

The Epistemology of Thomas Reid^{*}

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a reconstruction and analysis of Thomas Reid's epistemology, based upon an examination of his extant manuscripts and publications.¹ I argue that, in Reid's view, a certain degree of "evidence" (or, as I shall say, 'epistemic justification') is that which distinguishes mere true belief from knowledge; and that this degree of justification may be ascribed to a person's belief if and only if (i) the evidence upon which her belief is grounded is such that she holds it with "certainty"; (ii) she has a "sound understanding"; (iii) she has a distinct conception of the object of her belief; and, finally, (iv) she has formed her belief "without prejudice". We begin with Reid's notion of evidence.

1. EVIDENCE

Reid characterises evidence as the 'ground' of judgment or belief.² This relation of 'being grounded upon' is both psychological and epistemological: evidence is that which (i) inclines the agent toward the formation of a belief to a certain degree of strength, and (ii) that which may, under certain conditions, render the belief epistemologically justified.³

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¹ Given the enormity of textual material involved in this project, I have tried to assist the reader by providing, in footnotes, the key portions of text that I take to support my exposition, rather than supplying references only. Quotations presented in the main body of the paper are, for the most part, limited to passages that require a close analysis or explanation. Manuscripts are identified by the MS catalogue number (e.g. 4/1/27) followed by the page or folio number (e.g. 4/1/27, 2r). The prefix '2131' for the MSS from the Aberdeen University Library's Birkwood Collection is not recorded.

² "We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief." Reid, T. (1785/2002). *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Edited by D. R. Brookes and K. Haakonssen. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: p. 228. (Hereafter all references to the *Intellectual Powers* are abbreviated by 'IP'); "Evidence is the ground of judgment" IP, p. 410.

³ Cf. "Is a ground anything that gives rise to a belief; or must it give the belief some support, render it justified or rational in some degree? I think the answer must be: both." Alston, W. (1989a). Reid on Perception and Conception. In M. Dalgarno and E. Matthews, eds. *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, PSS 42: p. 41.

1.1 INCLINATION

Reid states that it is not “in a man’s power to believe any thing longer than he thinks he has evidence”;¹ that, “when we see evidence, it is impossible not to judge”;² and again, “It is not in our power to judge as we will. The judgment is carried along necessarily by the evidence, real or seeming, which appears to us at the time”;³ finally, evidence, he states, “is more easily felt than described. Those who never reflected upon its nature, feel its influence in governing their belief”.⁴

Several points may be extracted from these descriptions. First, beliefs do not arise *ex nihilo*: they are produced by some form of psychological impulsion or inclination, which, in turn, arises upon the agent’s becoming aware of something (proposition, experience, state of affairs) as being evidence for the truth of her belief.⁵ Thus:

A₁ *S* believes that *p* at *t* only if it seems to *S* that there is evidence for the truth of *p* at *t*.

Second, the inclination of evidence is involuntary: upon its seeming to the agent that there is evidence for the truth of *p*, it is not within his power to refrain from believing that *p* is true.⁶ This does not, of course, prevent the agent from forming false beliefs. As we shall see, if a person’s cognitive faculties are dysfunctional, or if he does not properly exert some voluntary intellectual operation (such as attention or deliberation) then, as a consequence, he might fail to see that he has good evidence for a belief, or that what he takes to be good evidence is nothing of the sort. Thus:

A₂ *S* believes that *p* at *t* if and only if it seems to *S* that there is evidence for the truth of *p* at *t*.

1.2 DEGREES OF BELIEF

Beliefs, for Reid, are held with varying degrees of strength or firmness; and this is determined by the degree of evidence the agent thinks that she has.⁷ For example, suppose an agent *S* attends to propositions *p* and not-*p*. On Reid’s account, if it seems to *S* either that (i) there

¹ IP, p. 228.

² IP, p. 410.

³ IP, p. 452.

⁴ IP, p. 228-29; cf. “it operates upon our belief whether we reflect upon its nature or not.” MS 8/II/16, 3

⁵ Whatever nonepistemic ends a person might achieve by believing that *p* (e.g. prudence or convenience), the function of believing, for Reid, is such that, if a person believes at all, she must believe that *p* is true: “to believe a proposition means the same thing as to judge it to be true.” IP, p. 572. Cf. “One has evidence that one’s belief that *P* is *really true* when one has evidence that *P*”. Lycan, W. (1988). *Judgment and Justification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: p. 137.

⁶ “Judgments be not immediately in our Power” MS 6/III/6, 1; “A parent or a master might command them to believe; but in vain; for belief is not in our power” Reid, T. (1788/210). Edited by K. Haakonssen and J. A. Harris. *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: p. 87. (Hereafter all references to the *Active Powers* are abbreviated by ‘AP’).

⁷ Reid states that evidence is “fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind”, either “in the highest degree, which we call certainty”, or “in various degrees according to circumstances”. IP, p. 229; “Every degree of evidence perceived by the mind, produces a proportioned degree of assent or belief.” IP, p. 557.

is no evidence for either p or not- p , or that (ii) p and not- p have equal degrees of evidence, then it is not within her power to judge either way: her judgment must remain in “perfect suspense”. On the other hand, if it seems to S that one or the other proposition has the slightest degree of evidence in its favour, then this “inclines the judgment in proportion”.¹ Thus, for Reid:

A₃ S forms or sustains a certain degree of belief that p at t if and only if it seems to S that there is a certain degree of evidence for the truth of p at t , and this degree of evidence is proportionate to her degree of belief that p at t .

