, a metaphor for grandeur—whilst (from the beginning of chapter 4) “we find beauty in colour, in sound, in form, in motion” (591).

Moreover, since beauty may truly belong to the objects of the senses, denying any real beauty in the objects in which we perceive beauty would amount to attributing to human beings ‘fallacious senses’ (EIP VIII iv, 595). Therefore we have several good reasons to contrast the analysis of beauty with that of grandeur.

Unfortunately, Thomas Reid did not approve of this argument. Here is one of his most disappointing passages:

If what was said in the last chapter of the distinction between the grandeur we ascribe to qualities of mind, and that which we ascribe to material objects, be well founded, this distinction of the beauty of objects [i.e., between original beauty and derived beauty] will easily be admitted as perfectly analogous to it. (EIP VIII iv, 599)

‘Analogous’ would have been enough; ‘perfectly’ goes too far. In any case, I cannot deny that Reid asserts that “the lustre of beauty in some objects is inherent and original, and in many others is borrowed and reflected.” However, should we conclude that Reid’s notion of the “communication of attributes”—i.e., the metaphorical transfer to the objects of the senses of qualities that belong to the realm of mind—prevents him from acknowledging that the objects of the senses may be truly beautiful? No. A few lines below, Reid is in better form when he writes: “I will now proceed to give a general view of those qualities of objects, to which we may justly and rationally ascribe beauty, *whether original or derived*” (EIP VIII iv, 600). This statement is crucial. The judgement that *x* is beautiful, even when the beauty of *x* is not original but derived, is liable to be true or false. Reid cannot say that beauty is “justly and rationally” ascribed to *x* without implying that the judgement that *x* is beautiful is true. Now, “if it be a true judgement, there is some real excellence in the object” (EIP VIII iv, 595).

Here my conclusion is that phrases such as “reflected to our sense” (600), “reflected to our eye,” “reflected to our understanding” (603), should not be construed in a subjectivist way. They do not mean that derived excellence exists only for the perceiver, but rather that it consists in the indirect expression or communication *to* the perceiver of original excellence. Therefore the beauty that is diffused through the sensible works of God is not “fancy,” but “real excellence in his works, which express the perfection of their Divine Author” (595).

I think that Reid’s hesitations are due to the fact that he mixes two different ways of dealing with the origin of beauty—namely, the psychological approach and the Platonic approach. But it is clear that he uses the term ‘derived’ in a Platonic sense, that of Maximus Tyrius, whom Shaftesbury quotes in *The Moralists* to show the ontological dependence of human-made beauty on divine-made beauty: “Therefore whatever Beauty appears in our second Order of Forms, or whatever is deriv’d or produc’d from thence, all this is eminently, principally, and originally in this last Order of Supreme and Sovereign Beauty” (*The Moralists*, 228). Shaftesbury accounts for the variety of love (from the enthusiasm for the “marble figures of men” to the enthusiasm for the divine) by an objective hierarchy in the lovable. The “derivation” of beauty should be understood as the causality of Platonic forms: the perfection that is present, to some

extent, at a lower level on the scale of the lovable is the effect of what is “eminently” present at the highest level.

However, I do not want to suggest that I deplore that Reid has given a psychological turn to Shaftesbury’s scale of beauties. On the contrary, what is especially interesting here is that Reid revives in a very original way the old Platonic theme.³ The originality lies in the way in which he combines ontological derivation with psychological suggestion (“natural signs”). ‘Taste,’ understood as ‘judgement,’ is the power to apprehend the invisible design through visible signs. As Reid says in Essay 4, chapter 4, “Of the Train of Thought in the Mind”: “Man has undoubtedly a power . . . whereby he distinguishes between a composition, and a heap of materials . . . between a sentence and a heap of words; between a picture, and a heap of colours” (341). Aesthetic perception, and especially the perception of derived beauty, rests upon our instinctual or constitutional ability to understand the signs of other minds.⁴ In the *Inquiry into the Human Mind* he had made clear that “A fine taste may be improved by reasoning and experience; but if the first principles of it were not planted in our minds by nature, it could never be acquired” (IHM V iii, 60). So I put stress on the continuity between acquired taste and natural or original taste.

According to Reid, the perception of a derived beauty draws on the same cognitive equipment as the knowledge of other minds or the knowledge (by virtue of the design argument) of the “Supreme Artist” (EIP VIII iv, 604), God. Thus taste is not a solitary, but a social operation of the mind: it involves not only a relation between the mind of the perceiver and qualities in the perceived, but also, in the case of original beauty, the presence of another mind, human or divine, or at least a relation of expression in the case of derived beauty. In the understanding of the “delightful marks of art, wisdom and goodness” in the works of nature (595), there is a social, but indirect, communication from spirit to spirit. Someone is speaking there.

4 The Location of Beauty: There Where the Power is Exerted

In order to defend the claim that excellence, even in the case of derived beauty, is real and intrinsic to the object that “reflects” it “to our sense” or “to our understanding,” we might be tempted to draw very roughly on the Cartesian distinction between formal reality and objective reality. We might say that the formal reality of a beautiful sensible object consists of its structure (we would stress either the regularity and variety; the aptness of means to ends; contrivance; or the perfection of the object in its kind). But that object would also have an objective reality, namely the moral, mental, or spiritual content that the structure expresses or signifies to us—i.e., all that may be encapsulated

³ Perhaps in a way comparable to that of his correspondent Archibald Alison (see Townsend 2003).

⁴ On this topic and for a comparison between the 1764 *Inquiry* and the 1785 essay on taste, see Demoor (2006).

by the term ‘design.’ In fact, the distinction between formal reality and objectivity reality is not by any means behind Reid’s analysis of derived beauty as a sign of original beauty, precisely because, as a sign, the object does not have a representational content—it is not an image (at least not in that sense, for, as we will see below, Reid happens to speak of derived beauty as an “image” in another sense). In line with the analogy between the external senses and the internal sense, the feeling is a sign of the quality without any “similitude” between them (EIP VIII i, 573). The “signature” is not a representation. However, it remains that there is an important difference, even a strong dissymmetry, between the way in which a sensation is a sign that points to the perceived object, and the way in which an object of art or an object in nature may be a sign that points to original beauty. We do not contemplate our own sensations; often we simply pay no attention to them and focus directly on the perceived object. We do, on the other hand, contemplate the objects of art or the beautiful objects in nature, and it is through that contemplation that we grasp their invisible signification. The intentional content attached to a visible object that expresses an invisible perfection may be considered as a reality in the visible object, exactly as the sweetness and kindness that a smile may express is where it is visible. This is how I understand the following passage, in which *image* is a synonym for *signature*, not for *representation* (EIP VIII iv, 603): “The beauties of mind, though invisible in themselves, are perceived in the objects of sense, on which their image is impressed.” It is precisely in the objects of sense that original beauty is perceived, as what is signified by them.

For this reason I am in disagreement with Peter Kivy when he deplors that for Reid a human face or a sunset cannot be properly said to be beautiful or (respectively) grand, since it is only the human person or the divine Creator, whom they express, that is beautiful or sublime. This way of rephrasing Reid’s account completely misconstrues it. Instead of explaining how a human face may be beautiful *as* the expression of a human mind, it dissociates the sign and what it signifies, and blocks the way to the understanding of Reid’s view. To give Reid his due, we should rather say that for him, the beauty of a human mind may be perceived *in* a human face, or, to put it the other way round, a human face may be in some sense the place or space where we perceive the original beauty of a human mind. The sunset may be the space where we perceive the grandeur of God, or more interestingly where God expresses his grandeur to the human eye.

According to Kivy, Reid’s essay on taste is a good instance of those aesthetic theories “that have refused to locate aesthetic qualities where we all seem to perceive them to be, almost always under the baleful influence of some metaphysical taboo or other” (Kivy 2003, 334). I diverge from Kivy’s reading on both points, namely regarding the location of aesthetic qualities and also on the influence of metaphysics on the debate. For Reid, aesthetic qualities really are where they appear to be, even in the case of derived beauty. And Reid has strong metaphysical reasons to maintain that aesthetic qualities are located exactly where they appear to be. For where else could the invisible become visible? Mind, whether my own mind, or other minds, is not visible or sensible to me.

We have a relative notion of our own mind through our immediate consciousness of its operations. As to other minds, it is “through the medium of material objects on which their signatures are impressed” that “we perceive life, activity, wisdom, and every moral and intellectual quality in other beings” (EIP VIII iv, 602–3). I understand Reid’s abundant use of ‘signature’ in this context, rather than of ‘sign,’ as a proof that in the perception of beauty psychological suggestion is the passive reverse of the exertion of an active power: “The invisible Creator, the Fountain of all perfection, hath stamped upon all his works signatures of his divine wisdom, power, and benignity, which are visible to all men” (603). The causality of the invisible mind, expressing itself, is responsible for producing the visible impact, “impressed signatures.”⁵ Aesthetic perception is the perception of effects of active powers, whether human or divine, which present themselves through their exertion and where they are exerted.

Therefore, against Kivy, I maintain that Reid accounts for the location of aesthetic qualities in the objects of sense. The metaphysical reasons for that lie in Reid’s pneumatology. A spiritual power does not have a place or occupy a space by “mathematical” contact, but in a virtual or dynamic manner. A power such as wisdom or goodness is inherent to its author, but it is present *wherever* it is exerted. So there is no contradiction in saying that the attributes of mind are “really inherent in their author” *and* that they are *in* the work to which they are ascribed. The work of art, or the beautiful form in nature, is the *ubi* of a spirit.⁶ This is the legacy, in the field of aesthetics, of the medieval distinction between “mathematical contact” and “virtual” or “causal” contact. This is the distinction that Locke refuses to understand in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

If it be said by any one, that it [a soul] cannot change place, because it hath none, for Spirits are not *in Loco*, but *Ubi*; I suppose that way of talking, will not now be of much weight to many, in an Age, that is not much disposed to admire, or suffer themselves to be deceived, by such unintelligible ways of speaking. (Locke 1690/1975, II, xxiii, 21)

Locke mocks the scholastic view set out, for instance, by Aquinas in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, 56, about the way in which an intellectual substance may be united to a body: through *tactus virtutis*, not through *tactus quantitatis*. The latter is a reciprocal relation between, say, two surfaces (or other “quantities”) that actually coincide part by part; whereas the former is a non-reciprocal relation by which a substance is present to something through the action it exerts upon it. The spiritual contact, then, is not actual, but “virtual”; another important difference is that it does not concern limits or parts of bodies, but is *ad totum*, to the whole. Reid draws on that kind of distinction in his 1766 lectures on pneumatology:

⁵ On the Renaissance background of ‘signatures,’ see Bianchi (1987).

⁶ My attention was first drawn to the topic of *ubietas* by Broadie (2005).

The Soul has no place otherwise it must have figure & Extension. Yet there is a certain Sphere to which its perceptions are limited so as to extend no farther . . . The Space within which its agency & its power of perceiving external things is limited may be called its place. (EIP, 619–20)

Thus we have two concepts of ‘place’: place proper (extensional), and what might be termed the sphere of influence of a power of action and perception.⁷

The way in which a moral or mental signification is present in the work of art or in nature is analogous to the way in which God is everywhere, or angels are somewhere, or my soul is here, without having spatial dimensions. I think that Broadie is right, but for more reasons than he mentions, when he says in his introduction to *Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts* that “Reid considered rhetoric to be grounded on pneumatology, the science of the mind . . .” (LRF, xliii). Pneumatology is relevant to the study of taste, not only because it is important to know more about the mind of the audience or of the perceiver, but also because of the way in which the mind of the artist, human or divine, expresses itself through the work of art or the works of nature.

In another lecture on pneumatology, Reid deals with the “indications of the character or state of the mind from the body.” He puts stress on three kinds of indications:

1. “From the size and proportions of the body in general . . .”
2. “From the features of the face. And especially the eye.”
3. “From the motions and gestures of the body.”

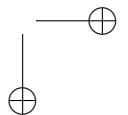
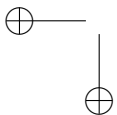
Reid immediately adds that “the particulars of these indications are to be learned 1 by much conversation and observation 2 from the best paintings and statues 3 from descriptions in prose and poetry” (AUL MS 2131/8/I/15, in LRF, 284). Reid could not better suggest that understanding a work of art is a social operation of the mind, analogous to a “conversation.” And also that the work of art is the place, in a non-spatial sense, where a mind speaks, as the eyes are a place where a spirit speaks. For Reid, this is not a platitude, but a metaphysical truth about the agency of spirits. I leave the last word to a poet, Joseph Spence, whom Reid praises for his “account of beauty in the human species” (EIP VIII iv, 609). This is a passage from Spence which Reid evidently had in mind when he was writing his essay on taste: “Philosophers may dispute as they please, about the seat of the soul, but wherever it resides, I am sure that it speaks in the eyes.”⁸

⁷ These considerations draw on the Aristotelian distinction between the category of place (*topos*) and that of ‘where’ (*pou*): the answer to the question ‘where,’ *ubi*, is that I am now in King’s College, but this does not mean that King’s College is the *topos* or surrounding place of my body; it means that I am doing something here.

⁸ Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the “Thomas Reid in His Times and Ours” conference in Aberdeen, March 2010, and at the invited symposium on “Reid’s Theory of Aesthetic Perception” of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, in San Diego, April 2011. The essay has benefited from questions of participants in both events, including Rebecca Copenhaver, Paul Guyer, and Udo Thiel, and especially from James Van Cleve’s comments. The research was supported by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR-09-SSOC-056).

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9

Pragmatism and Reid's "Third Way"

Patrick Rysiew

1 Introduction

However improbable the connection strikes some, there is a line from Thomas Reid, the eighteenth-century member of the "Scottish School of Common Sense," to the American (or "classical") Pragmatists, notable members of which included C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. But, as has been documented (Lehrer 1976; Redekop 2004), Reid and "the philosophy of common sense" did have a real and lasting influence on early American philosophy, politics, education, and culture. Further, those pragmatists—both classical and contemporary—who mention Reid tend to say only positive things about him and his views. For example, there is Peirce's well-known reference to Reid as "that subtle but well-balanced intellect" (Buchler 1955, 293); and more recently, there are approving citations from both Richard Rorty, a self-described pragmatist, and Hilary Putnam, who is as vocal and prolific a promoter of the virtues of pragmatism (as he conceives of it) as any current philosopher.

The question to be addressed here is this: in addition to the historical connection, and beyond these kind words, what substantive philosophical connection, if any, is there between Reid's views and those of the pragmatist tradition, both classical and contemporary? Answering this question, of course, is made more difficult by the fact that different things might be meant by 'pragmatism'—not to mention, by the fact that the various well-known proponents of pragmatism have held some subtle views, and on a whole broad range of topics, with plenty of significant internecine disputes besides.

It goes some way towards simplifying matters, however, that those who have addressed the question of the relation between Reid and pragmatism have tended to focus—as I will do here—on Reid's epistemological views and, in particular, on his defense of common sense and "the first principles (of common sense)" against skeptical attack. And, according to such recent writers—chiefly, Baumann (1999, 2004), Magnus (2004), Lundestad (2006, 2008)—there is a real, substantive philosophical connection: in responding to the skeptic, they say, Reid either did employ some distinctively pragmatist maneuver, or he should have, though he failed to properly develop the necessary "proto-pragmatic" elements within his epistemology.

Here, I want to examine such suggestions. And they *do* merit attention: like Reid's works, pragmatism has suffered from a relative historical neglect; but, just as there has been a resurgence of interest in Reid, recent times have seen a "revival of pragmatism" (Dickstein 1998) and the expressed hope for a "pragmatist enlightenment" (Putnam 2004). Because of this, and not just because of the aforementioned historical connection, the relation between Reid's views and pragmatism deserves careful consideration. Moreover, and looking ahead, I believe that there is a real, substantive connection between Reid's views and pragmatism. At the same time, however, I want to suggest that Reid's affinity with pragmatism is both shallower and deeper than others have suggested. Specifically, there is an emphasis on "the primacy of practice" in Reid's philosophy, and his epistemology in particular. This emphasis, like certain other features of his views, constitutes a significant pragmatist element in Reid. However, this is not something that occurs alongside, or as a supplement or welcome alternative to, his epistemological defense of common sense (etc.). That is, an emphasis on the primacy of practice is not opposed to or even distinct from Reid's attempt to show that the first principles are epistemically justified. (In this way, the pragmatist commitment is shallower than has been suggested by some.) Rather, the emphasis on practice comprises a *central part* of that attempt—it is key to Reid's avoidance of both skepticism and an unabashed dogmatism, to his "third way." (In this way, the pragmatist element is deeper.) In trying to establish these claims, it will be best to begin with a brief review of what others have recently said about Reid and pragmatism.

2 Some Recent Discussions Reviewed (Baumann, Magnus, Lundestad)

Peter Baumann argues that "Reid's theory of common sense implicitly contains a dilemma" (Baumann 1999, 47). Speaking of the epistemic status of the first principles, Reid argues that they "need no proof, and . . . do not admit of direct proof" (EIP I ii, 39). This follows directly from their (supposed) foundational role: since the first principles are *first* principles, they cannot be argued for on the basis of something more fundamental; and because this is so, it makes no sense to *ask* that such a justification be given. But even if this is right—even if we neither can nor should attempt to provide "proof" for the first principles—nothing follows about whether those principles are *correct*: "Proving that something is a principle does not imply proving that it is true" (Baumann 1999, 50).

Reid also, of course, stresses the fact that our belief in the first principles is not up to us: we are so constituted that "we are under a necessity of assenting to them" (IHM V vii, 71). Again, though, even if this is correct, it does not help address skepticism—Hume, after all, acknowledged the inevitability of certain "common sense" beliefs.

So, Baumann writes, neither of Reid's arguments goes any way towards *justifying* the first principles. And now we face a dilemma:

If the external world exists, then it is a more dangerous place for sceptics than for the followers of common sense. Given that we prefer not to break our noses, common sense is better off—given the existence of the external world—than scepticism. If the external world does not exist, then there is no difference between the two positions in terms of practical outcomes. Hence, common sense “dominates” scepticism: The outcomes of common sense are always at least as good as those of scepticism and they are better under at least one circumstance (the external world exists). The solution to our problem is clear: We should go for common sense and the belief in the existence of the external world. This is a pragmatic and not an epistemic justification of a principle of common sense. It leaves the epistemic status of such principles (as to truth, justification, etc.) open; the outcomes are defined in practical rather than epistemic terms. However, it still gives us a reason in favour of common sense, namely a practical one.

(2004, 75)

So, Baumann says, “The pragmatic argument . . . does not involve any . . . claims about the factual usefulness of common sense. All we need are conditional judgments and these are not controversial between sceptics and non-sceptics” (2004, 75).

Fair enough: the argument does not presume that common sense *is in fact* useful. Its *conditional utility*, however, is taken for granted—by, Baumann says, both skeptics and non-skeptics alike. But should it be? Perhaps the conditional utility of common sense is something that the relevant parties are prepared to grant only because they (and we) are all so steeped in the belief that the external world *does* exist, and that common sense *serves us well* in it.

In any case, there are still other worries about the pragmatic argument, as restated just above. As already noted, Reid is constantly emphasizing the fact that *it is not up to us* whether to believe the first principle. One might worry, however, that the decision-theoretic argument—“We should go for common sense and the belief in the existence of the external world” (2004, 75)—belies this fact. More seriously, Reid emphasizes the fact that the first principles are all epistemically on a par with one another. But the propounding of the decision-theoretic argument for trusting our perceptual faculties, even if it aims only at pragmatic justification, takes the reliability of reasoning (specifically, decision-theoretic reasoning) for granted:

Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?—they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another? (IHM VI xx, 169).

What all of this suggests is that if we want our “way out” of the dilemma we are facing to reflect as far as possible Reid’s own views, we will need to look elsewhere. And if this “third way” incorporates a pragmatic element, it must take some other form.

Here, P. D. Magnus has a suggestion. Recall Reid’s description of what would happen if we could and did “throw off [the] belief of external objects”:

I resolve not to believe my senses. I break my nose against a post that comes in my way; I step into a dirty kennel; and, after twenty such wise rational actions, I am taken up and clapped in a madhouse. (IHM VI xx, 170)

So we have yet to find a way out of the dilemma, a “third way” that doesn’t reduce to either skepticism or dogmatism. *And* we have yet to find a pragmatist element in Reid that both fits, as an interpretive matter, with the things Reid himself says, and is effective, as an epistemological matter, as some sort of counter to skepticism. It is not surprising, then, that others who have addressed the topic of Reid’s relation to pragmatism have felt that pragmatism, and responding to the skeptic, requires a real *break* from Reidian common sense philosophy. This is the view of Lundestad (2006, 2008).

According to Lundestad, both a genuine pragmatism and the avoidance of dilemmas of the sort Baumann describes are not possible from within a Reidian framework. Not that Reid's philosophy does not contain "proto-pragmatic" elements—particularly ones present in Peirce's "critical common-sensism." Thus, in Reid, we find a distinction between real versus merely professed doubt (Lundestad 2006, 131; 2008, 177), an insistence that the lack of a positive justification for certain beliefs does not itself imply doubt (2006, 130), and the observation that inquiry in *any* form arises and is carried out against the background of certain theories, beliefs, and methods—certain *practices* (2006, 131).

Reid's *mistake*, according to Lundestad, and where Reid and full-blooded pragmatists part company, is the attempt to find some infallible and/or unrevisable beliefs that are isolated from criticism. Lundestad writes (echoing Baumann) that Reid is "fully prepared to accept that our belief in the senses [e.g.] is not justified" (2008, 176). But because common sense philosophy nonetheless recommends confident belief about such things as the reliability of perception (e.g.), it "explicitly encourages dogmatism" (2006, 128), and so is locked in a "stalemate" with the skeptic:

[S]cepticism challenges us to come up with *reasons* for our beliefs. Or, as we may also put it, not to accept anything as true that we do not have reasons to believe. When Reid claims that commonsensical beliefs may be taken as true because they are inherent to our nature, this challenge is simply ignored. (2006, 132)

Whereas, Lundestad writes, John Dewey for example sees common sense as consisting of certain "established or conventional ways of dealing with reality" (2006, 135), and these are all revisable. "This openness for change is the most striking way in which pragmatism differs from the philosophy of common sense. . . . Even our most firmly held beliefs may . . . come to be revised" (2006, 135). (Peirce, in his "Critical Common-Sensism" (Buchler 1955, 293ff.), and James, in his "Pragmatism and Common Sense" (1907), seriously entertain some version of these claims; see also Baumann (1999, 53).)

This approach helps us avoid the charge that any appeal to common sense is just a lazy falling-back upon received dogma—the charge, in Kantian terms, that we are failing to observe the distinction between "the *quaestio facti* and the *quaestio juris*" (Lundestad 2008, 179). However, this distinction becomes one that is drawn within experience: some practices "work," others do not; the former receive "corroboration." When a practice proves problematic, *then* we may explicitly form a belief about it, and "the validity of this belief can only be settled by way of justification" in terms of its practical efficacy. This approach may not be without its problems, Lundestad says, but "there is no other way of overcoming the stalemate of common sense than by continuing to develop it" (2008, 186).

Now, as advertised, this statement of the pragmatic approach involves going beyond Reid—and not just because it involves elements one will not find in Reid. In many ways, it is distinctly *unReidian*. For one thing, it makes common sense and/or the beliefs to which it gives rise quite plastic. (One can hardly imagine *Reid* saying that

“common sense is continuously changing” (Lundestad 2006, 135).) More fundamentally, it is just not clear that Reid *does* think that certain common sense beliefs, including the first principles, “are not justified.” Of course, since the first principles are *first* principles, we cannot justify them in terms of some other beliefs or principles. But it does not follow that those principles are not justified—not unless we assume that foundationalism and the attendant notion of *immediate* justification are non-starters. Still, we have yet to see in what the justification of first principles is supposed to consist, such that we can avoid being mere “dogmatists,” while at the same time answering the skeptic. But I do think Reid has a story to tell here—and one, moreover, that incorporates some pragmatist ideas as a central part. What I want to do in the rest of this essay is to describe the Reidian story, his “third way,” leaving the reader to decide how much merit there is in the resulting view.

3 Some Elements of Pragmatism

As we have seen, those who regard pragmatism as playing a role in Reid’s philosophy (Baumann and Magnus) focus almost exclusively on the question of the “practical” matter of one’s acting in a particular way—whether this has (or would have) instrumental value, whether it is required by the consistent skeptic, and so on. But, as I have been indicating, not only do the views we have considered not provide satisfying answers to the dilemma we face, they fail to capture the pragmatist element in Reid. To see this, however, we need a broader picture of what pragmatism has traditionally involved. Here, Hilary Putnam provides a useful reference point; for he is a proponent of a fairly broadly characterized version of pragmatism. Putnam writes:

What I find attractive in pragmatism is not a systematic theory in the usual sense at all. It is rather a certain group of theses. . . . Cursorily summarized, those theses are (1) *antiskepticism*: pragmatists hold that doubt requires justification just as much as belief. . . ; (2) *fallibilism*: pragmatists hold that there is never a metaphysical guarantee to be had that such-and-such a belief will never need revision (that one can be both fallibilistic *and* antiskeptical is perhaps *the* unique insight of American pragmatism); (3) the thesis that there is no *fundamental* dichotomy between “facts” and “values”; and (4) the thesis that, in a certain sense, practice is primary³ in philosophy. (Putnam 1994b, 152)

There are various other candidates for inclusion here, of course—e.g., a suspiciousness about representationalist accounts of the mind, or an anti-essentialism about familiar objects of philosophical theorizing (‘knowledge,’ ‘truth,’ etc.).⁴

³ Cf. Brandom: “Pragmatism can be thought of narrowly: as a philosophical school of thought centered on evaluating beliefs by their tendency to promote success at the satisfaction of wants, whose paradigmatic practitioners were the classical American triumvirate of Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. But pragmatism can also be thought of more broadly: as a movement centered on the primacy of the practical” (Brandom 2002, 40).

⁴ See Rorty (1980) and Hookway (2010) for discussion of these and other themes within pragmatist(s) thought.

Further, each of the items Putnam lists could be elaborated upon, and developed in specific ways. For instance, (regarding 2) the endorsement of fallibilism is often associated in the relevant literature with the rejection of *foundationalist* epistemology. More specifically, it is associated with "the whole project of finding *indubitable* 'foundations of knowledge'" (Putnam 2001, 22; 2002, 8ff.)—the attempt, in Rorty's terms, to evade "the contingency of starting points" (1980, 726), to "ground some element of our practices on something external to these practices" (728). (These matters, in turn, are central to understanding pragmatism, in Rorty's view.) Similarly, (re. 3) it is not merely a neat cleavage between *facts* and *values* that pragmatists question; other familiar dichotomies are also put to the test—e.g., between fact and theory, thought and experience, philosophy and science, and (as 4 implies) theory and practice⁵ (Putnam 1995, 13; Rorty 1980, 723; Hookway 2010). (A willingness to challenge such "dualisms" might be seen as symptomatic of the pragmatists' "naturalism" (see Rorty 1998). So too, (re. 4) the idea that practice is primary might be developed or implemented in various ways—e.g., in the form of Peirce's famous "prope-positivist" maxim:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (e.g., Buchler 1955, 259.)

Or, the "primacy of practice" could find expression in some anti-metaphysical notion of truth (see Hookway 2010), or Rorty's (1979) "linguistic behaviorism" or Brandom's (1994) "inferentialism." And so on.

4 Reid on Common Sense, Evidence, and the First Principles: His "Third Way"

As the list of theoretical options expands and becomes more complex, it is clear once again that pragmatism resists any very pithy reduction. But the foregoing elaboration does at least put us in a better position to appreciate the degree to which Reid's epistemological views incorporate pragmatist elements to an extent not reflected in the discussions we have so far considered. This becomes apparent when we turn back to Reid and consider his views on three notions at the heart of his "common sense philosophy"—common sense, evidence, and the first principles.⁶

First, then, common sense itself. While, colloquially, 'common sense' refers most often to whatever it is that's widely regarded as true ("vulgar opinion," as Reid sometimes calls it), Reid of course has something rather narrower in mind. According to Reid, 'sense' is closely connected with judgment and cogitation: "in common language, sense always implies judgment. A man of sense is a man of judgment. Good sense is good

⁵ Cf. Dewey's remark to William Pepperell that "[h]is effort had not been to practicalize intelligence but to intellectualize practice" (Eldridge, 1998, 5).

⁶ Here, I draw upon Rysiew (2002) and (2005), wherein I discuss these matters at greater length.

judgment” (EIP VI ii, 424). On the relation between common sense and reason, Reid says that common sense is a “degree” of reason; specifically, it is that degree of reason which is requisite for judging “of things self-evident,” and which entitles humans “to the denomination of reasonable creatures” (EIP VI ii, 433).

For Reid, then, ‘common sense’ is not a purely descriptive notion—it suggests reasonableness, for instance.⁷ Also notable in the current context is the fact that it is not Reid’s view that common sense operates only at the level of “intellection”: a reasonable person is (i.e.) one who is “capable of managing his own affairs, and answerable for his conduct towards others” (EIP VI ii, 433). Common sense, then, is implicated in our actions as well as in our thought: it is, Reid says, “that degree of judgment which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business” (EIP VI ii, 424). As far as common sense goes, then, there is no neat division between theory and practice, or (relatedly) between practical and theoretical rationality.

In this connection, notice what Ruth Anna Putnam says, when *she* tries to get at what pragmatism is really all about: “I seek a philosophy that I don’t have to leave behind in the study” (Ruth Anna Putnam 2002, 8). And here is Hilary Putnam again: “if there was one great insight in pragmatism, it was the insistence that what has weight in our lives should also have weight in philosophy” (Putnam 1994a, 517). Now Reid:

The same degree of understanding which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life, makes him capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends; (EIP VI ii, 426)

[W]hat is absurd at the bar is so in the philosopher’s chair; (EIP VI ii, 475)

Philosophy has no other root than the principles of common sense; it grows out of them and draws its nourishment from them. Severed from this root, its honors wither, its sap is dried up, it dies and rots. (IHM Introduction, 19)

Next, consider *evidence*.⁸ Reid says that “[w]e give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief”; and, he thinks, there are different types or sources of evidence: there is the evidence of sense, of memory, of consciousness, of axioms, of reasoning, and so on (EIP II xx, 228–9). What do all of these kinds of evidence have in common?

They seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances. (EIP II xx, 229)

Notice, though, that when Reid says that the different kinds of evidence “are all fitted by nature to produce belief in the human mind,” he clearly means in the *sound* or “*healthy*”

⁷ Similarly, the German, *gesunder Menschenverstand*—what’s often rendered as ‘common sense’—literally translated, means “healthy human understanding.”

⁸ While Reid accords evidence a central place in his epistemology, it is not clear that he would qualify as an “evidentialist” in its currently dominant form (i.e., *à la* Conee and Feldman 2004); see Rysiew (2011) for discussion.

human mind.⁹ This, even though we have no standard of such cognitive "health" that's completely independent of our most deeply held beliefs, and our most fundamental epistemic practices¹⁰—that, perhaps, is just part of what "lunacy" involves. So, insofar as "evidence discerned by us forces a corresponding degree of assent" (EIP VI v, 481), that is contingent upon our being constituted as we are. Specifically, it is contingent upon our possessing specific "principles" that connect various experiences with a conception and belief of what they "suggest" (e.g., IHM V iii, 60–1; EIP II xxi, 237–8), as well as common sense itself. In a "healthy" human subject, however, "evidence discerned . . . forces a corresponding degree of assent" (EIP VI v, 481), and the belief so formed is justified:

All men of common understanding agree, that each [kind] of evidence may afford just ground of belief. (EIP II xx, 229)

All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures. (EIP II xx, 230)¹¹

So, as with *common sense*, in considering *evidence* we find a linking-up between questions of fact and questions of value—between our manner of forming beliefs, and what makes such beliefs justified; indeed, with our *standard* of justified belief. This is not, however, a failure to be cognizant of the distinction between "the *quaestio facti* and the *quaestio juris*" (Lundestad 2008, 179): it is an attempt to accurately portray the intimate connection between them in the phenomena in question.

Unsurprisingly, the same applies to the *first principles*—the third central notion we should briefly consider. These are, Reid says, *self-evident*:

[They] are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily, and both are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers. There is no searching for evidence, no weighing of arguments; the proposition is not deduced or inferred from another; it has the light of truth in itself, and has no occasion to borrow it from another. (EIP VI iv, 452)

Now, just as evidence is not merely what causes belief, self-evidence (/evidentness) is not simply the *inevitability* of the relevant beliefs. Reid regards the first principles as *constitutive* principles, in the sense that accepting them is a condition (for us, given

⁹ E.g.: "... in most cases, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding, when comprehended clearly and without prejudice" (EIP VII iii, 557).

¹⁰ "... such is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent. And a man who perfectly understood a just syllogism, without believing that the conclusion follows from the premises, would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet" (EIP VI v, 481). But if such a monster is a coherent possibility it can't be that evidence is *defined* as what forces assent (Van Cleve 1999, 18). So if 'evidence' is "whatever is the ground of belief," it cannot be that ground is a purely psychological notion.

¹¹ Other examples: "To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid" (EIP II xx, 228); "I shall take it for granted that the evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief" (EIP II xx, 229).

our nature) of cognizing at all.¹² A failure to accept the first principles of common sense is, Reid thinks, *lunacy*. The first principles are, for us, and in our view, the “fixed point” upon which cognizing rests (see EIP VI iv, 454). Thus, the distinction between self-evidence and being strongly inclined to believe a proposition is real, and is easy to draw at the level of non-basic propositions (e.g., whether the dollar will rise or fall against the pound over the next few weeks). However, since the first principles are *first* principles, their being self-evident and our all being strongly inclined to believe them are, as one might expect, not in practice separable. So too, Reid thinks, for our accepting the first principles and our *being justified* in accepting them: they typify, even define, what (self-)evidentness is for us, given our constitution.

If this seems unclear or implausible, note that essentially the same point holds for our beliefs about obvious necessary or analytic truths: it is not their necessity or analyticity per se which leads me to accept these things as true. What gets me accepting such things is my ‘*seeing*’ that they can’t be false, my inability to understand how things could turn out such that they’re not true. Reid, like Descartes, allows that even simple mathematical judgments are not impervious to error. Further, Reid thinks that we can conceive of impossible things—he argues, for example, that our ability to use *reductio ad absurdum* arguments requires it (EIP IV iii, 327ff.). So while the ordinary use of ‘conceivable’ disguises the distinction (EIP IV iii, 329 and 331), even for analytic truths, it is not the literal inconceivability but the *de facto unbelievability* of their negations that accounts for our thinking them true (EIP IV iii, especially 330). Hence Reid’s saying that “the rules of demonstrative sciences . . . have no authority but that of human judgment” (EIP VII iv, 565), and his holding that certainty, the “highest degree” of evidence and belief (EIP II xx, 229), is not reserved for necessary truths.¹³ So, whether it concerns contingent or non-contingent truths, the (self-)evidentness or simple manifestness of certain things, the brutality of certain such judgments is in the end the final court of epistemic appeal. If evidence and evidentness straddle the boundary between the psychological and the normative, *self-evident* propositions, including the first principles, mark the limits of this boundary for us, as the epistemic subjects that we are.

In the absence of any reasonable (i.e., evidence-based) doubt as to their truth, we have no reasonable alternative to accepting the dictates of common sense. And since any evidence as to the fallaciousness of one or all of our faculties would have to presume the veracity of at least one of them, given that the first principles “all come out of the same shop” (IHM VI xx, 169), such evidence would in fact undermine the attempted argument. In this sense, there *could not be* any reasonable (evidence-based)

¹² This and related ideas are spelled out in greater detail in Rysiew (2002).

¹³ “That there is such a city as Rome, I am as certain as of any proposition in Euclid . . .” (EIP VII iii, 557); “. . . my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives of what is commonly called an axiom” (EIP II xx, 231).

doubt as to the truth of the first principles.¹⁴ So, since it is rational to act on and believe that to which there is not—never mind, could not be—any reasonable alternative, it is rational for us to hold to the first principles of common sense.¹⁵

None of this, of course, establishes, or is meant to establish, the truth of the first principles: as noted above, Reid allows that they *may* be false. What the preceding does do is place the first principles “in a proper point of view” (EIP I ii, 41).¹⁶ And, as I read them, *that* is the real intended effect of the other of Reid’s “anti-skeptical arguments.” Taken as a whole, they are meant to show, as William Alston puts it, that “in a sense, there is no appeal beyond the practices we find ourselves engaged in” (1993, 130; cf. 1989), and in which we cannot avoid being engaged. Both the skeptic and the dogmatist fail to see this, however: both hold, if only implicitly, that epistemic justification *requires* an appeal to something deeper—hence their common belief that the first principles and the beliefs they undergird are without justification. But the real heart of Reid’s “third way” is his denial of precisely that thought.

As Reid sees it, attempts to ground the first principles and the beliefs they support in something further are not just inevitably unsatisfactory, they are misguided. This applies as much to attempts to ground them in one or another kind of non-epistemic, pragmatic consideration, as it does to attempts to find some source that guarantees their correctness. Contrary to the skeptic, however, this does not mean that we are left without any reason, any justification, for holding to them, and can only acquiesce in their inevitability and (apparent) practical utility. In a very real sense, their playing the central and indispensable role that they do is their justification, and not of an exclusively non-epistemic sort. Here, Reid’s epistemology is more radical than the skeptic’s, and more radical than what’s implicit in the pragmatist maneuvers scouted above; unlike them, he denies that practical considerations are entirely cut off from epistemic ones in the first place, and that any justification of common sense principles and beliefs must be in terms of something deeper than and independent of the central and indispensable role they play in our thought and action.

¹⁴ Which is not to say that it is impossible, as Reid puts it, “for what is only a vulgar prejudice [to] be mistaken for a first principle” (EIP I ii, 41). Even so, we do have (fallible) means by which to confirm that a given candidate is indeed a first principle: see EIP VI iv, 459–67.

¹⁵ It might seem that this line of argument involves a confusion of practical and epistemic rationality. But that is not so. For one thing, and as we have seen, common sense, which “discovers” the first principles, straddles the theory/practice distinction. For another, as Alston argues, “To accept some practice . . . as rational is to judge that it is rational to take it as a way of finding out what (some aspect of) the world is like; it is to judge that to form beliefs in accordance with this practice is to reflect the character of some stretch of reality. That means that to judge [some relevant practice] to be rational is to judge that it is a reliable mode of belief-formation” (Alston 1989, 21). Since reliability is central to justifiedness, the latter judgment is one of the (epistemic) justifiedness of the relevant practice and/or of the beliefs formed by means of it.

¹⁶ Of first principles, Reid writes: “Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view” (EIP I ii, 41); “they may admit of illustration, yet being self-evident, do not admit of proof” (EIP I ii, 41); “there are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected” (EIP VI iv, 463).

Such—in outline, anyway—is how we should read Reid on these fundamental epistemic matters. Whether I am right, and whether the views described are plausible, are good questions. But my interest here is, once again, to point out how, given the foregoing understanding of Reid’s epistemological views and of his “third way,” we can observe substantive connections to the pragmatist tradition beyond those noted by others. Briefly, then, here is what we find:

Like the pragmatists, Reid is both (re. 1) an antiskeptical *and* (2) a *fallibilist*. This, in fact, is among the things that sets him apart from the anti-skeptical philosophers who preceded him (and many of those who came after). For Reid, that even our most deeply held beliefs *could* be false cannot be denied. To many it will seem that, with this point granted, only skepticism can follow. However, attempts such as Descartes’ to remedy this matter so as to head off skepticism, because they are bound to fail, actually play into the skeptic’s hands. Surely the better path is to couple a sensible admission of the fallibility of our faculties with an equally sensible denial of their fallaciousness. We can see now why the following claim of Putnam’s, encountered above, is seriously misleading: “That one can be both fallibilistic *and* antiskeptical is perhaps *the* unique insight of American pragmatism,” Putnam says. But Reid saw that too. Indeed, *Reid* saw that one can be both fallibilistic *and* *foundationalist*—that is one of his great insights. Reid, as much as the pragmatists, rejects “the whole project of finding *indubitable* ‘foundations of knowledge’ ” (Putnam 2001, 22, emphasis added; 2002, 8ff.). And Reid makes no attempt to evade (in Rorty’s terms) “the contingency of starting points” (1980, 726), to “ground some element of our practices on something external to these practices” (1980, 728).¹⁷ On the contrary, our judgments as to the justifiedness of various beliefs, for example, are contingent upon our being constituted as we are; and, epistemically speaking, they *ground out* on the simple evidentness or manifestness of certain things.

Next (a related point), while Reid hardly rejects the fact/value distinction wholesale, (re. 3) he does seem committed to holding that certain central epistemic notions (common sense, evidence, the first principles) are such that there is a “mixing” of questions of value and questions of fact—or rather, an implicit denial that there is any such neat distinction to be drawn. So too, there is a rejection of a clear theory–practice distinction, particularly as regards common sense itself.

And, of course, if the preceding way of reading Reid is on the right track, his epistemology as a whole illustrates (re. 4) *the primacy of practice*, in the sense that our actual ways of forming beliefs (etc.) have, as just noted, no deeper epistemic grounding than those practices themselves. As we can now see, however, the appeal to *primacy of practice* is not the basis for “a totally different [i.e., non-epistemic] kind of justification: a pragmatic justification” (Baumann 1999, 53), of common sense; nor is it the basis for some argument concerning the pragmatic inconsistency of certain would-be skeptics, an argument that occurs alongside numerous others (Magnus). Rather, it is at the heart

¹⁷ As at several other points, there is of course an affinity here between the views of Reid and those of the later Wittgenstein. On this, see e.g., Wolterstorff (2001) and Alston (1989, 1993).

of notions as central to Reid's views as those of common sense, evidence, and the first principles; and it is essential to his defense of the *epistemic* justifiedness of our most deeply held beliefs. One simply cannot understand Reid's epistemology without appreciating this aspect of his views.

5 Conclusion

In addition to the historical connection between Reid and the pragmatist tradition, there is, I have argued, a substantive philosophical connection. In fact, in certain crucial respects Reid's commitment to ideas characteristic of subsequent "pragmatist" theorizing goes well beyond what has been suggested by other recent commentators. Of course, this commitment occurs in Reid alongside an equally strong commitment to such things as a robust metaphysical realism. And if one takes a rejection of the latter commitment to be somehow essential to pragmatism, clearly Reid is no pragmatist. But the present discussion has not been aimed at establishing any quick answer to the question of whether Reid is or is not a "pragmatist": given that the latter is a rich and nebulous notion, any such quick answer is bound to be too quick to be good. And a quick negative answer, predicated on Reid's having certain commitments (e.g., to metaphysical realism) which many pragmatists reject, would ignore what I have suggested is a deep and over looked affinity between pragmatism and Reid's epistemological views.¹⁸

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¹⁸ My thanks to Todd Buras and Rebecca Copenhaver for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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10

The Defense of the First Principles of Common Sense in Reid's Epistemology

A New Use for Track-Record Arguments

Angélique Thébert

1 Introduction

Although famous for his repeated claim that there are innumerable natural beliefs we hold without any reason, Reid gives us the means to make a new appraisal of track-record arguments tailored to show the truth of the first principles of common sense. We do not expect him on this field, because of the “epistemic circularity” that infects any argument of this kind. Reid enters the arena when he attempts to answer the skeptic who asks him how he knows the principles of knowledge that he points out are “truly such.” Although fully aware of the epistemic circularity involved in this request, it is striking that he considers as useful the arguments that attempt to support these principles. The question is to know how Reid reconciles the fact that we *immediately* know them, with the fact that we may be compelled to *defend* them.

2 An Ambiguity to Dissipate

Any reader who takes the lesson of the Scottish school of common sense literally may be astonished by the way its promoter also seems to unravel the main threads that contribute to weaving the motif of this school. This ambiguity is clearly present in the second chapter of the first book of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. There, Reid brings forth one of his main points: there are principles common to philosophers and to the vulgar that “do not admit of proof” (EIP I ii, 41). Although stated in a professorial tone, this lesson is right from the start linked to a kind of amendment that tones down its scope:

There are principles “which need no proof, and which do not admit of *direct* proof.”

(39, emphasis added)

Reid seems to make logical space for an “indirect proof” of principles, but without giving us more details about its form and purpose. The question is whether this concession opens the door to a genuine discussion with the skeptic (it would be the price to pay in order not to be accused of dogmatism). If this is the case, we may fear that it totally distorts the scope of his philosophical point. Is Reid the victim of his conciliating temper? This cannot be the case, insofar as he keeps stating that it is impossible to reason with someone who questions the principles of common sense. But if indirect proofs of the principles are not designed for the skeptics, what is their use?

2.1 The lesson from common sense: Reid’s condemnation of the epistemic circularity involved in track-record arguments

Reid condemns both the need to prove the principles of common sense and the pretension to gain their justification from “proofs.” By “proofs,” we must understand *direct* proofs—that is to say, not so much “short demonstrative proofs” as proofs which have a deductive form and are specifically designed to establish the *truth* of a principle. Reid calls them *apodictical* proofs (EIP VI iv, 463), faithful on this point to the Aristotelian categorization of reasoning. In these proofs, the link between the premises and the conclusion is necessary, so that the truth of the latter is established with absolute certainty.

Reid regularly states the impossibility of establishing the truth of the principles of common sense by such proofs. He notably emphasizes it when he tackles the seventh of the first principles of contingent truths, which claims that “the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious” (EIP VI v, 480). He affirms that “if any man should demand a proof of this, it is impossible to satisfy him.” The reason is that, in order to give any credit to the reasoning, we must take for granted “the very thing in question”—that is to say, the reliability of our faculties. The reasoning is thus vitiated by epistemic circularity.

Whether he is right or wrong in his accusation, Reid accuses Descartes of falling into this trap, having misconceived the power of such reasoning. According to him, Descartes commits “a false step in this matter”:¹

... for having suggested this doubt among others, that whatever evidence he might have from his consciousness, his senses, his memory, or his reason; yet possibly some malignant being had

¹ Reid refers to an argument stated by Descartes in the sixth of the *Metaphysical Meditations* (1641/1901): according to this argument, concerning extended things, we can rely on the truthfulness of God to conclude that our clear and distinct ideas about them are the source of certain knowledge (AT, IX, 63–4). We must distinguish the purport of Reid’s criticism from what is traditionally called the objection of the “Cartesian circle.” The latter must also be linked to an excerpt from the third *Meditation*, in which Descartes establishes the existence of God and his truthfulness from the general rule that everything he clearly and distinctly perceives is true (AT, IX, 27; AT, IX, 36). Descartes’ replies (his *Second*, *Fourth*, and *Seventh Replies to Objections to the Meditations*) emphasize a double distinction: between the axiomatic truths and the truths that are the conclusions of a reasoning on the one hand; and between the truths that are apprehended under the perspective of a deceiving Deity and the truths that are the objects of an actual perception of the mind on the other hand.

given him those faculties on purpose to impose upon him; and therefore, that they are not to be trusted without a proposer voucher: To remove this doubt, he endeavours to prove the being of a Deity who is no deceiver; whence he concludes, that the faculties he had given him are true and worthy to be trusted.

It is strange that so acute a reasoner did not perceive, that in this reasoning there is evidently a begging of the question. For if our faculties be fallacious; why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others? And if they are to be trusted in this instance without a voucher, why not in others?

Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity. . . . (EIP VI v, 480–1)

As we can see from this paradigmatic case, the epistemic circularity problem arises when, as we attempt to prove the reliability of a source of beliefs, we start from the outputs of this very source of beliefs. Suppose we aim to prove the reliability of sense perception, an epistemic circular argument looks like the following (where p_1 and p_2 are propositions known only by sense perception):

1. At t_1 , I form the perceptual belief p_1 , and p_1 ;
2. At t_2 , I form the perceptual belief p_2 , and p_2 ; . . .
3. Therefore my sense perception is a reliable source of beliefs.

No blatant *logical* circularity is involved, since the conclusion does not explicitly appear in the premises. Still, there is what William Alston (1986) calls *epistemic* circularity. In order to accept the second conjunct of each premise, we must be convinced of the truth of the conclusion.² More generally, this difficulty concerns any argument for the reliability of a faculty that proceeds by induction or, as Alston puts it, any “track-record arguments” (1986). It is all the more blatant when we attempt to prove propositions that are necessarily presupposed by any talk, thought, and action: that is why Reid attaches so little value to a reasoning whose purpose is to appraise the truth of a principle of common sense, taking it as a conclusion drawn from more fundamental premises.

2.2 A play for fun?

So far, so good. Reid could merely notice the impossibility of proving these principles without this constituting any problem. The difficulty arises when he is confronted with the intellectual requirement to prove any proposition we claim to know—that is to say, in a dialectical context. Even if it is totally artificial (it can only arise in the course of a discussion with a philosopher who is skeptically framed), Reid seems to consider he cannot escape this demand. Once it is formulated, it cannot be neglected,

² As Bergmann (2004) notes, and a reviewer points out, epistemically circular arguments are not problematic in every context. But Reid imagines Descartes’ reasoning about the reliability of his faculties in the context of explicit skeptical doubts about their reliability. In such contexts, epistemic circular arguments are clearly problematic—or, as Bergmann says, “malignant.” In section 4 I will show that, even in such contexts, epistemically circular arguments are less problematic than they seem.

even if it betrays a crass misunderstanding of the logical status of the propositions under scrutiny. This is where his analysis turns out to be more nuanced than we could think at first: even if Reid affirms that the principles of common sense are immediately known, and therefore require no proof, in his attempt to nip the skeptic in the bud, he nevertheless agrees to play the skeptic's game and to give epistemic credits in favor of these principles. It is in the course of this meta-justificatory enterprise that he surprisingly seems more favorable to track-record arguments. This process emerges in a subdued manner in several places, and also takes place explicitly in the fourth chapter of the sixth book of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*.

What should we conclude from this difference of appraisal? Is it the expression of a mere *formal* agreement with the skeptic (Reid momentarily surrendering to the skeptic's demand, playing her game "just for fun")? In this case, we should conclude that he will face the objection of incoherence. Or more likely, is it the expression of a *substantial* conception about the principles of common sense? In this case, we will be left with the task of shedding new light on the arguments under consideration, of clarifying their function and the way they operate. After all, as Reid repeatedly says: it is folly "[to go] from one faulty extreme into the opposite" (EIP VI iv, 464). Consequently, we cannot expect him, being so aware that "one extreme often leads into the opposite" (EIP VI iv, 454), to have yielded to such a common default. Which role does he ascribe to track-record arguments that take the principles of common sense as their conclusions? How does he conceive the way these general propositions are related to the particular premises?

3 Our Knowledge of the First Principles of Common Sense

Taking stock of track-record arguments, Reid conceives their purport afresh. This implies that one considers that the epistemic dependence of the premises on the principles neither threatens the epistemic immediacy of the premises nor entails the feared epistemic circularity. The clarifying of this tricky point necessarily calls for the study of the "problem of the criterion."

Classically, the problem of the criterion arises when we try to formulate a criterion of truth to distinguish false beliefs from true ones.³ It is generally presupposed that either we begin with immediately known particular judgments, from which we generalize and form a general criterion, or we begin with a general criterion that we then apply to particular circumstances. When Chisholm presents the dichotomy (1982), he labels

³ This is to be distinguished from the contemporary form of the problem of the criterion, which starts from the "principle of the criterion," according to which "A potential knowledge source K can yield knowledge for S, only if S knows K is reliable" (Cohen, 2002). The problem arises when we accept that "basic knowledge" exists—that is to say, "knowledge possessed without knowledge of the reliability of its source." The incompatibility of basic knowledge with the internalist version of the principle of the criterion leads to skepticism.

the former position “particularism” and the latter “methodism.” Each position takes for granted that there is an inferential dependence between the two kinds of propositions, be it an inductive or a deductive one.

3.1 *The particularist reading*

Chisholm (1982) and Van Cleve (1999) attribute to Reid a particularist position.⁴ Considering Reid’s list of the first principles of contingent truths, Van Cleve wonders whether Reid states a *few general* first principles of truth or *many particular* first principles of evidence. Let us take under scrutiny the fifth of the first principles:

Another first principle is, That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be. (EIP VI v, 476)

Either we consider that we are dealing with one general principle establishing the truth of all the judgments of perception, or we consider that we are dealing with a principle establishing that each judgment of perception is itself a first principle. Van Cleve opts for the particularist conception: the principles formulated by Reid designate a class of many particular judgments, each one deserving the status of “first principle.” Accordingly, the multitude of perceptual judgments contained under the fifth general formula must be treated as first principles. Van Cleve gives good reasons to adopt this reading: thus, while general principles may be doubtful, particular natural judgments of consciousness, memory, and perception are irresistible; and if we conceived the principles as general ones, we should proceed along methodist lines and treat natural perceptual judgments as inferred judgments that would take the general principles as their major premises. This is unquestionably something that would not cohere with their being immediately known.

However, what is important for Reid is not so much the distinction between general principles and particular judgments, as the distinction between self-evident propositions and propositions that must be based on self-evident ones to gain a positive epistemic status. For Reid, the category of self-evident propositions contains general *and* particular propositions. Consequently, we may think that the distinction between general and particular propositions is useless to determine which kind of propositions deserves the status of “first principles” more than another. It remains the case that Reid is still attached to this distinction:

I grant that there are innumerable self-evident propositions, which have neither dignity nor utility, and therefore deserve not the name of axioms, as that name is commonly understood to imply not only self-evidence, but some degree of dignity or utility. (EIP VI vii, 520–1)

⁴ Nevertheless, they do not mean exactly the same thing by this term: in trying to understand how to construe the extension of the term “first principles,” Van Cleve does not pretend to answer Chisholm’s question as to “how we do begin to distinguish true beliefs from false ones.” He is rather interested in the question of whether we should subscribe to the principle of criterion.

To be self-evident is therefore a necessary condition but an insufficient one to be an “axiom” or a first principle. If many perceptual judgments are self-evident, they are not first principles for all that, insofar as they do not possess this “dignity or utility” characteristic of principles. These characteristics convey the fact that, once they are stated, the first principles contribute to the improvement of our knowledge. As Reid says:

... it would contribute greatly to the stability of human knowledge, and consequently to the improvement of it, if the first principles upon which the various parts of it are grounded were pointed out and ascertained. (EIP VI iv, 457)

If pointing them out and ascertaining them is something desirable, then general first principles are not as immediately known as we initially thought. But this should not lead us to conclude to particularism. For Reid, general principles and particular judgments are *both* immediately known. This immediate knowledge is also compatible with the fact that particular judgments depend on general principles, and—in some other way—general principles depend on particular judgments. Let us analyze this mutual dependence.

3.2 *The epistemic dependence of judgments on principles*

The first kind of epistemic dependence implies that particular judgments cannot constitute knowledge without any presupposition about human faculties. For instance, a perceptual judgment like “I hear a car passing by” cannot constitute knowledge unless it is taken for granted that “my sense perception is reliable.”⁵ Otherwise, this would make the acquisition of knowledge too easy. The positive epistemic status of perceptual judgments would seem to be generated *ex nihilo*. But how can we reconcile this fact with the point, which is no less evident, that such perceptual judgments are immediately known?

In order to maintain the self-evidence of particular judgments with the self-evidence of general principles, it is necessary to view their relation not as an inferential one, but as a closer relation, typical of the one that exists between a rule and its applications. The relation between a first principle and all the particular judgments that fall into its clutches is similar to the latter: just as, when someone applies a rule, the consideration of the rule *in abstracto* does not precede its applications, when we form perceptual judgments, we do not begin by considering the fifth of the principles of contingent truths. Perceptual judgments are the applied principle. What they presuppose and at the same time help to constitute is not the contemplation of the separate rule but the mastery of the rule.

⁵ It implies that Reid subscribes to a qualified version of the “principle of the criterion.” But contrary to the way the principle is generally understood, I do not think that the knowledge of the reliability of K must *precede* and be *independent from* the knowledge of the judgments produced by this source. These two requirements give rise to the problem of the criterion. Once they are rejected, the problem vanishes.

This does not make Reid a particularist for all that. Indeed, the principle exceeds its applications: it is identical neither with the multitude of judgments it is the representative of, nor with its current applications. We can err in the application of the rule without losing its mastery. Actually, the principle is just another way to designate an intellectual power. This identity is more explicit in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* than in the *Essays*: there, the principles of the human constitution are treated as faculties or powers of the mind, whereas the *Essays* tend to convey the idea that they are general propositions. The second reading is favored by the fact that Reid, being well aware of what philosophers and above all the skeptics expect from him, is ready to make a list and enumerate the principles. But this systematic presentation must not mask the fact that, on the one hand, the list is not claimed to be exhaustive and, on the other hand, it is an artificial manner to make the different parts of our original constitution explicit. The *Inquiry* is more focused on the description of the causal processes which underlie our judgments of perception than on the philosophical dispute with the skeptic. That is why Reid does not so much speak of the “first principles of knowledge” as of the “principles of the human constitution” (IHM I i, 11). He associates them with dispositions, “propensities” to believe things that are specific to an intellectual field (for instance, the disposition to believe that the things we perceive exist). Most often, he does not distinguish them.⁶ In this perspective, particular judgments (“judgments of nature”) depend on the principles just as occurrences of an ability depend on the mastery of this know-how: they are not deduced from them, but are “inspired by” them (IHM II vii, 37), “contained under” them (EIP VI vii, 521), or “implied by” them.

Moreover, the reliability of the faculty is not only present, but also known.⁷ If the mere existence of the reliability of the faculty were sufficient, we would have a simple externalist conception of knowledge, according to which there is no need to know or to be justified in believing that a source of beliefs is reliable in order for its outputs to constitute knowledge.⁸ But once we consider the principles as the intellectual powers of the mind, we can say that we know they are reliable, without

⁶ Emphasis added: “it must be by an anatomy of mind that we can discover its *powers and principles*” (IHM I i, 12), “It must therefore require great caution . . . for a man that is grown up . . . to unravel his notions and opinions, till he finds out the simple and original *principles of his constitution*. . . This may be called an analysis of his *faculties*” (IHM I ii, 15), “Sensation and memory therefore are simple, original, and perfectly distinct *operations of the mind*, and both of them are original *principles of belief*. . . Sensation *implies* the present existence of its object” (IHM II iii, 29).

⁷ See EIP I ii, 39, emphasis added: “There are, therefore, common principles, which are the foundation of all reasoning, and of all science . . . Men need not to be taught them; for they are such as all men of common understanding *know*; or such, at least, as they give a ready assent to, as soon as they are proposed and understood.” Reid clearly distinguishes between “knowing” and “giving an assent to what is understood”: we can presume that the former designates “knowledge *simpliciter*,” knowledge the subject is not necessarily aware of, whereas the latter designates reflective and comprehensive knowledge.

⁸ This is Van Cleve’s view (1999, 14). In Van Cleve (2008, 296–303), he distinguishes between reliabilism and externalism, reminding us that “reliabilism is not the only variety of externalism.” He sides with externalism, explaining that “the particularist reading does not imply reliabilism.”

⁹ Coliva (2012) insists on the existence of a “*conceptual or grammatical connection* between our acting in a certain way . . . and being rational” (13–14). I agree with the necessity of pointing out the *immanence* of what makes our ways of doing rational. Where I depart from Coliva is in the way she analyzes our attitude towards that presupposition: she coins it as a “positive assumption.” Recognizing the difficulty of pinpointing a psychological attitude of acceptance towards a proposition at that level, she concedes that it “does not mean to say that subjects should explicitly entertain and assent to the proposition in question, or that they should at least have the conceptual resources necessary simply to entertain it. Rather, they could be seen as *implicitly* (yet positively) assuming a given proposition in virtue of being immersed in a practice, which has that acceptance as a precondition of its rational intelligibility . . . So, the notion of acceptance I am working with is admittedly psychologically very thin” (10). I take this “thinness” as a sign of its vanishing. I think we can explain her reluctance to stop talking about assumption (conceived as a “propositional attitude”), because she conceives her analysis as taking part in a “*normative* enterprise,” whose aim is to expose the “*abstract* space of reasons,” as it is presented to “an *ideal* epistemic subject” (emphasis added). But Reid’s enterprise should not be seen as a pure normative one (see Rysiew 2002).

¹⁰ On this point, there is a family likeness with some of Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* (1952): "105. All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life"; "204. Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game."

2) Contrary to the objects for which the mere presence of a reliable working is sufficient to make them “properly functioning objects” (e.g., a thermometer), for human beings, the mere presence of reliable faculties of knowledge is not sufficient to make them knowing subjects. The reliability must be accompanied by a kind of awareness, of “sensitivity” to it.¹² But contrary to what is implied by some internalist conceptions of knowledge, subjects are not required to have a *special access* to what constitutes their evidence. It takes the form of an instinctive trust, a natural confidence typical of the one involved in the mastery of know-how. This trust accompanies each exercise of the faculty. It enables us to make judgments by neglecting some obstacles, or without being disturbed by any reasons to doubt. It is the way in which our being “sensitive to the reliability of our faculties” manifests itself. It is not the object of a *specific* and *propositional* attitude. It is a kind of mental behavior, which constitutes a psychologically *robust* surrounding inside which an ability develops. This trust makes the ability all the more implanted in the human constitution.

4 A Qualified Conception of Track-Record Arguments

4.1 *The epistemic dependence of the principles on judgments: a logical space for the defense of the principles of common sense*

If particular judgments of common sense depend on the principles in the way operations of the mind depend on the powers of the mind, the principles of common sense also depend on the judgments that derive from them. Indeed, although they are constantly presupposed, they are not consciously and explicitly known. Particular judgments help to enlighten them. That is why the indirect proofs of the principles of common sense, named “illustrations” (EIP I ii, 41), have a specific role in the development of our knowledge. Surely, we cannot view them as *establishing* the truth of these principles, from premises that could be accepted entirely independently from them. Likewise, it would be a mistake to view them as aiming to convince someone who, before the proof, *doubted* the principles of common sense. If we can attach a genuine usefulness to these “proofs,” it is in the perspective of *improving one’s knowledge* of the principles. Reid distinguishes between knowing and improving our knowledge:

Thus, mathematicians, before they prove any of the propositions of mathematics, lay down certain axioms, or common principles, upon which they build their reasonings. And although

even if an ability manifests itself through its exercises, it is not to be identified with the summation of its particular occurrences; and it may happen that I err in the exercise of a capacity without losing the mastery of the capacity for all that. If the produced knowledge is secured, having the ability to do X does not imply that I *necessarily* do X when I am in the appropriate circumstances.

¹² This requirement is tailored to answer the objection of “cognitive irresponsibility” (addressed to the externalist conceptions of knowledge) and to take into account the charge of “psychological implausibility” (addressed to the internalist conceptions of knowledge).

It remains to explain how the conclusion can be known before it is derived from the premises, without depriving such arguments of any usefulness. The reason lies in the distinction between two kinds of knowledge: the *presupposed* knowledge and the *produced* knowledge. Making use of Sosa's distinction (1991, 240), we may consider that, whereas presupposed knowledge is animal and instinctive, produced knowledge is reflective. Nevertheless, if it puts us on the right track, this distinction is still based on the idea that knowledge is intrinsically *propositional*. Speaking about the presupposition that our "sense perception is reliable," Sosa describes it as "a kind of propositional attitude,"¹⁵ which is "virtually known." Moreover, he sometimes seems to refrain from assimilating animal knowledge to "real human knowledge" (1991, 274–5), saying that "no human blessed with reason has merely animal knowledge." It is simply viewed as "near-knowledge."¹⁶

But we should consider first that we have knowledge of the reliability of our sources of belief right from the start; and secondly that this presupposed knowledge is a kind of practical knowledge, not only in the sense that it is not the object of a conscious and clearly articulated doxastic attitude, but more radically in the sense that it is not the object of any propositional attitude at all. The reliability of our sources of belief is known in the sense that we know how to make correct beliefs, without this knowing-how including some knowledge-that.¹⁷ The knowing-how transpires in every judgment we make, in the same way that our knowing how to ride a bicycle transpires each time we get on our bike.

If we do not need to contemplate a rule explaining step by step how to proceed to perform correct perceptual judgments, as we gain some reflection and understanding, we may need to formulate it explicitly. As Reid notices, the learning of logic leads us “to start a doubt concerning our senses.” That is why it becomes necessary to give an explicit formulation of what we naturally and instinctively assent to. This is what Reid does when he gives the list of the first principles of knowledge: he formulates ways of codifying our faculties. The list looks like a user guide.¹⁸ He does not state rules that we should strive to follow. He only gives an explicit and propositional form to ways of doing, to what we have taken for granted from the start, without our knowing it. And just as we consult the guide only in cases of emergency, Reid endeavors to state the principles only because he is in a desperate situation, questioned by the skeptic.

I gave implicit belief to the informations of Nature by my senses, for a considerable part of my life, before I had learned so much logic as to be able to start a doubt concerning them . . . I consider this instinctive belief as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark. And now I yield to the direction of my senses, not from instinct only, but from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness. (IHM VI xx, 170)

This passage calls for two comments:

1) Reid speaks of an “implicit and instinctive belief.”¹⁹ It does not imply that we should conceive it as a *propositional* attitude. This is an assent that is not distinct and independent from the assent we give to our perceptual judgments. It must be granted that Reid defines belief as what “is always expressed in language by a proposition” (EIP II xx, 228). But precisely, belief is not *always* expressed in language. Occasions of belief largely exceed occasions of expression in language, be it explicit or not. Belief is “the main spring in the life of man.” This is a kind of dispositional capacity to trust

¹⁷ See Hetherington (2006) for an argument establishing that 1) know-how cannot be reduced to know-that, and 2) any propositional knowledge is a kind of know-how.

¹⁸ As is the case for information we find in user guides, the stated principles can be considered either as *descriptions* of each selected element (function-oriented guide), or as *recommendations* as to the way we should proceed (task-oriented guide) or, more probably here, as *both*.

¹⁹ We must “implicitly” take the testimony of our faculties for their veracity (EIP VI v, 481).

An indirect proof of the reliability of our memory,²³ like the appeal to our divine origin, reveals an implicit knowledge: they make us recognize this knowledge, and thus make it more stable.

4.2 *Why epistemic circularity is benign and virtuous*

Contrary to the view that considers that particularism, combined with simple externalism, has the great advantage of establishing the reliability of our faculties without circularity (Van Cleve, 2003), the Reidian alternative accepts the presence of a certain kind of circularity in the “proofs” of the principles of common sense. But this is not a crippling flaw, for the circularity is neither complete nor vicious:

1) The principle implied by the premises and the principle that is the conclusion of the argument are not of the same kind. To begin with, the principle appears through the different uses of our faculties, then it is a proposition which is the specific object of a doxastic attitude of acceptance. The circularity is therefore not complete: the proposition reached is not identical to the presupposition from which it is derived. “No matter how closely related they may be,”²⁴ there is a significant change between the principle when it is naturally operative and the principle when it is an object of second-order knowledge.

2) The epistemic circularity, though present, is not paralyzing insofar as this kind of proof enhances the quality of our knowledge. It makes the principles the point of convergence of all our judgments. It amounts to providing a justification which, though not necessary to produce knowledge in the first place,²⁵ contributes to its “stability and improvement.”²⁶ Track-record arguments implant our knowledge of the first principles, making their negation completely unreasonable.

... first principles, which are really the dictates of common sense ... will always, from the constitution of human nature, support themselves, and gain rather than lose ground among mankind. (EIP VI iv, 463)

This is the role of the track-record arguments: even though they could hardly make the principles gain all their positive epistemic status by simple bootstrapping, they are useful to boost it.

4.3 *A new diagnosis of the “proof”: beyond liberals and conservatives*

Reid offers a version of track-record arguments that does not have the limitations associated with them in contemporary thought. Indeed, describing the situation in which the subject does not doubt the conclusion, it has been held (Pryor 2004; Davies 2004)

²³ Even though it takes the form of an inductive proof, we shall not be misled by this apparent similarity. The transition from the premises to the conclusion does not proceed by a movement of generalization, but by a process of *reduction*: the proof reduces the different particular judgments to their underlying principle.

²⁴ See Sosa (2009, 60).

²⁵ One justifies a proposition, not an ability. An ability can only be reinforced or improved.

²⁶ See Hetherington (2001) for this alternative way of considering the role of justification in knowledge.

prior justification²⁷ to believe the conclusion. That is why the epistemic circularity is inescapable. Still, even though we cannot produce such a justification, we consider ourselves as entitled to assume its truth. The presupposition is the object of a positive propositional attitude: it is considered as being *accepted* or *taken on trust* (Wright 2004, 203).

According to the liberal conception of epistemic entitlement, the premises are taken as justified without the presupposition being required to have a justification. As long as there are no defeaters, the premises are *prima facie* justified. Consequently, their epistemic immediacy is not threatened and one escapes the epistemic circularity objection. Nevertheless, some difficulties remain:

1) First of all, for the premises to transmit their justification to the conclusion, it is sufficient that the subject does not doubt the conclusion before the proof is presented. This does not amount to a total epistemic indifference towards the conclusion: the subject must have no reasons to doubt it. Still, this absence of doubt is not treated as the equivalent to the presence of a belief.²⁸

But can we not fear that it amounts to being agnostic towards the principles of common sense? The fact that we do not believe the conclusion is true, while having no reasons to doubt it, seems to merge with not knowing whether it is true.²⁹ The absence of a positive doxastic attitude towards the conclusion seems to imply that the principles of common sense are totally absent. Yet, it is contradictory with their status to consider that they are not constantly presupposed. After all, their specificity is to be continuously accepted even if they are not explicitly articulated. Moreover, if the principle stating that “sense perception is reliable” were totally ignored before the proof, it would be difficult to understand how a subject, from the mere presentation of true perceptual judgments, could acquire this knowledge.

2) The second problem with the liberal conception of epistemic entitlement lies in the fact that the track-record arguments that have the principles of common sense as their conclusions are useful if and only if the subject does not doubt and does not profess any doubt about the conclusion, before the beginning of the proofs. As a consequence, it seriously narrows their efficiency. What we are above all concerned with is to convince someone of the truth of a principle, about which she previously *professed* a doubt.

²⁷ Wright speaks in terms of “warrant.” The “warrant” can be evidential (in this case, it is a justification) or non-evidential (it is an entitlement).

²⁸ Pryor (2012) seems to be aware of the difficulty of maintaining that we do not need an antecedent justification for the presupposition of the reliability of our sense perception to acquire perceptive knowledge. Indeed, how are we to reconcile this fact with the none the less important requirement to give a positive explanation of the way the premises are justified? That is why he concedes that we must *rely* on the general presupposition that “our sense perception is reliable.” Still, even if an entitlement to rely on something seems to be less demanding than an entitlement to *believe that* “our sense perception is reliable,” he considers it as one step too many, susceptible to be confounded with a doxastic attitude (which would launch a quest for a justification).

²⁹ Objection made by Wright (2007, 38).

To sum up, in contemporary discussions of track-record arguments that have the principles of common sense as their conclusions, either one considers that the presupposition is epistemologically entitled (it is the object of a *positive propositional attitude*, one of “belief,” “trust,” or “acceptance”), but the epistemic circularity is not bypassed; or one conceives the presupposition as not being entitled, so that—if one formally makes it the object of a propositional attitude—it has no specific epistemic credit.

But beyond these disagreements about the kind of epistemic dependence we should recognize (be it a strong epistemic dependence for conservatism, a weak epistemic dependence for Davies’ version of liberalism, or a complete epistemic independence for Pryor’s version of liberalism), conservatism and liberalism share the same central idea: in track-record arguments, the general presupposition *logically* precedes the particular premises.

Reid gives us the means to conceive these arguments afresh: if we do not conceive the presuppositions as *propositions* expecting a justification or an epistemic entitlement, but as *simple and original powers of the mind*, it becomes possible to combine two requirements: the epistemic immediacy of *both* general presuppositions and particular premises, and the transmission of the justification from the premises to the conclusion to gain a *new* grasp of the principles.

This alternative way of viewing the status of presuppositions goes hand in hand with an alternative way of viewing the function of track-record arguments: when they take the principles of common sense as their conclusions, these arguments do not intend to provide an apodictical proof, but they aim at *defending* the principles. In this respect, the reasoning is not limited by the analytical requirements that are specific to a deductive proof: the aim is to provide a *synoptic* view of the principle. It requires a kind of “sagacity” to quickly grasp “the road that leads to this end,” to gather the different materials that lead to the bringing into light of fundamental truths. This sagacity best develops with the talent of invention: it consists in having “an *extensive view* of what relates to the subject, and a quickness in discerning those affinities and relations which may be subservient to the purpose” (EIP VII i, 544; emphasis added). “To be able to *comprehend, in one view, a combination of steps*” relating the premises to the conclusion is the vocation of the track-record arguments used in the field of common sense. Track-record arguments are therefore no poor relations to apodictical proofs. They are rather the opportunity to establish connections between the different branches of common sense; they make us develop that “superiority of understanding which we call *genius*” (EIP VII i, 544). Contrary to all expectations, we must even side with Reid when he says that “the highest talent in reasoning is the invention of proofs” (understood as “indirect proofs,” “illustrations” of principles).

5 Conclusion: A Lesson from Skepticism

Now that the use of track-record arguments in the field of common sense is clarified, it is time to have a new look at Reid’s criticism of Descartes’ false step. Is Descartes

so unaware of the strangeness of a proof aiming at establishing the reliability of our faculties?

5.1 *Track-record arguments and their contexts*

Far from thinking that Descartes is insensitive to the different kinds of proofs, Reid considers him well aware of the definite purport of the proof under consideration.

... the reason why Descartes satisfied himself with so weak an argument for the truth of his faculties, most probably was, that he never seriously doubted of it. (EIP VI v, 481)

Reid hints at a distinction that must be borne in mind when we deal with cases of epistemic circularity. According to him, it would be exaggerated to consider that Descartes really treated the proof of the veracity of his faculties as a *cogent* proof—that is to say, as a proof that convinces someone of the truth of the conclusion, which she completely doubted before. The only way to recognize some validity to Descartes' reasoning is to consider that he did not doubt the conclusion before the proof. If Descartes had not taken for granted this information that his faculties were reliable, the premises—deprived of this background information—could not have been accepted.

But if Descartes does not really doubt the conclusion before the proof, he still claims he does. In order to make clear what he is trying to achieve with this proof, I propose to draw from Bergmann's first analysis of the matter. Bergmann contends that, in any proof of the principles of common sense, two types of contexts must be distinguished: there are "questioned source contexts" and "unquestioned source contexts." Questioned source contexts are contexts in which the subject begins by doubting or being unsure of the trustworthiness of a source of beliefs. Unquestioned source contexts are contexts in which the subject is interested in knowing how she can justify her belief that a doxastic source is reliable, even if she has no doubts about the trustworthiness of this source. It is in the *first type of context* that epistemic circularity is "malignant." If someone has been convinced by a skeptical argument that it is not sure that her perception is reliable after all, and if she is being proposed a track-record argument to sustain the reliability of her sense perception, she will not consider it as a means to help her regain confidence in her sense perception. The reason is that she will not accept the premises. She will straightforwardly notice that epistemic circularity infects the argument.

As far as the *second type of context* is concerned, epistemic circularity does not constitute a reason to begin to doubt the conclusion. It is "benign." If the subject has never manifested any doubt about the reliability of her sense perception, but if—pressed by the skeptic—she accepts to answer his request, the discovery of epistemic circularity will not constitute a reason to doubt it. The reason is that the subject was not "looking for some independent verification of the reliability of [her] senses. [She] was merely curious about how it was [she] came to hold, with justification, the obviously justified belief that [her] sense perception is reliable" (Bergmann 2004).

As far as Reid reconstructs Descartes' argument, we may suppose we are in a *third type of context*: in certain respects, we are dealing with an unquestioned source context because Descartes does not doubt the reliability of his faculties; but in other respects, we are dealing with a questioned source context, since it is because Descartes professes a doubt that he undertakes to prove what appears unsure. Far from being stuck in incoherence, this type of context underlines the fact that we must distinguish between two types of doubts, each one having a specific object.

5.2 *The sensibleness of the skeptic*

Even though the Cartesian skeptic claims she doubts the principles of common sense, she is still committed to them. In this specific context, the proofs of the principles of common sense are not totally useless. If for the "thorough and consistent sceptics" (IHM V vii, 71)—that is to say, for people who are theoretically and practically in the grip of skepticism—any rational argument is completely vain, for the "semi-sceptic," it remains worthy of interest. Indeed, such a skeptic makes use of her cognitive faculties. A practical knowledge of their reliability is involved, even though she claims she doubts it. It appears therefore that "something indubitable" may refer to two different things: either to something known, or to something that cannot be doubted. In the first case, it can be at the same time "known" (in a practical and instinctive way) and "doubted" (in a theoretical and reflective posture).

The semi-skeptic is far from being incoherent and having a weird state of mind. One can after all claim one doubts something, while one is unaware that one knows it. The reason is that *the claimed doubt* is not a doubt about simple knowledge: it is a doubt about "knowing that one knows." As one can know without knowing that one knows, the skeptic can claim she doubts a proposition she knows in other respects. Her only mistake is not to notice that practical knowledge and reflective knowledge do not equally succumb to skepticism.

Many Sceptics have denied every general principle of science . . . yet these men reason, and refute, and prove, they assent and dissent in particular cases. Many have in general maintained that the senses are fallacious, yet there never was found a man so sceptical as not to trust his senses in particular instances when his safety required it; and it may be observed of those who have professed scepticism, that their scepticism lies in generals, while in particulars they are no less dogmatical than others. (EIP VI v, 482)

Contrary to what Reid suggests, the distinction between the assent given to particular judgments and the dissent given to general principles does not correspond to the distinction between a practical ordinary behavior (the skeptic assents *as if she knew* that her senses were not fallacious) and a theoretical philosophical position (the skeptic professes an *absence of knowledge*). That would make her quite an inconsistent character. Rather, it corresponds to the distinction between two degrees of knowledge: a *genuine know-how* of which the skeptic is not aware ("in particulars"), and a more

demanding knowledge which is sometimes looked for (“in generals”), and which has more sophisticated propositional manifestations.³⁰

This distinction enables us to conclude that the proofs of the principles of common sense have a use even for people who claim to doubt them. We started noticing that this kind of proof can only be effective and the epistemic circularity not malign, when it addresses someone who does not claim to doubt the principles of common sense.³¹ But it is a meager consolation: it does not settle the matter with the skeptic. Once we distinguish between two grades of knowledge, these proofs can be useful even for the skeptics, if and only if their doubt is a doubt about their knowledge that “they know principles of common sense,” doubt which is not corrosive for instinctive practical knowledge. In other words, track-record arguments are useful to dispel *meta*-skepticism.

More radically, we can say that far from being troublemakers, skeptics give us the opportunity to improve our knowledge of the principles of common sense, to make them an explicit object of thought.³² Thanks to the plasticity of the Reidian concept of “principle,” we can escape one version of the epistemic circularity problem without making the acquisition of reflective knowledge something too easy. Indeed, it requires from the subject who presents the “proof” a kind of sagacity to grasp and display the particular judgments that, depending on the context, are likely to make the semi-skeptic see the evidence of a principle.

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³⁰ In common sense philosophy, theory is the mere continuation of practice, like branches are the extension of the roots of a tree (IHM I iv, 19).

³¹ This is the diagnosis made by Bergmann and “neo-Mooreans” like Pryor and Davies.

³² It is also noticed by Neta (2007).

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11

Theism, Coherence, and Justification in Thomas Reid's Epistemology

Gregory S. Poore

1 Introduction

This essay revisits the role of theism in Reid's epistemology.¹ I begin by laying out the standard externalist and foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology. Within this framework, I look at three standard views of the justificatory role of theism: dogmatism, vicious circularity, and justificatory irrelevance. Each leaves something to be desired. I then argue for a better understanding, one that involves a different interpretation of Reid's epistemology. If the standard interpretation is correct—that is, if Reid's epistemology is a form of simple foundationalism—then theism cannot legitimately play the justificatory role it seems to play. I argue that Reid's epistemology, while primarily foundationalist, is not simply foundationalist but contains coherentist strands. These coherentist strands allow theism to boost the justification of first principles. While such boosted justification is not generally necessary for knowledge, it can be valuable. I further develop the epistemic value of theism within Reid's epistemology through a comparison with Descartes' circle—a circle that Reid misunderstood, but which is actually akin to a circle of Reid's own.

¹ I will here focus on the positive justificatory role of theism, and not consider whether theism plays a role in Reid's epistemology similar to the role Alvin Plantinga claims theism plays in his Reid-inspired epistemology. According to Plantinga, metaphysical naturalism, unlike theism, gives rise to an undefeated undercutting defeater for any belief a naturalist may have, and therefore "naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics" (Plantinga 1993, 236). Philip de Bary argues theism does not and cannot play a similar role in Reid's epistemology (de Bary 2002, esp. ch 10). I argue in an unpublished paper that de Bary is mistaken.

2 Standard Reidian Epistemology: Externalism and Foundationalism

While the standard interpretation of Reid's epistemology requires important qualifications and additions—in particular, his epistemology is not *simply* foundationalist—it is largely correct. It also supplies the background against which to understand standard accounts of the justificatory role of theism in Reid's epistemology. It is true that for Reid externalism gets one epistemically off the ground, and most justification is a function of beliefs ultimately resting on a foundation of non-inferentially justified beliefs.

2.1 *Externalism*

On the standard interpretation, Reid thinks that our foundational beliefs are justified by virtue of being produced through the proper operations of our faculties. As I will show, there are at least four significant components of Reid's externalism. First, our beliefs are typically justified because they are formed by faculties that are (1) truth-directed:

Our intellectual powers are wisely fitted by the Author of our nature *for the discovery of truth*, as far as suits our present estate. *Error is not their natural issue*. . . . The understanding, in its natural and best state, pays its homage to truth only. (EIP VI viii, 527–8; emphases added)

Our faculties naturally produce beliefs that are true. But their “natural issue” of truth may be thwarted in two ways. First, if our faculties are damaged or malformed, they will not reliably produce true beliefs. So justification requires that our faculties be (2) properly functioning: “Yet, as we are liable to various diseases of body from accidental causes, external and internal; so we are, from like causes, liable to wrong judgments” (EIP VI viii, 527; see also VI iv, 465). According to Reid, if, for example, our perceptual faculties are properly functioning, then when we experience certain sensations, these will trigger in us corresponding beliefs according to the truth-directed nature of our faculties. If we experience the tactile sensation for hardness, this will trigger in us the conception of something hard and the belief in its present existence. But for our faculties to deliver true beliefs, it is not sufficient for certain sensations reliably to trigger certain beliefs through the proper functioning of our faculties. In addition to the internal connection between a sensation and a belief, there must be an external connection between the sensation and the object of belief: it must be the case that *hard things* produce in me sensations that trigger belief in something hard. So justification requires that our faculties be (3) functioning in the environment for which they are designed: “The Author of Nature hath made provision for our attaining that knowledge of his works which is necessary for our subsistence and preservation, *partly by the constitution of the productions of Nature*, and *partly by the constitution of the human mind*” (EIP V iv, 375; emphases added). If we are in the environment for which our epistemic faculties were designed, the constitution of the world and the constitution of our faculties correspond: hard things create sensations that trigger our belief in the present existence of hard things.

While Reid does not use the language of defeaters, there is clearly a defeater system at work in his epistemology: someone's belief is justified only if (4) she does not take that belief to be defeated. For example, Reid writes that it is "reasonable to hold the belief which nature gave me before I was capable of weighing evidence, *until convincing proof is brought against it*" (EAP IV vi, 236; emphasis added).² Part of the "proper allowance" for our fallibility is "being open to conviction" that we have made a fallacious judgment (EIP VII iv, 567).³

One particularly important faculty in Reid's epistemology is common sense. According to Reid, reason has

two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are. The first of these is the province, and the sole province of common sense; and therefore it coincides with reason in its whole extent, and is only another name for one branch or one degree of reason. (EIP VI ii, 433)

The faculty of common sense delivers non-inferentially justified beliefs that Reid calls the principles of common sense, or sometimes first principles.⁴ Roughly, the principles of common sense are self-evident propositions that everyone takes for granted in living their everyday lives.⁵ Reid does not think everyone has a clear or articulable notion of the principles of common sense, but he does think that adults who have a "ripe" understanding and are free from prejudice can intuit the truth of the principles of common sense upon clearly understanding them.⁶ Some principles of common sense are contingent, and others are necessary (EIP VI v–vi). They form an important part of our non-inferential, foundational beliefs. Perhaps most significantly, some principles of common sense underwrite, so to speak, the veridical nature of our faculties. For instance, Reid's seventh contingent first principle of common sense states that "the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious" (EIP VI v, 480). As Michael Bergmann has noted, while this deliverance of common sense supplies a non-inferential and justified higher-order belief "about the epistemic credentials of one's beliefs," externalism does not require such justified higher-order beliefs for the justification of lower-order beliefs (Bergmann 2008, 64).⁷

² For some relevant passages from EIP, see VI iv, 465–6, and VII iv, 568.

³ See also EAP II iii, 70. Alvin Plantinga and Michael Bergmann have developed Reid-inspired epistemologies in proper-functionalist terms very similar to the above four points. See Plantinga (1993) and Bergmann (2008).

⁴ Confusingly, Reid uses "first principle" in several senses. In its most general sense, it refers to any non-inferential belief. This includes both perceptual beliefs that are merely immediate (e.g., "there is a mug on my desk") as well as beliefs that are both immediate and self-evident (e.g., "my faculties are generally reliable"; Reid thinks that some truths that are neither analytic nor necessary are self-evident). Reid also uses "first principle" in several more specific senses, one of which is to refer to principles of common sense. These are not only immediately evident but self-evident. To avoid confusion, I will generally use "first principle" in the general sense.

⁵ For a discussion of the taken-for-grantedness of Reid's principles of common sense, see Wolterstorff (2001, ch. 9). A key passage on the taken-for-grantedness of the principles of common sense is EIP VI v, 481–2.

⁶ See, for example, EIP VI iv, 453.

⁷ Bergmann's reading of the seventh contingent principle is plausible, although Philip de Bary has argued it should be read as referring not to all of the belief-forming faculties, but only to reason and judgment.

2.2 Foundationalism

On the standard interpretation, for Reid our faculties deliver non-inferentially justified beliefs upon which the rest of our knowledge builds. John Greco has usefully described Reid's foundationalism as "moderate and broad" (Greco 2004, 148). Reid's foundationalism is *moderate* in that infallibility is not necessary for a faculty to deliver foundational knowledge:

That man, and probably every created being, is fallible; and that a fallible being cannot have that perfect comprehension and assurance of truth which an infallible being has, I think ought to be granted. It becomes a fallible being to be modest, open to new light, and sensible, that by some false bias, or by rash judging, he may be misled. (EIP VII iv, 563)

On Reidian foundationalism, unlike Cartesian, the foundation of knowledge is fallible.

The moderation of Reid's foundationalism allows it to be *broad*. Foundational sources of justification and knowledge include perception, memory, consciousness, testimony, and reason.⁸ This diversity of foundations can in turn support a large superstructure. The different sources of knowledge are irreducible to one another and thus in a sense autonomous (IHM II v, 32). This irreducibility preserves the breadth of Reid's foundationalism. If the justification and deliverances of one source of knowledge could be reduced to that of a second source of knowledge, then the first source would not be foundational. The various sources of knowledge are not only irreducible, but equally authoritative in their deliverances (IHM VI xx, 169). Somewhat surprisingly, Reid goes so far as to insist that all the faculties are equally reliable (EIP II xxii, 251–2).⁹ In short, we have no faculties which are perfect and infallible, but all our faculties are basic sources of knowledge and stand on equal epistemic ground.

3 Three Views of the Justificatory Role of Theism in Reid's Epistemology

3.1 Dogmatism

According to one interpretation, Reid's major or only response to skeptical doubts regarding the reliability of our faculties is a dogmatic appeal to God and his beneficence and non-deception of his creatures. Advocates of this position include Richard Popkin

De Bary would agree, however, that for Reid each of the faculties has its veridical nature guaranteed by a first principle. See de Bary (2000).

⁸ See, for example, EIP II xx, 229.

⁹ It is questionable whether Reid should have claimed this. For example, beliefs about our present sensations (and perhaps by extension, our consciousness) seem particularly reliable—indeed, infallible: "It is impossible that there can be any fallacy in sensation: For we are conscious of all our sensations, and they can neither be any other in their nature, nor greater or less in their degree than we feel them" (EIP II xxii, 243).

(1980, 68), J. H. Faurot (1952, 231),¹⁰ and Norman Daniels. Daniels, for instance, writes that

Reid's only defense against the skeptical outcome of his own nativism—namely, that our constitutions might lead us to systematically false beliefs—is his belief that God would not deceive us. . . . [Reid] slip[s] into dogmatism. God is guaranteeing our *knowledge* of the real world. . . . Reid justifies natively given 'common sense' beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a nondeceiver. (Daniels 1974, 117, 118, 119–20)¹¹

While some isolated passages in Reid's works might suggest such an interpretation,¹² Reid's appeals to theism are not dogmatic. He sees belief in God as grounded upon arguments.¹³ Reid gives various arguments for God's existence and perfection in his *Lectures on Natural Theology*,¹⁴ and the *Intellectual Powers* contains several theistic arguments, such as the argument from first cause and the design argument.¹⁵ For Reid, God's existence is not something believed merely as an article of faith, and so he does not dogmatically employ it in defense of common-sense beliefs. Moreover, given Reid's externalism and his moderate foundationalism, the justification of first principles does not normally require an appeal to anything or anyone, including God. We should seek a better interpretation of theism's role in Reid's epistemology.

3.2 Vicious circularity

Since Reid bases theism on arguments, it is natural that he is accused of circularly relying on his faculties to justify theism, and then using theism to justify his reliance upon his faculties. Sir Leslie Stephen made such an accusation in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Stephen 1902, 62–4). Similarly, Ernest Sosa has recently accused Reid, not of a dogmatic appeal to God, but of a viciously circular appeal to God:

Reid eventually must face a problem of vicious circularity like the one he deems fatal to Descartes . . . How can he regard himself as epistemically justified in believing that these faculties are God-given and accordingly truth-conducive?

(Sosa 2009, 59, 77; see also 74, note 8)

¹⁰ Since Faurot claims that in their dependence on theism "he [Reid] and Descartes were on identical grounds," Faurot could plausibly be understood as claiming that Reid makes a viciously circular appeal to theism.

¹¹ It should be noted that Daniels apparently questions these statements in the 2nd ed.

¹² See, for example, EIP II xx, 244, and VIII iv, 595.

¹³ While there is room in Reid's philosophy for theism to be properly basic, he never suggests this. For a partially Reid-inspired argument that theism can be properly basic, see Plantinga (2000).

¹⁴ It should be noted that these are student lecture notes, and it is possible that Reid's interest in the arguments in these notes may not reflect his own convictions so much as curricular requirements. The tone of the notes, however, coupled with their agreement with the arguments found in EIP, suggests they reflect Reid's own convictions.

¹⁵ See, for example, EIP II vi, 103–4, and VI vi, 508–9. While Reid speaks of "the existence and attributes of the Supreme Being, which is the only necessary truth I know regarding existence," he does not make any ontological arguments for God's existence (EIP VI iii, 443; see VI v, 469 for a similar statement).

Reid seems to think we believe in the existence of finite beings through perceptions, and on the basis of these perceptual beliefs we reason to belief in God's existence and perfection.¹⁶ Since the validity of theistic arguments depends on the correctness of our reasoning, and their soundness depends on the veridicality of our perceptions of contingent realities,¹⁷ it is obvious that for Reid, knowledge of God presupposes the veridicality of many of our faculties. Consequently, appealing to a non-deceptive God as the justification for trusting our faculties as veridical is clearly circular for Reid: it presupposes the reliability of our faculties in order to prove the existence of a non-deceptive God, who in turn guarantees the reliability of our faculties.

Does Reid escape skepticism via a viciously circular appeal to God? Reid's epistemology is externalist. Reid can reply that justified higher-order beliefs about the reliability of our faculties are not required for knowledge. In ordinary circumstances, knowing *p* requires merely that one be justified in believing *p*. It does not require one to have any beliefs, justified or otherwise, about one's justification for believing *p*. Contra Sosa, Reid does not think we can trust our faculties "simply because [we believe] they come from God" (Sosa 2009, 74, note 8). Our reliance on them is justified on externalist grounds. So Reid is not making a viciously circular appeal to God like the one he accuses Descartes of making. He does not think we are justified in trusting our faculties *simply* because we believe a good God created us. We should look for a better interpretation of theism's role in Reid's epistemology.

3.3 Justificatory irrelevance

James Somerville is one philosopher who represents the third interpretation.¹⁸ According to this interpretation, theism plays no justificatory role in Reid's epistemology and is epistemically irrelevant. Reid's discussions of God designing our faculties are "no more than pious reminders for the faithful" and "were probably regarded by him as little more than unremarkable pleasantries" (Somerville 1995, 347, 361).

Part of the motivation for this interpretation seems to be the rejection of the above two views. If Reid's discussions of God designing our faculties are neither dogmatic nor viciously circular appeals to theism, then it seems they have no epistemic function left (Somerville 1995, 354). This reason for the irrelevancy interpretation would be undermined if, as I will argue, there is another plausible interpretation for the role of theism in Reid's epistemology.

Also motivating the irrelevancy interpretation is the claim that Reid's first principles, including those about the veridical nature of our faculties, cannot have their justification boosted, and therefore cannot have their justification boosted by theism

¹⁶ See, for example, EIP VI vii, 515, and Broadie (2004, 165) (AUL MS 2131/4/I/8a).

¹⁷ Or perhaps on the veridicality of our self-consciousness, since Reid suggests a theistic argument can be based on one's own existence.

¹⁸ See also Robinson and Beauchamp (1978, 336) and de Bary (2002).

(Somerville, 1995, 357). In section 4 I will respond to this claim and show that inferences to the truth of first principles can boost their justification.

What should be noted here is that Reid's epistemological writings frequently suggest theism supplies some additional justification for numerous first principles, including the belief that our faculties are veridical and trustworthy.¹⁹ Consequently, the justificatory irrelevance interpretation should be rejected if there is an alternate and reasonable interpretation which accounts for the apparent justificatory role of theism in Reid's epistemology.

The dogmatism interpretation fails to recognize the rationality and philosophical grounds of theism, as well as the externalism of Reid's epistemology. The vicious circularity interpretation appreciates the rational grounds of theism, and it also has the virtue of taking seriously theism's apparent justificatory role. Its problem is that it makes theism necessary for knowledge. Reid's epistemology becomes viciously circular, and he commits the same fallacy he accuses Descartes of making. The justificatory irrelevance interpretation takes seriously the externalism of Reid's epistemology, but it does not make sense of the apparent justificatory role of theism. Is there a better interpretation?

4 Theism and Noncircular Inferential Justification of Certain Basic Sources of Knowledge

Discussions of the justificatory role of theism in Reid's epistemology often fail to make two important distinctions. The first is between theism providing *the* justification for trusting our faculties and theism providing *some* justification for trusting our faculties. The second is between theism providing justification for the belief that our faculties, *taken as a unit*, are veridical, and theism providing justification for the belief that some particular one of our faculties is veridical. Any argument, including a theistic one, that our faculties, taken as a unit, are veridical, will necessarily rely on some of our faculties, and therefore involve some circularity.²⁰ Some of our faculties will always be involved in establishing the premises, and some of our faculties will always be involved in reasoning from those premises. But it is not necessary that any circularity be involved in arguments, including theistic ones, that some particular faculty or basic source of knowledge is veridical. Consider the following example:

A, B, and C are basic sources of knowledge. A and B justify theism. A, combined with theism, provides justification for the belief that C is trustworthy.

If it is a first principle that C is trustworthy, one will already have some non-inferential justification for believing C is trustworthy since this belief is justified on externalist

¹⁹ Some relevant passages are given in section 6 below.

²⁰ This circularity may be only epistemic circularity, which is not necessarily problematic given foundationalism (see DeRose 1992; Van Cleve 1979).

grounds. But the above theistic argument will provide additional justification for the belief that C is trustworthy. This inferential justification will be noncircular and foundationalist.

Can Reid allow for this type of inferential justification of a basic source of knowledge? On both textual and philosophical grounds, Somerville (1995, 357), Peter Baumann (1999, 49), and Patrick Rysiew (2002, 444) deny this possibility.²¹ I will begin with the textual considerations. Somerville asserts that “if [Reid’s] talk of God constituted an attempt actually to supply proof, it would be too palpably inconsistent with his assertion that no proof can be supplied” for first principles, including those first principles of common sense concerned with the veridical nature of our faculties (Somerville 1995, 357). Rysiew similarly comments that “the appeal to external evidence [for first principles] has already been ruled out” (Rysiew 2002, 444).

Some passages in Reid’s writings do support these claims that Reid denies first principles can receive inferential justification.²² But unfortunately for this interpretation, Reid is not always very accurate in his statements. Especially when excitedly responding to skeptics, he not infrequently overstates his point, perhaps for rhetorical reasons. A more thorough examination of Reid’s writings reveals that he thinks we can argue for the truth of first principles. Only three paragraphs after claiming that first principles “need no proof, and . . . do not admit of direct proof,” Reid more cautiously writes that first principles “*seldom* admit of direct proof, nor do they need it” (EIP I ii, 39, emphasis added). The point Reid wants to emphasize in response to the skeptic is that first principles do not *need* proofs for us to know them in normal situations. His considered position is that first principles *seldom* admit of direct proofs, but they sometimes do, although, being first principles, they do not *need* external evidence for us to know them (at least, absent defeaters). Later in the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid notes a property that is common among “first principles, and which can hardly be found in any principle that is built *solely* upon reasoning” (EIP VI v, 482; emphasis added). Reid understands first principles, not as principles that are not or cannot be “built upon reasoning” (i.e., have some inferential justification), but as principles that are not “built *solely* upon reasoning”—that is, as principles that have some basic, non-inferential justification. While discussing first principles in the *Active Powers*, Reid similarly notes that he “perhaps can deduce one of them from another” (EAP V i, 276). That Reid thinks we can have inferential justification for first principles is further confirmed by the fact that he gives arguments for the truth of various first principles.²³

Somerville, Baumann, and Rysiew also give some brief philosophical grounds for their interpretation. Rysiew claims that “the idea of demonstration from something *more* basic is quite simply in conflict with the rock-bottom status of our basic beliefs” (2002, 444; emphasis in the original). This is doubtlessly correct. Since first principles

²¹ Baumann’s reasons for this interpretation are similar to Rysiew’s but less developed.

²² See, for example, EIP I ii, 41.

²³ See, for example, EIP VI v, 482; VI v, 489; IHM VI xxiv, 196.

are the absolute foundation of knowledge, there is nothing *more* basic than a first principle. And if there is nothing more basic, then one cannot argue for a first principle “from something *more* basic.” But why think that to argue for the truth of a first principle, one must argue from something *more* basic? To argue for the truth of a first principle, one would obviously have to argue from things equally or less basic. Why isn’t that possible? For instance, let us say that A, B, and C are independently held first principles, each with its own foundational justification. They are equally basic. If we can infer the truth of C from A and B, why doesn’t that boost C’s justification? Doesn’t C now have both its original, foundational justification plus some inferential justification?

Perhaps Rysiew’s thought is that there is something about “the rock-bottom status of our basic beliefs” that makes arguments for their truth impossible. This seems to be Baumann’s view: because first principles are the foundation of our knowledge—because they are the place where “all justification [comes] to an end”—there cannot be arguments for their truth (Baumann 1999, 49). For if there were arguments for the truth of a principle, it would not be foundational. This move, however, fails to distinguish between different kinds of justification. A first principle is one that has some non-inferential justification. But having some non-inferential justification does not exclude the possibility of also having some inferential justification.

According to Somerville, the veridical nature of our faculties is “so fundamental that any attempted proof would presuppose what is to be proved” (Somerville 1995, 357; see also 361–2). This claim is ambiguous. If Somerville’s point is that any attempted proof of the veridicality of our faculties *taken as a unit* “would presuppose what is to be proved,” he is right. But if, as I suspect, he means that any argument for the veridicality of a particular faculty “would presuppose what is to be proved,” then he is mistaken. For instance, consider conscience. As a basic source of knowledge, we are already justified in trusting conscience, and the deliverances of conscience are already justified on externalist grounds (under normal circumstances). One might use reason, memory, consciousness, and the external senses to reason to God’s existence, and from God’s existence one might then infer that conscience is veridical. This boosts one’s justification in accepting its deliverances: they now possess not only their original non-inferential justification as externalist first principles, but also inferential justification. This argument does not presuppose that conscience is veridical, for every step is justified independent of conscience.

Reid can and does allow some first principles to have their justification boosted. In principle, it is therefore possible for some basic sources of knowledge to provide non-circular, foundationalist justification for relying on other basic sources. In many cases, theism might be an important part of the reasoning that supplies such justification. One example is the above argument for the veridicality of conscience.

For Reid arguments (and by extension theistic arguments) for the truth of some first principles are legitimate on grounds acceptable to foundationalists. Reid does, however, see some epistemic danger in giving such external evidence for what is

immediately evident. In the *Active Powers*, he cautions that an argument for a first principle may “tempt those to doubt of it, who never did so before” (EAP V i, 270). When giving arguments for a self-evident truth, there is a danger that people will come to demand a proof for that truth. They will no longer accept it based on its self-evident nature, but rather simply because of reasoning which supplies external evidence for its truth. But such reasoning will always be inconclusive. It will either presuppose the truth of what it attempts to establish, or else it will be based on premises that are not more evident than what it is attempting to establish. Moreover, since the reasoning from these premises will almost certainly be probable rather than demonstrative, the conclusion will be less evident than the truths upon which it is based. So if one comes to accept a self-evident truth simply or primarily on the basis of reasoning, it will likely appear less evident than if one had never seen an argument for it. As a result of a good argument for a self-evident truth, one may end up in an epistemically worse position. This does not, however, indicate a problem with such arguments per se, nor does it mean they do not have legitimate and important epistemic functions. It does mean that they present an epistemic temptation and must be handled with care.

5 Coherentist Strands in Reid’s Epistemology

I have shown that in Reid’s epistemology theism can supply some noncircular justification for believing that some of our faculties are veridical. Such justification-boosting is acceptable on the standard interpretation of Reid as a simple foundationalist. In the remainder of this essay I will argue that Reid’s epistemology is not simply foundationalist and develop some of the epistemic value of theism that follows from that denial. In this section I will consider one passage that suggests there are coherentist strands in Reid’s epistemology in general. This helps prepare the way for my argument in section 6 that theism, via coherence, can and sometimes does boost the justification of first principles, including those first principles of common sense concerning the reliability of our faculties. Via coherence, theism may also raise basic beliefs to a new epistemic level.

On simple foundationalism, a belief is justified because (1) it is properly basic, (2) because it is properly founded on basic beliefs, or (3) because it is both properly basic and properly inferred from other basic beliefs, as I argued above.²⁴ On simple foundationalism, arguments merely transmit basic justification; they do not generate justification. If a belief is the conclusion of a genuinely circular argument, that belief does not receive any additional justification from the argument, for the transmitted justification just is that belief’s justification. On simple foundationalism, the justification that comes out of a circle cannot be greater than the justification that goes into it. The circle, *qua* circle, is empty and worthless as regards justification; it merely

²⁴ The beliefs from which it is inferred might not be basic, but if they are not, they cannot depend, directly or indirectly, upon the basic belief that is being inferred from them. Such an inference would be circular.

transmits, but does not generate, justification. But for a coherentist, the circle *qua* circle is not necessarily worthless, but may be coherence-building. The coherence of the beliefs that form the circle, or perhaps one's awareness of such coherence, may generate some justification for all of them.

Reid is generally considered a foundationalist full stop. Some interpreters, such as Philip de Bary, take pains to deny that Reid does or can have genuine coherentist strands:

Now if Reid were any sort of a modern 'coherentist,' he would have an obvious and disarming reply to these alleged shortcomings [of circularity in his track-record arguments]. . .

[C]oherentism . . . would seem to be inimical to Reid's whole conception of knowledge. . . .

There is no role, in this [coherentist] account, for self-sufficient foundational beliefs—beliefs that lend justification to other beliefs without ever needing to borrow it for themselves. For Reid, of course, the first principles of common sense are just such self-sufficient propositions.

(de Bary 2002, 154–5)

The problems with de Bary's interpretation of Reid are twofold. First, he is approaching Reid's epistemology in too black-and-white of terms: *either* Reid is a full-blown foundationalist, *or* he is a full-blown coherentist.²⁵ It is possible to hold a reasonable position that combines elements of both foundationalism and coherentism.²⁶ Second, by approaching Reid in these terms, de Bary is caught in the difficult position of having to dismiss, reinterpret, or count as contradictory various passages in Reid. These interpretive gymnastics are largely avoidable, I submit, if Reid is allowed to speak for himself rather than being forced into that box with which he has the greatest affinity. By arguing that Reid's epistemology contains coherentist strands, I do not wish to suggest that coherence is the primary, let alone the only, source of justification. By itself, the justification supplied by coherence is not sufficient to justify a belief to the level required for knowledge, nor is it necessary for knowledge, at least in normal, non-skeptical contexts. I wish to argue merely that for Reid, the value of coherence is not simply the absence of defeaters—that is, the value of consistency. Coherence has positive epistemic value for Reid and it can boost, though not supplant, the justification of beliefs formed according to his externalist criteria.

One instance of coherentist justification in Reid's epistemology is the correspondence of visible and tangible figure. Reid is here discussing two means of sensory perception, the visual and the tactile:

²⁵ De Bary is aware that he is "[w]orking . . . with . . . rather 'broad-brushed' dichotomies" (2002, 155), and he cites an unpublished paper by Keith Lehrer and John-Christian Smith where they "used these passages to emphasize a hitherto unnoticed coherentist strand in Reid's thought," although de Bary follows Daniel Schulthess in marginalizing this (2002, 163, note 3). These considerations do little, however, to moderate de Bary's rather cut-and-dried interpretation of Reid. For Schulthess' discussion of the unpublished paper by Keith Lehrer and John-Christian Smith, see Schulthess (1989, 193–203).

²⁶ Susan Haack's foundherentism is one example of such a combination; see, for example, Haack (2009). See also Plantinga (1993, 180) and DeRose (2005).

Hence it is evident, that the visible figure and extension of objects is so far from being incompatible with the tangible, that the first is a necessary consequence of the last, in beings that see as we do. The correspondence between them is not arbitrary . . . ; but it results necessarily from the nature of the two senses; and this *correspondence* being always found in experience to be exactly what the rules of perspective show that it ought to be if the senses give true information, *is an argument of the truth of both*. (EIP II xix, 225; emphases added)

Reid does not here say that the correspondence between the visual and tactile senses gives further justification for the truth of some particular deliverance of both. For example, Reid is not saying that seeing an apple gives justification for believing the apple exists, and feeling the apple gives additional justification for believing it exists. This would make sense on simple foundationalism: each sense provides further justification for the deliverance of the other, for the same belief can be legitimately and independently arrived at through both senses. What Reid does say here is that the correspondence between the visual and tactile senses “is an argument for the truth of both” *senses*. It is not the case that one receives further justification for believing either sense is reliable because its reliability is foundationally inferable from the reliability of the other. Rather, it is awareness of the “*correspondence*” between them and their deliverances that gives one further reason for considering both senses veridical. In short, one receives further justification for the veridicality of both senses on coherentist, not foundationalist, grounds. The value of the coherence is not reducible to the value of mere consistency, or the absence of defeaters. Coherence has positive epistemic value, and “is an argument for the truth of” that which coheres.

For Reid, such circular reasoning does not and cannot get one epistemically off the ground. But once one is epistemically off the ground on externalist grounds, such circular reasoning can give one some *further* justification for trusting one’s faculties. In most situations, such further justification is not necessary for knowledge; it makes one’s belief super-justified. But such justification may be important or necessary for knowledge in certain situations. For instance, perhaps I have a partial defeater for a belief. As a result, this belief no longer has sufficient justification to count as knowledge. In this situation, circular, coherence-building reasoning might supply the additional justification needed for my belief to return to the status of knowledge.

Moreover, such circular reasoning can also give one rational access to a reason for trusting one’s faculties. Circular, coherence-building reasoning can enable one to give a reason for believing various first principles and trusting one’s faculties. This is not one’s original justification, and even now it does not supply most of one’s justification, which is externalist. But it nonetheless is an articulable reason, and one that boosts one’s justification.

While Reid is not a simple coherentist, neither is he a simple foundationalist. He is a foundationalist with a limited role for considerations of coherence.

6 Coherence and Theism in Reid's Epistemology

This conclusion—that Reid is not a simple foundationalist—sheds new light on the question of the role of theism in Reid's epistemology. I will show that for Reid theism provides some justification, via coherence, for believing that our faculties are generally veridical. I then develop Reid's position by both contrasting it to his interpretation of Descartes' circle and briefly comparing it to what Descartes seems actually to be doing in his circle.

6.1 Coherentist theistic arguments that our faculties are veridical

Some passages provide fairly clear support for the conclusion that theism, via coherence, supplies some justification for believing that our faculties are veridical. This conclusion in turn allows us to make sense of numerous other passages that would be difficult to account for on simple foundationalism. One clear passage comes from Reid's *Inquiry*:

I consider this instinctive belief [in “the informations of Nature [given] by my senses”] as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark. And *now* I yield to the direction of my senses, *not from instinct only*, but *from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness*. (IHM VI xx, 170; emphases added)

Previously, Reid had yielded to his sensory perceptions “from instinct only.” These beliefs were justified on externalist and foundationalist grounds. While Reid still justifiably believes the deliverances of his perceptual faculties on these grounds, he now trusts them “not from instinct only.” He now has *additional* justification for his perceptual beliefs—namely, his “confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor.” Reid's belief in a beneficent God is, as he states here, “grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness”—in other words, upon Reid's experiences via his perceptual faculties. Since Reid elsewhere gives arguments for the existence and perfections of God, his “confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor” is also grounded upon theistic arguments—arguments which are also based on his perceptions. Reid's theistic reasons for trusting his perceptual beliefs are circular: based on perceptual beliefs, he believes in God's existence and goodness, and this belief gives him further justification for his perceptual beliefs. This inference is circular—viciously circular, if Reid were a simple foundationalist, but virtuously circular since his epistemology contains coherentist strands and these circles are coherence-building and hence justification-generating.

Reid further explains his trust in his faculties as grounded upon his experience of God's “paternal care and goodness.” He does so by comparing his trust of his God-given faculties to his trust of testimony:

In all this, I deal with the Author of my being, no otherwise than I thought it reasonable to deal with my parents and tutors. I believed by instinct whatever they told me, long before I had the idea of a lie, or thought of the possibility of their deceiving me. Afterwards, upon reflection, I found they had acted like fair and honest people who wished me well. I found, that if I had not believed what they told me, before I could give a reason of my belief, I had to this day been little better than a changeling . . . And I continue to give that credit, from reflection, to those of whose integrity and veracity I have had experience, which before I gave from instinct.

(IHM VI xx, 170–1)

Reid instinctively but with justification believed what his senses told him before he could “give a reason” for these beliefs. Now, he continues to believe what his senses tell him not from instinct only, but “from reflection” upon the “fair and honest” way that God has treated him. He is using perceptual beliefs to arrive at a theistic reason for his perceptual beliefs. This is circular, and on foundationalism would not boost the justification of his perceptual beliefs. But because Reid has coherentist strands in his epistemology, his reflections build the coherence of his beliefs and this generates some justification for the cohering beliefs. In this way theistic, coherence-building reasoning boosts the justification of Reid’s perceptual first principles.

In the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid again emphasizes that the original justification of our perceptual beliefs is non-inferential and based on the proper functioning of our faculties. Theism does not play a role in our original, instinctive knowledge, for such knowledge is justified on externalist grounds and is possessed by the atheist as well as the theist. Nevertheless, the theist does have an *additional* reason to believe the deliverances of his constitution, and this boosts the justification of his perceptual first principles. But this justification-boosting is difficult to make sense of on simple foundationalism:

In believing upon testimony, we rely upon the authority of a person who testifies: But we have no such authority for believing our senses.

Shall we say then that this belief is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in a good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is *persuaded that he is the workmanship of God*, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that *a good reason to confirm his belief*: But he had the belief before he could give this or any other reason for it.

(EIP II xx, 231–2; emphases added)

The atheist and the theist both form perceptual beliefs from instinct, and with justification. But the theist has “a good reason to confirm his belief.” This reason is his belief that God has created him and constituted him to form perceptual beliefs. And how does the theist come by this belief? Through perceptual beliefs. He confirms his perceptual beliefs through theistic reasoning based on his perceptual beliefs. This is circular. If Reid were a simple foundationalist, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain how such circular reasoning can boost the justification of perceptual beliefs.

But because coherence is a source of justification and such reasoning is coherence-building, it generates some justification for the beliefs involved. Once again, theism gives Reid some further justification which we can readily make sense of in coherentist terms.

Reid's epistemology is plausibly understood as containing coherentist elements. While coherentist justification is not the primary form of justification and is not in general necessary or sufficient for knowledge, it is present, and can boost the justification of first principles. Interpreting Reid's epistemology as containing coherentist elements makes sense of otherwise problematic passages, and it helps explain how theism can boost the justification of first principles.

6.2 *Reid versus Descartes as interpreted by Reid*

Reid is very critical of Descartes' circle (as interpreted by Reid). How does Reid's circle differ from Descartes', allowing it to be virtuous while Descartes' is vicious? Reid thinks Descartes is attempting to withhold assent to the deliverances of his faculties until he proves they are veridical. Descartes then attempts to get epistemically off the ground by using circular theistic arguments to prove that at least some of his faculties are veridical. Reid's key critique of Descartes comes within his discussion of the seventh contingent first principle: "the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious." Reid writes,

If any man should *demand* a proof of this, it is impossible to satisfy him. For suppose it should be mathematically demonstrated, this would signify nothing in this case; because, to judge of a demonstration, a man must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question. . . .

If a Sceptic should build his scepticism upon *this* foundation, that all our reasoning and judging powers *are fallacious in their nature*, or should resolve at least to *with-hold assent* until it be proved that they are not; it would be impossible by argument to beat him out of this strong hold, and he must even be left to enjoy his scepticism.

Des Cartes certainly made a false step in this matter; for having suggested this doubt among others, that whatever evidence he might have from his consciousness, his senses, his memory, or his reason; yet possibly some malignant being had given him those faculties on purpose to impose upon him; and therefore, that they *are not to be trusted without a proper voucher*: To remove *this doubt*, he endeavours to prove the being of a Deity who is no deceiver; whence he concludes, that the faculties he had given him are true and worthy to be trusted.

It is strange that so acute a reasoner did not perceive, that in this reasoning there is evidently a begging of the question.

For if our faculties *be fallacious*; why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others? And if they are to be trusted in this instance without a voucher, why not in others?

(EIP VI v, 480–1; emphases added)

Reid's critique is aimed at radical skeptics, those who "demand" a proof that their faculties are not fallacious, who "withhold assent" until they receive such a proof, who think their faculties "are not to be trusted without a proper voucher." Reid's point is

that one cannot get oneself epistemically off the ground; one cannot reason oneself into justification out of a justificatory vacuum. One must already be epistemically off the ground, and Reid thinks that this is possible only via externalist foundationalism, only if one is non-inferentially justified in believing the natural deliverances of one's faculties. Then, and only then, can one give reasons that justify trusting one's faculties. But these reasons only give further justification for what one was already justified in believing, and they are not necessary for knowledge in most situations. For Reid, theism, via coherence, can strengthen and boost the justification of beliefs at all levels of the superstructure of knowledge, but the superstructure still requires a foundation. The foundation, however, is moderate and broad. It does not require indubitable certainty like Descartes'.

6.3 Reid and Descartes: two levels of knowledge

Various scholars have defended Descartes' circle against the charge of vicious circularity based on a distinction between two levels or kinds of knowledge, *cognitionem* and *scientia*.²⁷ In Descartes' "Second Set of Replies," he writes,

The fact that an atheist can be "clearly aware [*clare cognoscere*] that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles" is something I do not dispute. But I maintain that this awareness [*cognitionem*] of his is not true knowledge [*scientia*], since no act of awareness that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge. Now since we are supposing that this individual is an atheist, he cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him to be very evident . . . And although this doubt may not occur to him, it can still crop up if someone else raises the point or if he looks into the matter himself. So he will never be free of this doubt until he acknowledges that God exists. (Descartes 1984, 101)

Descartes thinks an atheist can have a kind of knowledge, *cognitionem*, but only a theist can have "true knowledge," or *scientia*. Drawing from Keith DeRose and James Van Cleve, we can distinguish these two levels of knowledge as follows. The atheist and the theist have *cognitionem* of particular propositions, such as "the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles," by virtue of their beliefs falling under the following epistemic principle: "(A) For all *P*, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that *P*, then I am certain that *P*" (Van Cleve 1979, 66). *Cognitionem* does not require that I believe this epistemic principle; the simple fact that it is true and that my clear and distinct perception that *p* falls under it guarantees that I am certain that *p*, that I have *cognitionem* of *p*. *Scientia* of *p*, however, requires that I both (1) clearly and distinctly perceive that *p*, and (2) clearly and distinctly perceive the general epistemic principle that whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true (DeRose 1992, 224).²⁸ That is,

²⁷ See, for example, DeRose (1992) and Sosa (2009). While James Van Cleve does not similarly distinguish *cognitionem* and *scientia*, he makes some very relevant distinctions in Van Cleve (1979).

²⁸ DeRose later adds the following condition for *scientia*: "one must also meet *some* further requirement to the effect that one recognizes the connection between the general principle that what one clearly and distinctly perceives is true and one's belief that *p*" (1992, 227).

scientia of *p* requires both *cognitionem* of *p* and *cognitionem* of the general epistemic principle (A). In the Cartesian circle, Descartes begins with *cognitionem* of particular propositions. He reasons from these to the existence of a non-deceptive God, and from there he comes to have *cognitionem* that whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives is true. He now has *scientia* of the particular propositions with which he began. Since the *cognitionem* that the circle presupposes is different from the *scientia* that it delivers, it is not viciously circular. According to Descartes, a distinguishing mark of the theist's *scientia* is its indubitable nature; it cannot be rendered doubtful. The theist not only knows *p*. He knows that he knows *p*.

While I am unaware of any passage where Reid makes a similarly explicit distinction between two kinds of knowledge, I think that Descartes' distinction illuminates a similar one implicit in Reid's epistemology. Similar to Descartes' distinction between *cognitionem* and *scientia*, Reid distinguishes knowledge of the sort possessed by everyone from knowledge that is bolstered by theistic considerations. I will call the latter *theistic knowledge*. Theistic knowledge not only gives one some added justification, but gives one a *reason* to think that one's faculties are veridical.²⁹ Borrowing from Ernest Sosa's discussion of Descartes, we can say that for Reid theistic knowledge yields "an epistemic perspective on himself and his world, through which he might confidently trust his faculties" (Sosa 2009, 141). Theistic knowledge both has intrinsic epistemic value and can be epistemically valuable in certain circumstances, such as if one worries that one's perceptual faculties are fallacious.

Reid most clearly discusses theistic knowledge in the following key, neglected passage from the *Active Powers*. Reid has been discussing the two leading and rational principles of action, "a regard to our happiness upon the whole, and a regard to duty." He writes,

As to the supposition of an opposition between the two governing principles, . . . this supposition is merely imaginary. There can be no such opposition.

While the world is under a wise and benevolent administration, it is impossible, that any man should, in the issue, be a loser by doing his duty. Every man, therefore, who believes in God, while he is careful to do his duty, may safely leave the care of his happiness to him who made him. He is conscious that he consults the last most effectually by attending to the first.

Indeed, if we suppose a man to be an atheist in his belief, and, at the same time, by wrong judgment, to believe that virtue is contrary to his happiness upon the whole, this case . . . is without remedy. . . He must either sacrifice his happiness to virtue, or virtue to happiness; and is reduced to this miserable dilemma, whether it be best to be a fool or a knave.

This shews the strong connect between morality and the principles of natural religion; as the last only can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty. (EAP III iii.viii, 194)³⁰

²⁹ Reid's theistic knowledge, however, may not deliver Cartesian indubitability.

³⁰ While I do not deny that Reid frequently notes the importance of theism to moral motivation, the passages quoted here are primarily concerned with moral *epistemology*. They therefore have direct relevance to the role of theism in Reid's epistemology more generally.

The atheist, like the theist, may believe happiness and duty are never opposed. This is similar to how Descartes' atheist geometer possesses *cognitionem*. But as Descartes' atheist geometer "will never be free of this doubt [or potential doubt based on the possibility that he is being deceived] until he acknowledges that God exists," so similarly for Reid only theism "can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty." Similar to *scientia*, theistic knowledge provides a favorable perspective on one's epistemic situation and defends one against many potentially undermining skeptical worries.

7 Conclusion

Each of the three common views of the role of theism in Reid's epistemology—dogmatism, vicious circularity, and justificatory irrelevance—is lacking. Contra Somerville, Baumann, and Rysiew, I have argued that Reid's first principles can and sometimes do receive an inferential boost in their justification. I have shown that, even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology, theism can supply noncircular justification for certain basic sources of knowledge. Moreover, while Reid's epistemology is externalist and foundationalist, it is not *simply* foundationalist, for it contains coherentist strands. For Reid, theism, via coherence, provides some justification for thinking that all our faculties are veridical, and it allows for a kind of knowledge similar to Descartes' *scientia*. I have not argued that theism has an epistemically essential role or that nothing else could play the same or a similar role.³¹ Nonetheless, it is clear that for Reid theism can and does provide some justification for thinking our faculties are veridical, and it does so in philosophically respectable ways.³²

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³¹ Alvin Plantinga argues that theism is vital to epistemologies like Reid's in Plantinga (1993).

³² I thank Todd Buras, Dan Johnson, Adam Pelser, and Becko Copenhaver for many helpful comments on previous versions of this essay.

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12

Does Reid Have Anything to Say to (the New) Hume?

Terence Cuneo

1 Introduction

Thomas Reid is partially responsible for an interpretation of Hume according to which Hume is an epistemological skeptic, harbors idealist sympathies, and rejects the existence of robust causation in the world. While Reid's interpretation has powerfully shaped our present-day understanding of Hume, it has come under increasing pressure from Hume scholars. According to these philosophers, the traditional Reidian interpretation misrepresents Hume's views. A close and sympathetic reading of Hume, these philosophers contend, would reveal that Hume is neither a skeptic nor a metaphysical antirealist. Rather, Hume is merely an epistemological fallibilist who believes that there is a ready-made world stitched together by robust causal connections.¹

This disagreement is recapitulated in discussions of Hume's metaethics. According to the traditional Reidian interpretation, Hume's metaethical views are also broadly skeptical and antirealist. Under this reading, Hume is a noncognitivist regarding ethical judgments, an instrumentalist about practical reason, and a proponent of the claim that evaluative judgments cannot be deduced from any set of purely factual premises. While deeply influential, this reading of Hume has also come under attack from Hume scholars. A close and careful look at Hume's moral philosophy, these philosophers maintain, would reveal a Hume very different from that presented by the traditional Reidian reading. Far from being a moral skeptic or a robust ethical antirealist, advocates of the "new" Hume claim, Hume believes in the existence of genuine moral properties that we can directly apprehend.²

My concern in this essay is Reid's understanding of Hume's metaethical views. I am not, however, primarily interested in defending Reid's interpretation of Hume's

¹ See, among others, Kemp Smith (1941), Strawson (1989), and Wright (1983). A nice introduction to the issues is in Read and Richman (2000).

² See, for example, Cohon (2008), Kail (2007), Norton (1982) and Sturgeon (2008).

metaethical views. In fact, on this occasion, I am going to grant that advocates of the new Hume are correct in their contention that it is largely mistaken, assuming that Reid misrepresents fundamental aspects of Hume's position. Does it follow that Reid's engagement with Hume is merely a historical curiosity, a dramatic example of how one excellent philosopher can misunderstand another? Or do there remain important points of disagreement between Hume and Reid that Reid himself recognized—points of disagreement in which Reid has something to say to Hume? That is my topic.

2 The Common Reading

Philosophers have long grumbled about Reid's interpretation of Hume. In the early 1940s, for example, Norman Kemp Smith began his now classic *The Philosophy of David Hume* by vigorously arguing that the traditional Reidian interpretation of Hume is fundamentally mistaken. The key to understanding Hume, argued Kemp Smith, is to see his views as a variant of Hutcheson's sentimentalism.³ Kemp Smith's suggestion that we should situate Hume within the broadly sentimentalist tradition is central to recent attempts to rescue Hume's metaethical views from the reading that Reid championed. By far and away the most sustained and probing of such attempts is Rachel Cohon's recent book *Hume's Morality*.⁴ Let us begin, then, by having the core components of the interpretation that Cohon wishes to reject—what she calls the “common reading” of Hume—before us.

According to the common reading, Hume endorses these three theses:

Inertness. Mere cognitive states such as beliefs cannot move us to action; motivation requires the presence of an affective state, which is not itself entirely generated by a belief.

Noncognitivism. Moral judgments do not express moral propositions but mere feelings, which themselves cannot be true or false.

Fact/Value Gap. Evaluative judgments cannot be inferred or deduced from any set of purely factual premises.

To these three claims, we can add another that is commonly attributed to Hume and which Cohon discusses, namely:

No Moral Motives. For every virtue, there is some non-moral motive—some motivating passion distinct from moral approval and disapproval—that

³ Kemp Smith (1941, ch. 1).

⁴ Cohon (2008). I will insert page references to Cohon's book in the text. In her discussion, Cohon is primarily interested in developing her own interpretation of Hume. So, Cohon herself does not emphasize the extent to which Hume's views mirror Hutcheson's, although at various points she calls attention to similarities between their views. Kail (2007)—whose interpretation of Hume is very close to Cohon's—does, however. Moreover, Cohon does not delve into the history of the common reading of Hume and, so, does not explicitly attribute it to Reid. Reid is, however, the first to endorse the common reading, or at least central elements of it.

characteristically produces actions expressive of that virtue and that, by eliciting our approval, renders virtuous the actions that are so motivated.⁵

Reid does not attribute the first claim, Inertness, to Hume; he has relatively little to say about Hume's views regarding the motivational role of beliefs. But Reid does attribute the other three claims to Hume. For example, in Essay V of *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, Reid explicitly attributes Noncognitivism to Hume, writing that, in Hume's view, "moral approbation and disapprobation are not judgments, which must be true or false, but barely, agreeable and uneasy feelings or sensations" (EAP V vii, 345). Later in this same essay, Reid maintains that Hume not only accepts Fact/Value Gap but also charges rationalists with having violated this principle by attempting to derive normative conclusions from merely descriptive premises (EAP V vii, 354–5). Finally, Reid attributes to Hume No Moral Motives, maintaining that Hume endorses the "maxim that no action can be virtuous or morally good, unless there be, in human nature, some motive to produce it distinct from its morality" (EAP V vi, 337).

Reid believes these claims, which constitute the common reading of Hume, to imply "shocking absurdities" (EAP V vi, 337). However that may be, the common reading has proven to be both alluring and influential—so much so that Cohon says that one of the main challenges of writing her book was to free herself of it.⁶ Still, Cohon claims, this reading is mistaken. For when read with care and charity, we can see that Hume endorses none of the four claims stated above.

But if the common reading of Hume is mistaken, what positive views does Hume defend? Under Cohon's interpretation, Hume develops a position that she calls the moral sensing view (Cohon, 2008, ch. 4). For our purposes, we can think of the moral sensing view as including two central claims, both of which concern the role of affect.

The first claim is that our basic awareness of vice and virtue—these being the primary ethical categories with which Hume works—is a direct apprehension by feeling. Feelings, under this reading, function as intermediaries between moral qualities and the agents that apprehend them; they provide epistemic access to the moral facts. When all goes well, these feelings produce moral ideas or judgments, which themselves can be corrected by taking up what Hume calls "the common point of view"—this being, roughly, a suitable standpoint from which we can revise and correct our moral judgments. The second claim constitutive of the moral sensing view is that the moral properties sensed just are dispositions to produce these feelings. In contemporary parlance, they are response-dependent qualities.⁷

⁵ See Cohon (2008). I've modified Cohon's own wording.

⁶ See Cohon (2008, 5). Elsewhere, Cohon writes: "Like others who were trained as academic philosophers, I was educated to take the common reading of Hume's metaethics for granted. I have found it very hard to break free of its hold, and can slip back into reading Hume that way without noticing it" (13).

⁷ "We will find that in the *Treatise* Hume says only a little about what moral good and evil themselves are, and most of that is about what they are not. But one crucial passage shows him to believe that moral properties are essentially reaction-dependent properties: they depend for their existence on the emotional responses of sensitive beings" (100; see also 112, 115, 124). Cohon discusses the common point of view in ch. 5. See also Cohon's discussion of Hume's account of moral properties (113–25).

The implications of attributing the moral sensing view to Hume should be apparent. If Hume embraces this position, then he is not an ethical noncognitivist, since moral judgments have genuine moral propositional content. Nor is Hume a moral nihilist, since he believes that there are moral properties. Once we see this, says Cohon, other features of Hume's view fall into place. Consider, for example, the third thesis presented above, Fact/Value Gap. Scholars have long thought that, in the famous is–ought paragraph from the *Treatise*, Hume advocates the view that an ought cannot be validly inferred from is.⁸ But, says Cohon, when Hume attacks the “vulgar moralists” in this passage, he is not making a point about the logical relationship between descriptive and evaluative concepts. Rather, he is making an epistemic point. Hume is simply telling us that we apprehend moral features not by reasoning but by feeling. In so doing, Hume is pointing us to an important difference between his view and those of the rationalists (Cohon 2008, 92–5).

But this is not the only important difference between Hume's view and those of the rationalists. Rationalists have typically claimed not only that we grasp moral truths via reason, but also that this grasp is sufficient to motivate us to virtuous action. According to the fourth thesis stated above, No Moral Motive, Hume rejects this claim, telling us that the virtuous are motivated not by moral judgments but cognitive states that do not have moral propositional content, such as the conviction that by acting in a certain way would benefit others. Understandably, Hume's commentators have long puzzled over the claim that the virtuous are motivated by only their non-moral convictions.⁹ Take the virtue of honesty with respect to property—what Hume calls justice—for example. What would be the non-moral motive that characteristically motivates just people? It might make sense to say that the benevolent person is characteristically motivated by a concern for the welfare of others. But, on the face of things, this is not the sort of motive that would express the virtue of justice. Rather often we must abide by rules of fairness with respect to the distribution of goods even when we know that it will not benefit anyone. This leaves Hume with a problem.

According to Cohon, however, Hume's commentators needn't puzzle so. For a close reading reveals that Hume does not embrace No Moral Motive. Rather, he endorses a weaker thesis that concerns only the so-called natural virtues—these being, roughly, those traits that are not socially invented but are the manifestation of a familiar feature of human nature (Cohon 2008, 162). According to this weaker thesis, every natural virtue is such that there is some non-moral motive that characteristically produces actions expressive of that virtue. However, with regard to the so-called artificial virtues, such as honesty and justice, Hume's view is different. With regard to actions expressive of these virtues, he allows that agents can be motivated by their moral convictions.

⁸ Hume (2007), 3.1.1.27. In his discussion of Fact/Value Gap in EAP V vii, Reid quotes this passage.

⁹ Cohon discusses the attempts of several commentators, such as Darwall and Gauthier, to make sense of Hume's views (2008, 183–9).

Return, once again, to the virtue of justice (or honesty with respect to property). Hume's account of the genesis of this virtue, Cohon contends, falls into two parts. In the first part, Hume hypothesizes that the effects of greed and self-interest induce us to invent a system of rules for the distribution of goods and evils, benefits and burdens, rewards and punishments. We realize soon enough that conformance to this system of rules is in our best interest. In the second part, Hume claims that the mechanism of sympathy naturally leads the members of society to feel approval for behavior that conforms to the rules and disapproval for behavior that doesn't. Through an elaborate process of social conditioning, this "sympathy with the public interest" is transformed into a deeply rooted abhorrence of rule-breaking behavior. This abhorrence is so strong, in fact, that it is not readily overcome in any particular instance of greed or self-interest (Cohon 2008, 173–5).

In short, when social conditioning has done its work, we develop what Hume calls a "sense of honor." This sense of honor, moreover, is not only expressive of the virtue of justice, but also reliably produces just actions. Under the moral sensing view, this motive counts as virtuous since it is the sort of thing that elicits our approval from the common point of view. If this is right, Hume can say that, with regard to the artificial virtues—roughly, those virtues that are socially invented—there are moral motives that are expressive of those virtues. An unqualified version of No Moral Motive, in Hume's view, is false.

I began our discussion by noting that the scholarly literature presents us with two Humes: the old, traditional Hume and the new Hume. Reid's Hume, we saw, is the old Hume, a noncognitivist who endorses both Fact/Value Gap and No Moral Motive. Reid, arguably, has some telling points to make against the old Hume, criticisms that have been developed with increasing sophistication by more contemporary philosophers. But if Cohon's interpretation of Hume is correct—and let me register my own conviction that she makes a powerful case in its favor—then many of Reid's objections lie wide of the mark. And, so, we return to our leading question: suppose that Reid's interpretation of Hume's metaethical views is largely mistaken. Does Reid have anything to say to Hume, at least with regard to broadly metaethical issues? Or should we view the last part of *Essays on the Active Powers* as an especially vivid example of one philosopher failing to understand another?

3 Reid on Hume

It would be miraculous—a lucky fluke—if Reid has something to say to Hume but nonetheless misinterpreted him on nearly every point of importance. If so, our task is to look for points of agreement between Reid's interpretation of Hume and that offered by advocates of the new Hume, such as Cohon. Are there any such points?

There are. Reid begins chapter V of *Essays on the Active Powers* by noting that, for Hume,

moral approbation or disapprobation is not an act of the judgment . . . it is only a certain feeling, which, from the constitution of human nature, arises upon contemplating certain qualities of mind coolly and impartially.

This feeling, when agreeable, is moral approbation; when disagreeable, disapprobation. The qualities of mind which produce this agreeable feeling are the moral virtues, and those that produce the disagreeable, the vices. (EAP V v, 301–2)

In this passage, Reid presents Hume as a virtue theorist. It is “qualities of mind” or character traits, in Hume’s view, that elicit states of moral approbation and disapprobation. Reid then claims that, for Hume, “all personal merit, all virtue, all that is the object of moral approbation, consists in the qualities of mind which are agreeable or useful to the person who possesses them, or to others” (EAP V v, 302). But, Reid continues,

the addition of utility to pleasure, as a foundation of morals, makes only a verbal, but no real difference. What is useful only has not value in itself, but derives all its merit from the end for which it is useful. That end, in this system, is agreeableness or pleasure. (EAP V v, 302)

It follows that, in Hume’s view, “pleasure is the only end, the only thing that is good in itself, and desirable for its own sake; and virtue derives all its merit from its tendency to produce pleasure” (EAP V v, 302).

Reid, then, interprets Hume as a hedonist. Under Reid’s interpretation, when Hume offers his account of the artificial virtues, he is not simply doing descriptive psychology, telling us that states of pleasure and pain move the virtuous agent. Rather, Hume is telling us that pleasure and pain are genuine values, the sorts of things that warrant our acquiring and possessing traits of certain kinds. It is easy to imagine that this marks a difference between Reid’s interpretation of Hume and that of advocates of the new Hume, such as Cohon. But it doesn’t. Reid and Cohon agree that Hume is a hedonist.¹⁰ Since this aspect of Hume’s view lies at the core of the dispute between Reid and Hume, it is worth taking a closer look at it.

Run your mind over the various states and activities that are goods or evils in an ordinary human life—goods such as bodily freedom and health, on the one hand, and evils such as forced confinement and illness, on the other. According to Reid, Hume’s view is that a state or activity counts as a life-good in virtue of its either being a state of pleasure or being such as to elicit a state of pleasure in someone who considers it “coolly and impartially.” Correlatively, a state or activity counts as a life-evil in virtue of its either being a state of pain or being such as to elicit a state of pain in someone who considers it in the right conditions. How do we distinguish the various life-goods and life-evils from one another? How, for example, do we distinguish those life-goods that are virtues from other life-goods? And how do we distinguish those

¹⁰ Here is Cohon: “Hume is a hedonist, in the sense that he takes the good in life to be pleasure and the evil to be pain or uneasiness; and in the end, the only warrant for any motivating passion, any reaction and any quality of mind we have is its role in the generation of pleasure and the avoidance of pain” (2008, 158; see also 33ff.).

life-evils that are vices from other life-evils? Under Reid's interpretation of Hume, what distinguishes those life-goods that are virtues from others is the type of pleasure sensation they elicit. Likewise, what distinguishes those life-evils that are vices from others is the type of pain sensation they evoke. The difference, in Hume's view, is primarily phenomenological.¹¹

Reid is deeply out of sympathy with this way of individuating virtues and vices. But rather than develop his misgivings, he focuses his critical attention on what Hume says about the artificial virtues in particular, among which Hume includes the virtue of justice. Reid, it should be noted, expresses uncertainty about whether Hume intends to offer an account of justice broadly understood or merely certain dimensions of justice, such as honesty and fidelity to contracts (EAP V v, 314–15).¹² What he does say about Hume's account, however, resembles the interpretation offered by Cohon. This interpretation attributes to Hume a two-part thesis. The first is that implementing rules for such things as the distribution of property—call them the *rules of distributive justice*—is justified by the fact that conformance to them has considerable utility. It allows us to avoid serious evils, such as societal chaos, and enjoy goods, such as harmonious societal conditions. These goods and evils, in turn, are to be understood along hedonist lines, as either being hedonic states themselves or being such as to elicit them in suitable observers. The second thesis is that conformance to these rules counts as a virtue because it elicits approbation from the common point of view.

Fundamental to Reid's engagement with Hume's metaethical views is the contention that this two-part thesis is false. It will not function, as Reid puts it, as a "foundation for morals" (EAP V v, 302). Admittedly, Reid's attempts to articulate what he finds unsatisfactory about this dimension of Hume's views can appear less than compelling. As an opening objection, Reid writes that "agreeableness and utility are not moral conceptions, nor have they any connection with morality. What a man does, merely because it is agreeable, or useful to procure what is agreeable, is not virtue" (EAP V v, 302). But, Reid continues, "every action takes its denomination from the motive that produces it; so no action can properly be denominated an act of justice, unless it be done from a regard to justice" (EAP V v, 311). Since, however, "the notion of duty be a simple conception, of its own kind, and of a different nature from the conceptions of utility and agreeableness" (EAP V v, 304), it follows that, if Hume's view were right, we could never perform just actions. Ultimately, we could perform actions only in light of the fact that they are agreeable or useful.

¹¹ What exactly is the phenomenological difference? Hume sheds little light on the matter—although see Cohon's discussion (2008, 105).

¹² This uncertainty does not, however, prevent Reid from pressing Hume. Charitably reconstructed, Reid's full worry is this. Either Hume is offering us an account of justice that is supposed to generalize to matters commonly thought of as falling under the domain of justice or he isn't. If he is, his view is deficient, as what he says about fidelity to contracts and property does not generalize, even to such "property-ish" things such as one's reputation. If he isn't giving us a complete account, then his view is also deficient because substantially incomplete. Either way, Hume has left us in the lurch concerning a central component of the moral life. See EAP V v, 324.

Reid supplements this objection with a second argument. According to this argument,

if there were no other argument to prove, that the obligation of justice is not solely derived from its utility to procure what is agreeable either to ourselves or to society, this would be sufficient, that the very conception of justice implies its obligation. The morality of justice is included in the very idea of it: nor is it possible that the conception of justice can enter into the human mind, without carrying along with it the conception of duty and moral obligation. Its obligation, therefore, is inseparable from its nature, and is not derived entirely from its utility, either to ourselves or to society. (EAP V v, 311)

Neither of these objections appears to be particularly powerful. Consider the first. The problem in this case is that the objection appears not to make contact with Hume's views. For suppose we distinguish a motive for action from its justification. A motive is that in light of which an agent acts, his reason for acting. Motives are that of which an agent is ordinarily aware when acting. A justification for a motive, by contrast, is what justifies an agent to act from a type of motive. A justification for a motive is often such that an agent is not aware of it when acting.

According to philosophers such as Cohon, when presenting his views regarding the artificial virtues, Hume offers an account of both motives and their justification. The just person's motive is a sense of honor, an abhorrence of breaking the rules of distributive justice. The justification for having motives of that type, however, is that acting from such motives has tremendous utility. Reid, in effect, objects that if an agent is just, the justification that Hume offers cannot function as an agent's motive to be just. But the obvious reply is that Hume doesn't intend it to so function. In general, the grounds or justification for a motive needn't itself be an agent's motive.

The second argument appears not to fare much better. In this argument, Reid points to an apparent conceptual connection between an action's being just for an agent and her having an obligation to perform it. He then goes on to claim that if the rules of justice were grounded in utility, then this connection would not hold. This may be so, of course. But in the passage quoted, Reid provides no argument for this claim. In other places, however, Reid seems to indicate that any attempt to offer an account of justice in terms of utility must come to grief, since the "notion of duty" is "simple" and "of a different nature from the conceptions of utility and agreeableness" (EAP V v, 304). But if this is Reid's point, it is difficult to see why Hume would be moved by it. Charitably understood, Hume is not claiming that our notion of justice is identical with that which produces utility. His claim is that considerations of utility are what account for our formulating the rules of distributive justice. Hume's story about the emergence of justice is primarily a genealogical one.

In sum, we have discovered an important point of agreement between Reid's interpretation of Hume and that offered by advocates of the new Hume, such as Cohon. Both maintain that Hume is a hedonist. Both maintain, moreover, that Hume offers an account of the rules of distributive justice—these rules being justified by the fact

that conformance to them allows us to avoid considerable evils and enjoy important goods. Finally, both agree that, according to Hume, an agent's tendency to conform to these rules counts as a virtue because it elicits approval from the common point of view. Still, when articulating his reasons for rejecting this position, Reid does not look at his best. Reid seems to overlook important nuances in Hume's view, such as the fact that, according to Hume, just agents do not act from the conviction that their actions tend to have considerable utility.

We need, however, to take a more careful look at what Reid is up to. For when we situate the passages quoted above against the larger tapestry of argument in *Essays on the Active Powers*, a rather different interpretation of the source of Reid's dissatisfaction emerges.

4 Where the Difference Lies

Reid has bold and ambitious claims to defend in the *Essays on the Active Powers*, claims about the nature of active power and moral reality. We, his readers, expect him to support these bold and ambitious claims with bold and ambitious arguments. However, rather often Reid appears not to oblige. Instead of furnishing novel arguments, he seems more interested in getting us to see how a range of interlocking normative concepts fits together.

Turn, for example, to Reid's defense of the claim that we are endowed with active power. Central to Reid's case is the thesis that a being has active power just in case it is the sort of thing that can rightly be held morally accountable for its actions and omissions (EAP IV vii, 239). What is it for an agent to be such that he or she can rightly be held morally accountable? In his discussion of accountability, Reid says little explicitly about the matter. But it is not difficult to see how he is thinking, as he picks up the matter later in his discussion of justice. Here Reid tells us that accountability is closely related to justice. "The notion of justice," in turn,

carries inseparably along with it, a perception of its moral obligation. For to say that such an action is an act of justice, that it is due, that it ought to be done, that we are under a moral obligation to do it, are only different ways of expressing the same thing. (EAP V v, 311)

So far, Reid has told us that the notions of active power, accountability, moral obligation, and justice bear intimate relations with one another—relations that allow us to recognize important constraints on what could count as an adequate account of justice. We can, Reid suggests, expand the circle of normative concepts yet wider. For consider the notion of being an injury. "A man," says Reid, can be injured in numerous ways, including "in his person, by wounding, maiming, or killing him" and "in his liberty, by confinement" (EAP V v, 312). When Reid says that a man can be injured, he is at pains to emphasize that this does not mean that a man can be hurt (EAP V v, 310). The difference between these concepts is that the former is a normative notion, while the latter is not. To harm someone is to cause that person pain, but to injure him is to render him less than what he is due; it is to violate a moral right that he has against

you (EAP III ii.v, 132). (Notably, Reid does not claim that something is an injury only if it involves causing pain. Reid does not rule out there being a category of painless injuries.) Referring to states such as enjoying the liberty to move one's body as one pleases, Reid says:

To say that he has a right to these things, has precisely the same meaning as to say, that justice requires that he should be permitted to enjoy them, or that it is unjust to violate them. For injustice is the violation of right, and justice is to yield to every man what is his right . . . what is really due to him. (EAP V v, 313, 311–12)

Reid is not content to stop here, however. The explicitly normative notions of 'being accountable' and 'being a right,' he says, are paired with affective states of certain kinds. To be accountable, Reid says, is to be the sort of thing that can be the proper object of attitudes such as resentment and indignation.¹³ Important for our purposes is Reid's observation that the immediate objects of resentment and indignation are not "things" such as propositions or states of affairs but persons (EAP III ii.iii, 108). If we keep in mind that, in Reid's view, one can be the rightful object of resentment, this is just another way for Reid to make the point that rights are always rights against other persons. Those obligations that are the correlatives of these rights, in turn, are always obligations to other persons. Rights and their correlative obligations are normative relations that people bear to one another.

Reid, then, has led us around a circle of moral concepts. 'Being accountable,' 'having a right,' 'being due another,' 'being obligated,' 'being just,' 'being injured,' 'being liable to resentment'—all these notions, Reid claims, can be understood in terms of one another. "They lie," says Reid, "as it were, in one line, and resemble the relations of greater, less, and equal. If one understands what is meant by one line being greater or less than another, he can be at no loss to understand what is meant by its being equal to the other" (EAP V v, 311). Reid, it should be noted, is not telling us that all normative notions are related in this way. Notions of prudence and benevolence, for example, are notably absent from Reid's circle. Rather, Reid is claiming that those concepts that cluster around our notion of justice are related in these ways. Suppose we shift away from Reid's own geometrical metaphor and instead think of these concepts as nodes in a network of normative notions, all of which reveal various dimensions of justice. Call this constellation of concepts the *network of primary justice*.¹⁴ Reid, in *Essays on the Active Powers*, is concerned to help us see the shape of this network. But why? Why does Reid go through the trouble of tracing the conceptual relations between the various members of our network of justice? What is the theoretical payoff of doing so?

The payoff, if Reid is right, is that once we have done so, we will have identified the parameters of any adequate account of justice. We can better see why Reid proceeds in the way he does by returning to what Hume says about justice.

¹³ At EAP III i.v, 167 Reid distinguishes "sudden" from "deliberate" resentment. In his discussion of justice, it is the latter notion that he has in mind.

¹⁴ I borrow the term "primary justice" from Wolterstorff (2008, Introduction), which uses the term to refer to both distributive and commutative but not rectifying justice.

Suppose we distinguish those actions that are required by justice, on the one hand, from the ground of these requirements, on the other. For present purposes, think of those actions that are required by justice as those actions such that an agent's performing (or, as the case may be, failing to perform) them would imply that he had thereby wronged another party. Alternatively, they are those actions such that someone has a right against an agent's performing (or, as the case may be, failing to perform) them. An example of such an action would be my preventing you from voicing your opinion in an ordinary conversation. The ground of such a requirement, by contrast, is that which accounts (at least in part) for an agent's being required to not act in this way or, alternatively, her having a right against an agent's acting in that way. In the example just used, a ground of your having a right against my preventing you from voicing your opinion might be that doing so would express profound disrespect towards you. In principle, different positions could offer different accounts of the grounds for the requirements of justice. Under Reid's interpretation, the account Hume offers is complex. It specifies that the ground of the requirements of justice consists in the implementation of certain conventional arrangements, those that specify that actions of certain types are required, forbidden, or permitted within a given domain. These conventional arrangements, in turn, are implemented on the basis of their being such that conformance to them yields (to those whom they apply) a highly favorable distribution of pains and pleasures. In short, under this interpretation, Hume is a rule-utilitarian of a certain kind with regard to justice.

Reid sometimes writes as if the problem with Hume's view is that it identifies the concept of 'being just' with that of 'being such as to produce the most utility' (EAP V v, 304).¹⁵ Earlier we saw that Hume would probably be unmoved by such a charge, as Hume's primary concern is not to offer an account of the concept 'being just' but rather to indicate how it is that the rules of justice emerged and how we might be motivated to conform to them. Charitably understood, however, Reid's charge is not that Hume has offered us an inadequate account of the meaning expressed by the phrase "being just." It is rather that Hume fails to offer us a satisfactory account of the grounds of justice. Any account of the grounds of justice, says Reid, must be such that not only is it compatible with the ways in which the various members of the network of justice are related. It should also shed light on why these relations hold, explaining such things as why it makes sense to resent those who have violated the rights of others. Hume's position, according to Reid, does not.

Reid offers two lines of argument that develop this charge, both of which converge on the claim that Hume's view provides the wrong reasons to be just. According to the first, we begin by considering the various ways in which a person can be injured:

A man may be injured, 1st, in his person, by wounding, maiming, or killing him; 2ndly, in his family, by robbing him of his children, or any way injuring those he is bound to protect; 3rdly, in

¹⁵ Smith (2002) levels the same complaint in Part IV of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "the sentiment of approbation always involves in it a sense of propriety quite distinct from the perception of utility" (220).

his liberty, by confinement; 4thly, in his reputation; 5thly, in his goods or property; and, lastly, in the violation of contracts or engagements made with him. (EAP V v, 312)

An innocent person, Reid continues,

has a right to the safety of his person and family, a right to his liberty and reputation, a right to his goods, and to fidelity to engagements made with him. To say that he has a right to these things, has precisely the same meaning as to say, that justice requires that he should be permitted to enjoy them, or that it is unjust to violate them. For injustice is the violation of right, and justice is, to yield to every man what is his right. (EAP V v, 313)

Consider, for illustration's sake, a particular injury closely connected with a violation of honesty with regard to property, such as a case in which I slander you behind your back, thereby ruining your reputation. According to Reid, anyone competent with the concept of justice will recognize that I have wronged you (cf. what Reid says regarding promising at EAP V vi, 342). For there is a life-good to which you have a right—namely, that others refrain from destroying your reputation.

But if so, Reid says, it is difficult to see what role considerations of pleasure and utility could play in grounding such a right. By saying this, it should be noted, Reid does not deny that “justice is highly useful and necessary in society, and, on that account, ought to be loved and esteemed” (EAP V v, 305). Still, if Reid is right, it is not as if the slanderer wrongs his victim on account of the fact that were people to act in this way, then they would probably bring about an unfavorable distribution of pains and pleasures. For even if my slandering were to contribute to an unfavorable distribution of pleasures and pains, this would not account for why I have wronged you. Your resentment would rightly be directed at me not because I have failed to do my part to contribute to some global generic good. Rather, it would be properly directed at me because I have mistreated you by demeaning you. Nor, it should be added, have I wronged you because there is some conventional arrangement in place whose justification consists in the fact that slandering tends to bring about an unfavorable distribution of pains and pleasures (EAP V v, 324). For it is not as if were there no such convention in place, there would have been no wronging. The fact that actions of certain types tend to contribute to unfavorable distributions of pleasures and pains, says Reid, is simply not the right sort of thing to explain why agents have rights to goods of certain types (EAP V v, 324). The reference here to “goods of certain types” is important. In principle, the utilitarian justification could ground certain types of rights—rights, perhaps, that members enjoy upon joining an organization such as a baseball team. Reid's point is that the utilitarian justification could not ground the sorts of rights in which he is interested, which concern injuries of a certain range (see EAP V v, 325).

Reid develops a second argument designed to complement this last point. This second argument appeals not simply to the irrelevance of considerations of utility to issues of basic justice but only to the nature of motives. To see the shape of Reid's argument, return for a moment to Hume's broadly genealogical account of the

emergence of justice. This account, recall, comes in two parts. In the first part, Hume hypothesizes that the effects of greed and self-interest induce us to invent a system of rules for the distribution of goods and harms. Conforming to this system of rules, we recognize, is in our long-term best interest. According to the second part, the mechanism of sympathy naturally leads the members of society to feel approval for behavior that conforms to the rules and disapproval for behavior that doesn't. Through an elaborate process of social conditioning, this "sympathy with the public interest" is transformed into a deeply rooted abhorrence of rule-breaking behavior.

Reid begins by noting that the "common good of society, though a pleasing object to all men . . . hardly even enters into the thoughts of the far greatest part of mankind" (EAP V v, 306). Perhaps more importantly, Reid emphasizes, such considerations do not enter into the thoughts of "the man of honor." For the man of honor ascertains that an agent has the right to life-goods such as the good that others refrain from destroying his reputation "abstracting from the consideration of utility" (EAP V v, 306). Yet, Reid emphasizes, "every action takes its denomination from the motive that produces it; so no action can properly be denominated an act of justice, unless it be done from a regard to justice" (EAP V v, 311). I've already pointed out that Reid often gives the impression that, by making these points, he is identifying a difference between his view and Hume's. But we've seen that under Cohon's interpretation, Hume does not disagree with what Reid says. Hume does not claim that the just person is motivated by considerations of utility. The just person is motivated by a sense of honor.

Charitably understood, however, Reid's claim is not that, in Hume's view, a just person would have to be moved by considerations of utility. Rather, he is making a more subtle point, which is that if considerations of pleasure and utility were the grounds of the requirements of justice, then they would have to be the *sort* of thing that could in principle properly motivate a person to perform acts of justice. The grounds of the requirements of justice must be able to function as motives. Reid contends that, if Hume's view were correct, the grounds of the requirements of justice would not be the right sort of thing to function as motives.

Lying at the core of Reid's disagreement with Hume, then, is a commitment to a principle that specifies how the grounds of the requirements of justice, on the one hand, and motives for action, on the other, should be related. We can formulate this principle, which I take Reid to rely on, as follows. Consider any act type A that is just. What we can call Reid's *Test for Grounds* tells us that

X is an adequate ground for S's Aing only if (i) X can be a motive for S's Aing (ii) were X to be S's motive when Aing, then S would not be liable to reproach for having acted from it but the proper object of esteem and (iii) were S to A from some other motive that is a putative ground for Aing but is not or does not include X, then S would be liable to correction, admonition, or resentment, all else being equal.

Test for Grounds is Reid's way of articulating a publicity constraint on grounds for motives. A ground is adequate only if it can function as a motive and satisfies certain

constraints, including being such that acting from it does not render an agent liable to reproach.

To see the work that this principle is supposed to accomplish, return to the case I offered a few paragraphs earlier. According to this case, I have slandered you behind your back, ruining your reputation. Suppose, to fill out the case somewhat, that there is a reason for my having behaved in this way. You and I, let us imagine, belong to the same academic department. I am, however, deeply averse to your assuming a position of power in the department. So, I resort to slander, expecting that this will ruin your chances of gaining power in the department. Still, there are others in the department who have desisted from slandered you, even though there was, we can suppose, pressure on them to do so.

Now imagine that you have become aware of what has happened. You ask a fellow member of the department who has desisted from slander why she has done so. Suppose that person were to appeal to general considerations of utility, citing how slanderous behavior tends to result in an unfavorable distribution of pains and pleasures. That is why there is a rule not to engage in it. The principle articulated above tells us that something has gone wrong in your colleague's thinking. The fact that she has desisted on these grounds is "not virtue" (EAP V v, 302). For considerations of utility are not the sort of thing that should move an agent to act in the way that she did. Reid puts the point by drawing a comparison between being motivated by prudence and benevolence, on the one hand, and utility, on the other:

If a man pays his debt, only that he may not be cast into prison, he is not a just man, because prudence, and not justice, is his motive. And if a man, from benevolence and charity, gives to another what is really due to him, but what he believes not to be due, this is not an act of justice in him, but of charity or benevolence, because it is not done from a motive of justice . . . what a man does, merely to procure something agreeable, either to himself or to others, is not an act of justice, nor has the merit of justice. (EAP V v, 311–12)

In acting from these considerations, Reid says, a person is not worthy of that esteem due to the person of honor. In fact, were a person to desist from slander simply because she holds that it would be imprudent, not express benevolence, or fail to conform to a system of rules the conformity to which tends to maximize utility, she would be worthy of reproach, all else being equal. Her deliberations have been blind to the worth and welfare of the person who has been wronged.

We can, Reid says, look at the matter from another angle. Suppose there were a system of rules such that conformance to them tended to eventuate in a favorable distribution of pains and pleasures. Now consider a case in which an agent deliberates by appealing to these grounds but fails to perform those actions dictated by this system of rules; he sees that following the rules will probably yield a favorable distribution of pains and pleasures but doesn't act in accordance with them. If these rules really express the requirements of justice, this agent would be liable to resentment, for she would have failed to do what justice requires of her. But, Reid contends, that is not

the case. “To perceive that justice tends to the good of mankind, would lay no moral obligation upon us to be just, unless we be conscious of a moral obligation to do what tends to the good of mankind” (EAP V v, 327).

Reid does not straightforwardly deny that there is any such moral obligation. Nor does he deny that there are obligations to look after the public good. His point, rather, concerns what we today would call the lexical priority of honoring rights to that of producing utility. Justice requires that we not injure others, treating them in a way that renders them less than they are due. The injunction not to injure has normative priority and we are liable to resentment when we fail to conform to it. But an agent’s failure to perform some action that is dictated by a system of rules the conformance to which would probably eventuate in a favorable balance of pleasure to pains need not render her liable to resentment. If so, it follows that performing that action is not a requirement of justice. No one has a right against me that I perform those actions that I reasonably believe will maximize a favorable distribution of pleasures to pains.

Let me summarize: there are important respects in which Reid’s interpretation of Hume fails to comport with that offered by proponents of the new Hume, such as Cohon. Still, there is at least one important point they have in common: both interpret Hume as a hedonist who defends a broadly rule utilitarian account of justice. Reid’s strategy when evaluating Hume’s view is to begin by identifying the network of primary justice, elucidating the grammar of the concept of justice by tracing the conceptual connections between notions such as ‘being a right,’ ‘being just,’ ‘being an injury,’ ‘being liable to resentment,’ and so forth. This provides the parameters, if Reid is correct, of an adequate account of justice. Having identified this network, Reid presses two main lines of argument against Hume’s account of justice.

According to the first, considerations of utility are irrelevant to the grounding of rights of a certain range. In general, we do not wrong individuals because our actions fail to conform to a system of rules the general conformance to which would yield a favorable distribution of pains and pleasures. According to the second argument, Reid claims that the grounds of the requirements of justice must be the sort of thing that could properly motivate just actions. But, if Hume’s view were correct, Reid says, they are not. Reid makes this point by appealing to a principle that I called Test for Grounds. According to this principle, were I to act from the grounds of the requirements of justice, then I could not be liable to reproach for having done so. Were I to perform an act-type that is just from some other motive that is not or does not include such grounds, by contrast, I would (all else being equal) be liable to correction or reproach. Nor would it be permissible to be aware of these grounds, fail to act from them, and not be liable to resentment. Reid contends that Hume’s view fails to satisfy this test.

Stephen Darwall, in his book *The Second-Person Standpoint*, provides a helpful conceptual framework to understand the pattern of Reid’s thought.¹⁶ Consider once

¹⁶ Darwall (2006). Darwall himself does not speak of three standpoints, as I do here. But doing so, I believe, is in the spirit of Darwall’s discussion. I should also note that Darwall himself contends that Reid’s

again the distinction between the requirements of justice and their grounds. One way to think about the relation between grounds and requirements is by invoking the first-person standpoint. According to this way of proceeding, what accounts for an agent's being required to act in a certain way (or his having a reason to act in that way) is the fact that acting in that way contributes to his own well-being. Requirements of justice, according to this view, are justified by the fact that they bear the right sort of relationship to an agent's own flourishing. Another way of thinking about the relationship between grounds and requirements is by invoking the third-person standpoint. According to this way of thinking, what accounts for an agent's being required to act in a certain way (or his having a reason to act in that way) is the fact that acting in that way bears the proper relation to some abstract good, such as contributing to a favorable balance of pleasures and pains. A third way to think about the relation between grounds and requirements, however, is to invoke the second-person standpoint. This way of thinking tells us that what accounts for an agent's being required to act in a certain way (or his having a reason to act in that way) is the fact that acting in that way bears the proper relation to other agents who are bearers of worth. Specifically, according to the second-person standpoint, as bearers of worth, these agents have the authority to demand that we conform to these requirements.

In *Essays on the Active Powers*, Reid spends a considerable amount of energy arguing that first-personal accounts of moral requirements are mistaken; the fact that acting in a certain way would contribute to one's own flourishing is the wrong sort of thing to ground the requirements of respect.¹⁷ In his discussion of justice, Reid interprets Hume's view as one that appeals to the third-person perspective. For reasons we have seen, Reid thinks that abstract goods that concern the distribution of pleasures and pains are also insufficient to account for the requirements of justice. Reid's fundamental insight—to advert to Darwall's way of framing things—is that we must think of justice in terms of the second-person standpoint. The requirements of justice are conceptually tied with the rights that agents have against each other, which themselves legitimate attitudes such as resentment and indignation towards those who violate them. These rights, if Reid is correct, cannot be justified by appeal to the fact that conforming to them would contribute to an agent's own flourishing or to a favorable balance of pleasures and pains.

5 Conclusion

Suppose that Reid's interpretation of Hume is in important respects mistaken, since Hume's views do not conform to what Cohon calls the common reading. The question that has concerned me is: if this is so, does Reid have anything to say to Hume? Or

disagreement with Hume regarding the nature of promising turns on Reid's appreciation of the second-person standpoint (2006, ch. 8).

¹⁷ I explore Reid's arguments for this claim in Cuneo (2010).

does Reid's discussion of Hume in the *Active Powers* fail to make contact with Hume's actual metaethical views? I have argued that there is reason to hold that Reid does have something to say to Hume. For Reid's interpretation of Hume and that offered by advocates of the new Hume converge in at least one important respect, as both present Hume's account of justice as resting on a commitment to a blend of hedonism and rule utilitarianism. Initially, it can seem as if Reid's attempts to articulate what is unsatisfying about Hume's account of justice miss the mark. But, when charitably read, I have contended that Reid has some telling criticisms to make against Hume's view, ones which emphasize the importance of the second-person standpoint. To be sure, Reid says much less than one would like when offering his own account of the relation between the requirements of justice and their grounds. He never tells us, for example, what it is about human agents that accounts for why they have the rights they do. He hints that it is the possession of active power that grounds the rights of agents, but he never develops the point (see EAP, Introduction). In this regard, his position is considerably less developed than Kant's. Still, there may be wisdom in saying less and what is correct than in saying more and what is not.¹⁸

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¹⁸ Todd Buras, Rebecca Copenhaver, Esther Kroeker, and participants in the workshop "The Problem of Evil in the Scottish Enlightenment" at the University of Notre Dame offered helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I thank them for their help.

13

Reid on Favors, Injuries, and
the Natural Virtue of Justice*Lewis Powell and Gideon Yaffe*

1 Introduction

David Hume famously claims that justice is morally good—worthy of moral approval—only thanks to certain social conventions. To give people the objects they deserve—i.e., those that are due to them—as when we return to someone an object that fell from his pocket, is not a natural, but an artificial virtue. In hypothetical worlds lacking social conventions, either because none is needed or because the need they serve has not yet been met through the construction of a convention, there would be nothing morally good about being disposed to distribute goods in accord with the bounds of ownership. Thomas Reid is among the many of Hume’s contemporaries scandalized by this idea. Surely, thinks Reid, Hume is denigrating the grand and important virtue of justice. However, unlike some who take Hume’s alleged denigration of the virtue of justice to be reason enough to reject his view of it, Reid offers a counterargument intended to show not just that the virtue is natural, but that anyone who accepts, as Hume does, that the affections of gratitude and resentment are natural is committed, also, to the claim that even in a state of nature, lacking in human conventions, justice would be morally good and approved as such. So, Reid tries to show that Hume himself is tacitly committed to what he so fervently denies.

Reid states the central ideas behind his argument as follows:

A favour, an act of justice and an injury, are so related to one another that he who conceives one must conceive the other two . . . As soon, therefore, as men come to have any proper notion of a favour and of an injury; as soon as they have any rational exercise of gratitude and of resentment; so soon they must have the conception of justice and of injustice; and if gratitude and resentment be natural to man, which Mr HUME allows, the notion of justice must be no less natural.

(EAP V v, 311)

The argument runs, roughly, as follows.¹ Gratitude and resentment are natural feelings that we have, without help from social conventions, in response to good and bad

¹ See EAP V v, esp. 306–11.

things being given to us, and taken from us, by other people. But when someone who is rational possesses those feelings, they involve the recognition that the beneficial or harmful object bestowed by another was not deserved. The rational feel grateful only for being given what is not theirs, and resentful only when deprived of what is rightfully theirs. So, thinks Reid, implicit in our natural responses to receipt of that which we are not owed is *the recognition* that the object in question is not owed. It follows, thinks Reid, that the recognition of a certain act as just, as giving someone what he is due, and the attendant feelings involved in that recognition, are themselves natural. It is a further step from this conclusion to the proposition that justice is *a virtue* in the state of the nature; perhaps in the absence of conventions we recognize that some things are deserved by people and are even moved to bestow them on them without the disposition to do so being morally approved. But both Reid and, importantly, Hume accept, for different reasons, that this further step can be made. In short, the argument runs by deriving—from the facts about gratitude and resentment—premises that are sufficient to establish, by both Reid and Hume’s lights, that justice is a natural virtue.

The argument has been discussed in passing by various commentators, but none has lingered on it.² Our goal here is to bring out the details of the argument and explain how they are entrenched in other aspects of Reid’s thought that are unacceptable to Hume for independent reasons. One of the points that emerges is that Hume’s moral philosophy is rooted in his philosophy of mind and action more deeply than perhaps he himself realized. If it were not for the fact that he allows only a sparse set of principles through which mental phenomena can be explained, he would not be committed to the view that justice is an artificial virtue. Reject that sparse set of principles, as Reid does, and you have no reason to follow Hume in his claim that justice is an artificial virtue. Reid’s argument succeeds, that is, given a philosophy of mind and action that Hume rejects. So, in the case of justice, as in so many other cases, the disagreement between Hume and Reid is, at bottom, a disagreement over their respective conceptions of how the human mind works at its most fundamental level.³

2 Hume and Reid on Motives to Justice

Reid’s argument is offered in opposition to a line of thought that we find in Hume’s *Treatise*, but which, for whatever reasons, Hume does not explicitly repeat in *An*

² An exception is Pritchard (2008), which offers a somewhat more detailed discussion of the topic than is usually found. The argument is also mentioned in Wolterstorff (2010) and Harris (2010).

³ In this way, our conclusion here is consonant with, although distinct from, a conclusion reached recently by James Harris. Harris argues that the disagreement between Hume and Reid over justice is rooted in radically different views of the nature of moral judgment, or the moral sense, and the qualities of actions and agents that are recognized through its exercise—a difference, that is, in their respective views of what it is to recognize and respond to the morally salient qualities of actions and agents. While this is probably true, in at least the respects we discuss here, a disagreement in their moral philosophies arises also from disagreements in their respective views of the nature of the mind. See Harris (2010).

Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.⁴ Hume claims that justice is a natural virtue only if there is some natural motive to do just acts—some motive, that is, that people would have even in the absence of social conventions. He is searching for a motive to do just acts *as such*, not just a motive to do acts with a certain property that happens to accompany or coincide with the property of being just. Hume runs through a series of possible motives and argues, in each case, that the motive in question is either not natural, or else would not motivate the full range of just acts, some of which provide no benefit at all to anyone. The latter point is intended to show that the motive in question does not favor just acts as such.

Reid may have been the first of the many commentators to note one particularly peculiar aspect of Hume's discussion: his exclusive interest in one branch of justice, namely the justice involved in respecting property rights, to the neglect of other branches. Hume does not claim, for instance, that there is no natural motive to physically harm those who have physically harmed others. Nor does he claim that someone who is confined against his will has not thereby suffered a harm if there are no social conventions. He is really interested in the question of whether there is a natural motive to restore to people those things that are theirs, or a natural motive to respect their decisions not to give their things to those who need them more than themselves. His interest is with justice in interventions that move objects out of one person's possession and into another's. Intuitively, and glossing over important distinctions (such as those involved in lending, and those involved in cases of great need, among others), we take such givings and takings to be just if, in the end, people have possession over all and only the things that are theirs.

But to claim even that justice in this one domain is not natural is easily seen as a subversive conclusion. It appears to run directly contrary to Locke's claim that, as soon as people mix their labor with objects, they acquire rights to the possession and usage of those objects, a claim which underwrites the thought that property rights are more basic and fundamental than the rights of parties to social conventions. Many in both Reid's time and ours see the thought that property rights are convention-independent as essential to placing limits on the state's power to take and use that which citizens have worked to make better for their own purposes. To take something that belongs to someone is to wrong him. Normative limits of this sort are not thought to be contingent and absent in places with different conventions. The fact that people are typically or conventionally divested of that with which they have mixed their labor hardly makes that divestiture right. Of course, it is possible that such conclusions do not follow from Hume's position; it may be less subversive than it can appear. But subversive or not, the claim that justice is not naturally approved is a conclusion that Hume takes to follow inexorably from the facts about human motivation. If the

⁴ In *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume does imply that justice and property would not be instinctually recognized in the absence of human conventions. But this falls short of a statement of the argument Reid targets.

disposition to respect and enforce property lines were a natural virtue, then there would be a natural motive to behave in that way; since there isn't, it isn't.

This line of thought of Hume's does not strictly require the converse claim that, were there a natural motive to just acts, then justice would be a natural virtue. But Hume probably believes this. After all, for Hume an act is morally good if it is morally approved of from a disinterested point of view. Such approval typically arises through sympathy with either the person whose act it is, or with those people who are affected by the act, or both. So, insofar as those parties have an "agreeable" feeling either in the performance of the act, or thanks to it, the disinterested spectator, animated by sympathy with them, will have an agreeable feeling, too. Just acts, however, frequently provide no agreeable feelings in anyone affected by them. X drops an item that was in his possession, and for which he has no use; Y, knowing full well that it was in X's possession first, finds it and can use it to his benefit; Z, acting justly, takes the object from Y and returns it to X. X is not benefitted by this act. Y is positively worse off. Z does not benefit either. So who can the disinterested observer of Z's act sympathize with, in order to generate the requisite positive feeling? Given that Z was motivated to perform the act, it would seem that he must have had some kind of feeling of approval of it. So, the answer is Z. If Z could have been motivated to perform the just act, then the disinterested observer will share in Z's approval of the act, and he too will approve it. So, if people are motivated to perform just acts in the state of nature, then they could also sympathize with such motives. This would then pave the way for approving of just acts from the disinterested point of view in the state of nature and, given Hume's moral theory, it follows that just acts are morally good in the state of nature.

Hume thinks, therefore, not just that were there no natural motive to justice, justice would be artificial—that is the point that drives his own argument for the artificial nature of justice—but also that were there a natural motive to justice, it would be a natural virtue. Given this, Reid need only show that there is, and Hume must admit there to be, a natural motive to perform acts whose only merit is conformity to the demands of justice in order to show that Hume is committed to thinking that justice is a natural virtue after all.

This point deserves emphasis. Consider Reid's statement of what he will show in the argument that concerns us here:

[A]s soon as men have any rational conception of a favour, and of an injury, they must have the conception of justice, and perceive its obligation distinct from its utility. (EAP V v, 306)

Reid here identifies two things that, for reasons that will presently be explained and explored, he takes to be possessed "as soon as men have any rational conception of a favour, and of an injury." The first is that they recognize some acts to be just; the second is that they perceive themselves to be obligated to do just things. Reid understands the second of these two things in a radically different way from the way in which Hume understands it. Reid takes just acts to possess essentially the quality of being obligatory. He takes that property to be "perceived" through the exercise of a natural

faculty of the human mind—the “moral sense” or “conscience.”⁵ And he takes anyone who exercises the moral sense so as to recognize that an act possesses the property of being obligatory to be thereby motivated to perform such an act. By contrast, Hume does not think of the moral sense as a distinct mental organ. While there is a question of exactly how it should be understood for Hume, it is clear that he takes an exercise of the moral sense to amount to the exercise of other, independent faculties of mind in a particular setting. To exercise the moral sense, for instance, might be just to feel sympathy while considering an action or agent in a disinterested way.⁶ Further, and importantly, he does not think of the quality of being obligatory as a property of actions that is somehow “picked up” by exercises of the moral sense but is present in the acts independently. Rather, he seems to think of moral qualities of this kind as present in actions and agents in part in virtue of the fact that people respond in certain ways when they consider them in a disinterested way.

But, and this is the important point, these differences regarding the second of these two things that Reid takes to be present “as soon as men have any rational conception of a favour, and of an injury” matter very little given our purposes here. The reason is that Hume grants too much, *even by his own standards*, if he concedes the first thing to follow. That is, if Hume allows that we naturally recognize, for instance, that an object that has long been in a person’s possession is *owed* to him, or that he *deserves* to use it as he sees fit, then he would have to allow that we naturally approve of acts that give people what they are owed or deserve in this sense. And from this it will follow that justice is a natural virtue, not an artificial one: the approval serves as the natural motive, and if there is a natural motive to do just acts, then Hume is committed to thinking that justice is a natural virtue.⁷ So, although Hume and Reid disagree about how we would get from the claim that we naturally conceive of acts as just and unjust to the further claim that justice is a virtue independently of social conventions, they would agree that we can make that inference. The result is that Hume must find a way to block the very first step of Reid’s argument. He must not accept that “as soon as men have any rational conception of a favour, and of an injury, they must have the conception of justice.”

⁵ Immediately preceding the passage quoted above, Reid states, “[W]hen men come to the exercise of their moral faculty, they perceive a turpitude in injustice, as they do in other crimes, and consequently an obligation to justice, abstracting from the consideration of its utility” (EIP V v, 306).

⁶ In fact, Reid recognizes this feature of Hume’s view and offers general criticisms of the project of accounting for morality in terms of animal motives. As can be seen from Hume’s discussion of actions produced principally by explicitly moral motives (Hume 2007, 3.2.1), Hume would consider it absurd to account for morality in terms solely or principally by reference to such explicitly moral motives. It is essential to his view, that is, that the exercises of the moral sense are not of an entirely different sort from the exercise of other faculties of mind.

⁷ It is important to note that, when we reference “a motive to do just acts,” we mean to discuss a motive to do an act insofar as it is just. Many just acts are also beneficent acts, but the motive of beneficence is not, in those cases, a motive to do just acts. This is important because it underscores why, for Hume, justice would not be a natural virtue unless there were a natural motive to perform just acts whose sole recommendation is their status as just acts.

In his argument for the claim that even without the help of social conventions people conceive of acts as just and unjust, Reid exploits Hume's concession that gratitude and resentment are natural feelings. Hume is adamant that it is naturally virtuous to feel and act grateful, especially towards one's parents:

Of all crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural is ingratitude, especially when it is committed against parents, and appears in the more flagrant instances of wounds and death. (Hume, 2007, 3.1.1)

Gratitude is an appropriate response to a *favor*, thinks Reid. So, Hume must think that we naturally conceive of some acts by others as favors (and injuries, in the case of resentment). It would seem to follow, then, that whatever conceptions one must have in order to conceive of an act as a favor can be had without the help of social conventions. Add the further plausible claim that acts are not favors unless the recipient of the bestowed good is not already owed it and it would seem to follow that gratitude is natural only if the conception of some objects as undeserved is natural. The question of whether Hume can reject Reid's argument at just this point will be discussed in section 4. There we consider the question of whether Hume ought to agree that the facts about our naturally grateful (and resentful) responses show something of importance about our natural conceptions of those acts to which we respond with gratitude and resentment.

But even if Hume agrees that we do indeed naturally conceive of some givings and takings as undeserved, it is a further step to the claim that we therefore conceive of others as deserved. And Reid's argument relies on a general principle about conceiving contradictories to establish this point. But perhaps we can conceive of the absence of desert without conceiving of its presence. Now, to anyone who accepts the plausible view that the concept of *being undeserved* is constructed out of some concept of negation and some concept of desert, such a view will appear to be absurd. But that plausible view involves some substantive commitments about the nature of moral conception that we should be careful of casually attributing to Hume. The question of whether the conception of the undeserved entails or involves the conception of the deserved, for Hume, is the topic of section 3.

3 The Range of Moral Conceptions

As indicated at the end of the previous section, Reid's argument relies on an instance of the general principle that one cannot conceive one member of a pair of contradictories without conceiving the other. Call this the CBS principle (for "conceive both sides"). The argument does not depend on CBS in its full generality, but only on the specific claim that one cannot conceive oneself as undeserving of a particular object unless one can also conceive oneself as deserving. Regardless, Reid does accept CBS. In fact, this principle is deeply entrenched in Reid's philosophy of mind. His independent commitment to it is expressed most clearly in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*

of *Man* where he discusses Hume's claim that conceivability entails possibility. In presenting one of his objections to the principle that conceivability entails possibility, Reid attributes CBS to Hume, and provides, as evidence, a direct quote from *A Treatise of Human Nature*:

Every proposition carries its contradictory in its bosom, and both are conceived at the same time. "It is confessed, says Mr HUME, that in all cases where we dissent from any person, we conceive both sides of the question, but we can believe only one." From this it certainly follows that when we dissent from any person about a necessary proposition, we conceive one that is impossible; yet I know no Philosopher who has made so much use of the maxim, that whatever we conceive is possible, as Mr HUME. A great part of his peculiar tenets is built upon it; and if it is true, they must be true. But he did not perceive, that in the passage now quoted, the truth of which is evident, he contradicts it himself. (EIP 4 iii, 331–2)

The remark that Reid quotes from the *Treatise* seems at first glance to support the attribution of CBS to Hume. But, this initial appearance is deceptive. The remark appears in the middle of Hume's discussion of belief. Hume is attempting to spell out and defend his view that belief differs from mere conception only in the manner of conceiving (as opposed to differing from conception in kind). To illustrate his position, he offers a discussion of a case of disagreement or dissent, asking how those two states differ from belief. It is worth quoting Hume's passage at length:

Wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition? The answer is easy with regard to propositions, that are prov'd by intuition or demonstration. In that case, the person, who assents, not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily determined to conceive them in that particular manner, either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas. Whatever is absurd is unintelligible; nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration. But as in reasonings from causation, and concerning matters of fact, this absolute necessity cannot take place, and the imagination is free to conceive both sides of the question, I still ask, Wherein consists the difference betwixt incredulity and belief? since in both cases the conception of the idea is equally possible and requisite.

'Twill not be a satisfactory answer to say, that a person, who does not assent to a proposition you advance; after having conceiv'd the object in the same manner with you; immediately conceives it in a different manner, and has different ideas of it. This answer is unsatisfactory; not because it contains any falsehood, but because it discovers not all the truth. *'Tis confess, that in all cases wherein we dissent from any person; we conceive both sides of the question; but as we can believe only one, it evidently follows, that the belief must make some difference betwixt that conception from which we assent, and that from which we dissent.*

(Hume 2007, 1.3.7; emphasis added)

Hume intends the "confession" that Reid notes—which appears to be a statement of CBS—only for a limited range of cases. The context for the quote includes two stories: one for demonstrable/intuitive contents (the category that serves as the fore runner of the first *Enquiry's* "relations of ideas") and the other for causal/factual judgments ("matters of fact"). Hume can, at most, be taken as endorsing CBS as restricted to matters of fact.

So, we know that Hume does not think that conceiving of two and two as equaling four requires also conceiving of two and two as not equaling four. We can grant Reid that Hume thinks conceiving that bread nourishes requires also conceiving that bread does not nourish. What about conceiving of some good office O as being undeserved? Unfortunately, nothing in the *Treatise* or the *Enquiries* makes it clear what Hume's stance about such a case would be. In *Treatise* 3.1.1, titled "Moral Distinctions not Deriv'd from Reason," Hume seems to argue that moral claims are neither demonstrative or intuitive relations of ideas, nor non-demonstrable matters of fact.⁸ This makes it difficult to assess whether the conception of an act as undeserved would be more like the conception of matters of fact—and thus, subject to a version of the CBS principle—or outside the application of CBS, like relations of ideas.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that a principle like CBS has different import for Reid than it does for Hume. Since Reid takes us to be able to conceive impossibilities, for instance, he would take us to be able to conceive of arbitrary acts as falling under arbitrary moral predicates, independent of his views on which actions are morally good or bad and how they come to have that status. As we continue to consider the status of the CBS principle (as it applies to moral claims) for Hume, it will be important to keep in mind that the real concern, for Reid, is whether it is possible to have a conception of some moral status without possessing the conception of the contrary moral status. Thus, even if Hume allows that one can conceive of act A as unjust, without thereby being able to conceive of act A as just, Hume would still be in trouble if his view required that one cannot conceive of act A as unjust, without thereby conceiving of some other act as just.

What really complicates any attempt to adjudicate whether Hume is forced to accede this point is that the view put forward in *Treatise* 3.1.2 ("Moral Distinctions Deriv'd from a Moral Sense") outlines Hume's sentimentalist view of moral *judgment*, but does not discuss (nor even suggest) a view of (mere) moral *conception*. In fact, nowhere in the *Treatise* are we given an explicit indication of a positive account of *mere* moral conception. Even extrapolating a view of moral conception from the explicit view of judgment is made difficult by the wide variety of interpretations of Hume's account of moral judgment (e.g., ideal-agent realist, speaker-subjectivist, emotivist, projectivist, etc.).⁹ Some of these views, although not all, positively entail a theory of the nature of (mere) moral conception. Any straightforwardly "cognitivist" interpretation of Hume's views of ethical judgment—any interpretation, that is, under which moral judgments are to be equated with factual beliefs—will entail an account of moral conception.

⁸ Some of the scholars mentioned in footnote 9 would contest this characterization of Hume's argument in 3.1.1.

⁹ Some examples: David Norton interprets Hume as a moral realist, Anthony Flew reads him as an emotivist, and Simon Blackburn labels him a projectivist. Peter Kail reads Hume as a projectivist (though not in the same sense as Blackburn), and Rachel Cohon defends a cognitivist interpretation. This brief, incomplete list is provided merely to illustrate the diversity of interpretations. Reconciling what each of these labels amounts to, and how they relate to one another, is beyond the scope of this essay. For a thorough introduction to Hume's moral philosophy and the interpretive debates surrounding it, see Cohon (2010).

Whatever the content of the belief that is to be equated with moral judgment is on such interpretations, it would also be available for mere contemplation. For instance, say we attribute to Hume the position that to judge an act to be wrong is to believe that disinterested observers would feel disapprobation on contemplating it. Under such a view, to conceive of good or beneficial act A as being undeserved would then be to conceive of *not* feeling disapprobation at the disinterested conception of failures to provide A. It would seem to follow that moral conceptions are no different from conceptions of matters of fact and, so, Hume would be committed to the claim that CBS applies to them, just as Reid assumes.¹⁰

Things are somewhat more complicated if we attribute to Hume some form of non-cognitivism according to which to make a moral judgment is, at least in part, to exhibit (or be disposed to exhibit) some kind of emotional reaction that is not, itself, capable of truth or falsity. We can imagine an advocate of such a position denying that there is such a thing as moral conception. Say that a moral judgment is a sentimental response to a descriptive conception of an act, where the sentimental response does not involve any conception at all. On such a view, that is, there is no difference in the conceptions of the person who thinks, “S took something that was in my possession and with which I mixed my labor” and the person who thinks “S did me an injury by taking something that was in my possession and with which I mixed my labor.” Both conceive of the act and both attribute a set of non-moral properties to it. They differ in their feelings, not in their conceptions. It is not hard to imagine taking a consequence of such a view to be that there is no such thing as moral conception. There are just conceptions of non-moral qualities and there are sentimental responses to them. If that is Hume’s position, then he would take the very idea of moral conception to be problematic, and so would not accept the CBS principle when applied in the way Reid hopes to apply it.

The CBS principle has been useful for drawing out these complications for a Humean account of moral conception, but it is important to remember that the issue is not whether conceiving of some act A as unjust requires also possessing the conception of A as just. The issue is whether it is possible to conceive of injuries, for example, as unjust, without having any conception of justice. And the point remains the same: on a view that denies that any moral conception occurs, there is no such thing as conceiving of justice and so no obstacle to conceiving of injuries without conceiving of justice.

However, the advocate of such a non-cognitivist position about moral judgment might not take such a hard line about moral conception. Such a person could say that, trivially, anyone who judges an act to be morally good thereby conceives of moral goodness; perhaps the sentimental response to the conception of the act’s descriptive properties involves, or just is, the conception of the act’s moral quality. When moral conception is understood in this way, the CBS principle does not hold in the moral domain. There may be well-constituted rational people who cannot conceive

¹⁰ Things are further complicated by the murky modal status of facts about the constitution of human psychology in Hume’s view, an issue that arises also in connection with Hume’s views on the necessary connection in causation, the connection between conceivability and possibility, and other topics.

of acts of certain morally salient descriptive types without feeling approbation or disapprobation from the disinterested position, in which case, such acts could only be conceived as morally good by such people.¹¹ There may even be such people who are only constituted so as to feel approval, and no disapproval. Such people would have conceptions, in the weak sense of that term under consideration here, only of morally good qualities, but not of morally bad ones.¹² It follows that if Hume accepts a form of non-cognitivism about moral judgment, he would be unmoved by Reid's inference from the claim that we naturally conceive of some objects as undeserved by us to the claim that we conceive of others as deserved. It could be that we are naturally disposed to respond with moral approbation and disapprobation to undeserved givings and takings, respectively, and not to deserved. If there is no more to moral conception than the having of such sentiments, then Reid's argument fails. What follows, however, is not that Reid's argument fails, full stop. It is not clear that the having of a sentiment lacking in descriptive content can amount to a conception of any kind. To know if it could, we would have to know more about what criteria a mental act needs to meet in order to count as a conception. Does any sentiment lacking in descriptive content meet such criteria? It is impossible to say without spelling out the criteria in question. In short, examining the force of Reid's argument against a non-cognitivist about moral judgment, which Hume very well may have been, requires a deeper examination of the sense in which sentiments, particularly moral sentiments, are contentful. Reid's argument is effective only against those who hold that moral sentiments are bearers of content in a way similar enough to matter-of-fact beliefs to warrant the conclusion that, when we conceive one side of the question, we also conceive the other.

One thing that makes it especially difficult to adjudicate the issue, then, is that Reid is not able to provide an example of a specific affection we feel towards acts of justice as such, and he recognizes that, in children, gratitude and resentment are provoked indiscriminately. We will shortly turn our attention to the issues surrounding Reid's developmental account of gratitude and resentment, but it is worth observing that, if Hume adopts a view on which moral conception consists in sentimental reaction, and there is no distinctive sentimental reaction towards just acts (prior to socialization), Hume is in a good position to grant that gratitude and resentment are natural affections, while affirming that justice is an artificial virtue.

4 Developing Passions: Artifice vs. Maturation

Reid's argument is motivated in part by observation of the development of moral sentiments in children. He notices that children respond positively, with gratitude, to

¹¹ For discussion of a closely related issue, see Gendler (2000).

¹² Arguably, the possibility of such a person would tell against any meta ethical theory that allowed it. Perhaps someone who has positive reactions to benevolent acts without also having negative reactions to malevolent acts is not actually judging benevolent acts to be good. Perhaps to truly value positive effects of acts on human beings one must also disvalue negative ones.

any “good office” done by another and negatively, with resentment, to any harm done to them. In small children, these responses are insensitive to the facts about others’ intentions—children respond positively to good offices even if those good offices are performed with intent to harm, for instance. The responses are also insensitive, in children, to the facts about what they are owed, or what they deserve. The child, for instance, responds with gratitude to the return of an object that had been taken from his possession by another child, even though that object was owed to him. (More, shortly, about the sense of “ownership” involved here.) But, as children grow older, they come to respond differently depending on whether the beneficial or harmful acts were performed with good or bad intent, and depending on whether the benefit or harm was owed, or deserved. Eventually, that is, they respond with gratitude only to good offices that were intended to benefit and when the benefit was not due to them; and they respond with resentment only to bad offices that were intended to harm and when the harm was not owed to or deserved by them. The second change—the alteration of the moral sentiments in response to the facts about what is not owed rather than the facts about intention—is of particular importance to the argument that Reid is offering. It is from this change that Reid derives the claim that when children grow to the age of reason they have a conception of what is undeserved, or not due to them. In other words, it is from the fact that rational adults respond differentially depending on whether the benefit or harm received was owed to them that Reid reaches the conclusion that rational adults have *the conception* of some things as undeserved by them. As we saw in the previous section, the further claim that rational adults have the conception of things as owed to them, given that they have the conception of some things as unowed, is problematic. But for the purposes of this section it will be granted to Reid. The question under discussion in this section is whether Hume need accept that the facts about the ways our sentiments are modulated once we reach the “age of reason” entails that we *conceive* of the quality to which we differentially respond—namely, the quality of being undeserved or unowed.

Can, or ought, Hume reject this inference? Perhaps he should claim that the facts about the ways our responses are modulated do not entail facts about our conceptions of objects as unowed? But before considering this possibility, it is important to head off a potential misunderstanding. One might worry that it begs the question against Hume to say that in the state of nature human beings respond differently depending on whether what they receive from another is deserved, or owed. After all, Hume thinks that there is nothing owed or deserved (at least no property owed or deserved) prior to the enactment of human conventions. To insist that people respond differentially to the facts about what is owed in the state of nature is to imply that there are such facts, which is exactly what Hume denies.

However, the reason that this concern is based on a misunderstanding is this. Reid’s point about the ways in which our sentiments are modulated once we come to the age of reason can be made without appeal to facts about what is owed per se. The point can be made, instead, through appeal to the kinds of facts that both Reid and

Hume allow to entail facts about what is owed *in the world as it is today*, littered as it is with social conventions. That is, the differential response might be to facts about possession and non-value-laden facts (such as what one has mixed one's labor with), rather than facts about what is owed thanks to the facts about possession and other non-value-laden facts. X finds a piece of wood that was never in anyone's possession. He takes possession of it, cuts it and uses it to build a birdhouse which he hangs in a tree near where he lives. The wind blows the birdhouse away and it is found by Y, who returns it to X. Does X feel grateful? Reid thinks that, assuming that X has reached the age of reason, he does not. He might feel positively towards Y, but it is not *gratitude* that he feels. (He may feel grateful to Y for going out of his way. But this feeling is not gratitude for the return of the bird house per se.) He responds differently than a child would. The child would respond with gratitude. But because of the fact that X possessed the wood and built the birdhouse himself, he responds in some other way. Notice, as just described, that the difference in the way in which X responds to Y, on the one hand, and the way the child would, on the other, is not explained through appeal to facts about what anybody is *owed* or facts about what *belongs* to anyone, or any other morally charged notions of this kind, but merely through appeal to the facts about possession and labor-mixing. To avoid begging the question against Hume, Reid must characterize the change in our moral sentiments on reaching the age of reason in these terms. We respond differently in light of facts that, in the actual world, are constitutive of facts about ownership but which may or may not be constitutive of such facts in a world where there are no social conventions.

But say Hume grants to Reid that, even without help from conventions, people respond differently to receipt of benefit or harm, when they reach the age of reason, depending on the facts about possession and labor-mixing. Roughly speaking, and glossing over complexities in the rules of property, an adult responds with gratitude only if the object given to him is not something formerly in his possession with which he mixed his labor, and responds with resentment only if the object taken from him is. If Hume agrees to this, he still might claim that such facts entail nothing about the conceptions of desert of those who respond in this way. Why should Reid think that the only way to explain such differential response is through appeal to conceptions of what is deserved and undeserved on the part of those who respond in these ways? A plant grows differently depending on whether the sun shines down on its left side or its right—it grows towards the sun, wherever the sun happens to shine. But this does not show that the plant *has a conception* of the sun's location. A bee shows greater interest in novel flowers, of a color it has never seen before, than it does in those of familiar colors. But this does not show that the bee *has a conception* of novelty. Why should it be any different in our case? Why should the fact that we respond differently depending on the facts about possession and labor-mixing show that we have a conception of those facts, much less that we have a conception of the facts about desert that we now, in our civilized state, take the facts about possession and labor-mixing to entail? Perhaps we respond differentially thanks to representations of the

relevant facts, but not through *mental* representations of the relevant facts. Perhaps the differential responses in our sentiments are like goosebumps: they are modulated by air temperature, and so the air temperature is represented by something it causes, but it is not *mentally* represented. The fact that goosebumps are modulated by temperature doesn't show that we *have a conception* of the temperature.

Reid takes the inference from the facts about the modulation of the moral sentiments in rational adults to the claim about our conceptions to be unproblematic. In fact, the inference is unproblematic for someone who accepts a collection of intertwined views about motivation, active power, and moral assessment, almost all of which Hume would deny, and all of which Reid asserts. In particular, he has a view of what it is to act on a rational motive, as opposed to an animal motive, a view about what must be true of a person for an act to be attributed to him, and a closely related view about what is involved in the expression in action of a character trait like the virtue of gratitude. To see the relevance of these views to the point at issue, first note that both Reid and Hume take the person who feels gratitude to be motivated to perform grateful actions; such a person is motivated to express gratitude. So, the question of what a person would feel in response to the receipt of an undeserved benefit by someone intending only good and the question of what a person would be motivated to do in response to such an act are not independent. The feeling may be distinct from the motive itself—Reid would say it is, Hume would say it is not—but regardless, the feeling at least is accompanied by a motive to perform grateful actions in response. So, to note that there is a change in the moral sentiments as the child reaches the age of reason—he now feels gratitude only in response to receipt of undeserved benefits, where previously he responded even to deserved benefits with gratitude—is also to note a change in his motivations. After he comes to the age of reason, the child is motivated to respond gratefully only if the benefit was not deserved.

What kind of motivation is present in such a case? Reid would classify such a motive as a “rational motive.” Much earlier in the *Essays on the Active Powers* he has distinguished the rational “principles of action,” or motives, from the mechanical and animal, like so:

Mechanical principles of action produce their effect without any will or intention on our part. . . . Animal principles of action require intention and will in their proper operation, but not judgment. . . . [T]he rational principles of action in man . . . have that name, because they can have no existence in beings not endowed with reason, and, in all their exertions, require, not only intention and will, but judgment or reason. (EAP III iii.i, 152)

We shortly later learn that Reid takes there to be two very different ways in which a rational motive can involve judgment. First, one can be motivated in part thanks to the fact that one judges a particular act to be a means to some end one has. But, second, and much more importantly, one can *acquire an end* thanks to the fact that one makes a particular judgment. Reid writes,

Reid takes any first principles to be true in virtue of the resolution on the behalf of some agent to act in accordance with it. The fundamental laws of nature are true thanks to the fact that God is resolved to act in accordance with them. They are, as Reid puts it, “fixed resolutions” on God’s part. Similarly, the fundamental principles governing human behavior are fixed resolutions either on the parts of human beings, or on the parts of other agents, such as God. Only in the former case, however, is conduct subsumable under a particular first principle genuinely attributable to the creature whose conduct it is. Your conduct is *your conduct*, in the sense that matters to, among other things, moral evaluation, only because the fundamental rules under which it is subsumable are true thanks to the fact you are resolved to act in accordance with them. This is not true of, for instance, the beating of your heart. The beating of your heart is subsumable under a rule which is, itself, subsumable under some other rule, and so on, until, ultimately, we identify some first principle that the beating instantiates which is not, itself, subsumable under any rule but is true only thanks to the fact that God is resolved to act in accordance with it. But your grateful action, for instance, is attributable to you only thanks to the fact that you are fixedly resolved to act in accordance with the rule specifying grateful actions in response to the conferral of undeserved benefits by another. You have it as an end that you perform actions that

conform with that rule, and it is thanks to that fact that the grateful act is attributable to you as such. Equivalently, it is only thanks to the fact that you are resolved to act in accordance with such a rule that you are rightly said to possess the character trait, the virtue, of being a grateful person.

Further, Reid holds that to have a fixed resolution to act in accordance with a particular rule, one must have a conception *of that rule*. And further the conception of the rule requires conception of all of the various properties of objects that are referred to by the rule. So, if it is possible to perform grateful acts without the help of human conventions, it must be possible, thinks Reid, for a person in a world without social conventions to conceive of all of the properties of agents and objects that are invoked in the rules of gratitude, or the rules that grateful people are fixedly committed to following.

So, what, exactly, are the rules of gratitude? It was suggested above that Reid begs the question against Hume if he insists that the difference in the moral sentiments of gratitude and resentment had by children, on the one hand, and had by those who have come to the age of reason, on the other, is explicable only by appeal to the normative notions of desert and ownership. The change must instead be characterized as marking a difference in the way in which people come to modulate their sentiments in response to the facts about possession and labor-mixing; facts that, uncontroversially, constitute ownership and desert in a civilized state in which there are social conventions. If the rules of gratitude similarly invoked only the notions of possession and labor-mixing, and did not say anything about ownership, entitlement, desert, and the like, then it would not follow that the attribution of grateful acts to an agent required conception of these moral properties by the agent.

Here, however, another controversial doctrine of Reid's is playing a role in his thinking. This is the view that an act is not morally valuable unless it is motivated in part by a conception of it *as* morally valuable. As Reid puts the point:

A being who has no more conception of moral goodness and baseness, of right and wrong, than a blind man hath of colours, can have no regard to it in his conduct, and therefore can neither be virtuous nor vicious. (EAP IV iv, 299)

To have a conception of the facts about possession and labor-mixing, while lacking a conception of ownership and desert would be analogous to having a conception of the facts about the way in which an object reflects light while lacking a conception of the color of the object. Just as we need to have the faculty of sight in order to have the conception of color, we need to have the faculty of conscience, or the moral sense, to have the conception of the moral properties to which the facts about possession and labor-mixing give rise. Growing to the age of reason, for Reid, is important only because the concomitant of the faculty of reason is the moral sense. But the crucial point for our purposes here is that an act performed merely from a conception of a rule requiring positive response when someone gives you something that you never

possessed or mixed your labor with *would not be a virtuous act*. In particular, it would not, for Reid, be a *grateful* act but would, instead, be a pantomime of a grateful act.¹³

So, although the non-question-begging point is only that the rational adult's sentiments are modulated by the facts about possession and labor-mixing, Reid needs the further claim that the acts the rational person performs in response are genuinely *grateful* and so involve a conception of the facts about ownership and desert that are constituted by the facts about possession and labor-mixing. Only if his conduct is genuinely subsumable under the rules of gratitude, rules which he is fixedly committed to following, can he be attributed with having performed a grateful act.

In short, there is an important and complex line of reasoning behind Reid's inference from the claim that, even in the absence of social conventions, rational adults feel gratitude in response to receipt of a good object only if the object is not one that they possessed and mixed their labor with, to the further claim that rational adults *conceive* of people as deserving the use and possession of some objects. Reid thinks this follows because he thinks that rational adults in a world without conventions perform genuinely grateful actions that are attributable to them. The attribution of such actions requires that the agents to whom they are attributed are fixedly committed to the rules of gratitude. Fixed commitment to a rule requires a conception of that rule. And the rules in question invoke the quality of being undeserved. And so it follows that to even perform a grateful act one must have a conception of the object received as one to which one was not already entitled.

Hume denies so much of the picture that underlies Reid's thinking on this point that it is not possible to detail all of the disagreements here. Still, consider the claim that one cannot attribute an action to a person in the sense that is relevant for moral responsibility without also taking the laws under which that action is subsumed to be true, thanks to a resolution on the part of the person to act in accordance with them. Not only does Hume deny that laws are ever true in virtue of agents' resolutions to act in accordance with them, but he also denies that, even if this were so, such a resolution would be required for moral responsibility. Hume famously claims that determinism is required for moral responsibility since there must be an exceptionless law linking an agent's behavior with her motive and character—which is what he takes us to hold people accountable *for*—for us to be justified in holding the agent responsible for the behavior. But he does not think that the law in question must be true by virtue of some resolution on the part of the agent. His compatibilism allows that the law in question might be true only because God is resolved to act in accordance with it, or for any other reason, and, yet, the action would be attributable to the agent in all the ways that matter for responsibility. So, Hume would reject Reid's reasoning here, even if he were

¹³ Notice that, by contrast, Hume thinks that a large class of acts that are motivated by a conception of them as grateful are not grateful acts. He especially has in mind people who perform grateful acts grudgingly, recognizing that they are grateful acts, but feeling no positive feeling towards them. (See Hume 2007, 3.2.1).

to demur from invoking his well-known views of the nature of causality and the laws of nature, not to mention his denial of Reid's claim that morally assessable action must be performed from a belief about its moral value.

When it comes to the inference from the facts about the ways in which our sentiments of gratitude and resentment are modulated in the state of nature to the claim that we conceive of some objects as being due to us in the state of nature, Reid's seemingly unencumbered argument is, in fact, relying on an entire model of human agency, laws of nature, and the moral value of acts with which Hume fervently disagrees.

5 Conclusion

In building his argument for the naturalness of justice from claims about gratitude, Reid would seem to be arguing *ad hominem*: he would seem to be starting with premises that Hume, given his admiration for gratitude, would accept. But if Reid's ambition was to argue *ad hominem*, he falls far short of his aims. It is true that no commentator has claimed that Reid is unencumbered in his effort to respond to Hume's claim that justice is an artificial virtue. Commentators have recognized, that is, that Reid employs premises that Hume would deny. The fundamental dispute between them, expressed by their respective and conflicting positions about the nature of justice, cannot be adjudicated without engaging with their conflicting views on other topics. We take our contribution here to be in expanding the list of disagreements that underlie this one. Determining the degree to which Reid's argument succeeds requires adjudicating disputes about the sense in which moral judgments, insofar as they involve sentiments, thereby also involve moral conceptions or other content-bearing mental states. It requires adjudicating disputes about what needs to be true for an act to be genuinely attributable to a person. And it requires determining what it is for an act to be properly thought of as expressive of a character trait of a person, a question which turns also on the more fundamental question of what a character trait is. Reid and Hume's respective views about justice sit in a web of interconnected views in moral philosophy, but also in the philosophy of mind and action.

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