1.3 EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

Reid distinguishes between (i) *mere* evidence or a *mere* ground of belief, as being that which gives rise to a belief, and (ii) “good evidence” or a “just ground” of belief, as being that which produces judgments that are “just and true”;² which functions as “the voucher for all truth”;³ or which “ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures”.⁴ Put another way, a belief that is grounded upon good evidence obtains a positive evaluation from an epistemic point of view: for it has fulfilled the epistemic aim of believing that p if and only if there is good evidence for the truth of p .⁵ I shall say that this kind of belief is, for Reid, ‘epistemically justified’.⁶

Reid, it must be said, uses the term “justify” to refer to the epistemic status obtained by virtue of something the agent *does*, such as showing that a belief is justified by producing an argument. For example:

“When I believe the truth of a mathematical Axiom, or of a proposition that necessarily follows from it; I see that the thing cannot possibly be otherwise. There is nothing I can desiderate to *justify this belief*. I see that the thing is so and why it is so.”⁷

The term as I use it in the following exposition, however, will refer only to the *state* or *condition* of being justified, and may thus be applied to any belief that is grounded upon good evidence, whether the evidence of reasoning or self-evidence, as in the quotation above.⁸

¹ IP, p. 557.

² IP, p. 421.

³ IP, p. 481.

⁴ IP, p. 230.

⁵ “It is every mans concern & every mans wish to believe onely what he has just ground to believe & not to believe, where he has no just ground for belief.” MS, 8/II/16; “To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid, and which every man wishes to avoid.” IP, p. 228.

⁶ Cf. Alston, W. (1989b). Concepts of Epistemic Justification. In *Epistemic Justification*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press: p. 83.

⁷ MS 8/II/10, 3 (My italics). cf. “Dr HARTLEY . . . is brought at last to *justify* this deviation in theory, and to bring arguments in defence of a method diametrically opposite to it.” IP, p. 81-82; “The child, . . . acts agreeably to the constitution and intention of Nature, even when he does and believes what reason would not *justify*.” IP, p. 249; “Though this belief cannot be *justified* upon his system, it ought to be accounted for as a phænomenon of human nature.” IP, pp. 290; “This instinctive induction is not *justified* by the rules of logic” IP, p. 374; “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*.” IP, p. 596. (My italics)

⁸ This distinction is made by William Alston, for example, in Alston, 1989b: pp. 82-83.

1.4 DEGREES OF JUSTIFICATION

There are, in Reid's view, two basic kinds of evidence, probable and demonstrative. Reid distinguishes between the term 'probable' as it is used in common language, and as it is used by philosophers. In the former case, it refers merely to a certain degree of belief. Thus, if, in ordinary language, *S* states that '*p* is probable', the implication is that, while *S* might believe *p*, he does so with a certain degree of doubt or uncertainty. But 'probable evidence', in the philosophical sense, provides a range of degrees of epistemic justification, "from the very least, to the greatest which we call certainty". It differs from 'demonstrative evidence' inasmuch as it can never afford that kind of justification which Reid calls 'absolute certainty': for this kind of justification attaches only to necessary truths, and the beliefs grounded upon probable evidence must always be contingent. However, probable evidence may still afford a very high degree of justification. Indeed, Reid suggests that the highest degree of probable evidence ought to produce a degree of belief that is equal to that afforded by demonstration:

"That there is such a city as Rome, I am as certain as of any proposition in EUCLID; but the evidence is not demonstrative, but of that kind which Philosophers call probable."¹

Reid, it must be said, is often ambiguous as to whether he is referring to degrees of belief or degrees of evidence, his use of the term "certainty" being a prime example. There is a good explanation for this. Reid holds that, for the most part, we measure a degree of evidence, that is, the degree of justification afforded by evidence, by means of the degree of belief it produces in us:

"I think, in most cases, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding, when comprehended clearly and without prejudice."²

More precisely:

A₄ *S*'s belief that *p* has a higher degree of epistemic justification than her belief that *q* only if *S* believes that *p* with more firmness or strength than that with which she believes that *q*.³

Now, if epistemic justification comes in degrees, it would make sense to ask whether there is some point at which a true belief might have a degree of justification sufficient to convert it to knowledge. Reid's response would be that the true belief must be held with "certainty".

"In knowledge, we judge without doubting; in opinion, with some mixture of doubt."⁴

¹ IP, p. 557.

² IP, p. 691; cf. "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." IP, p. 593.

³ This is not sufficient, of course. *S* must also have a "sound understanding", a distinct conception of *p* and *q*, and a non-prejudicial belief in *p* and *q*.

⁴ IP, p. 435.

“there can be no knowledge without judgment, though there may be judgment without that certainty which we commonly call knowledge.”¹

Reid is not suggesting that knowledge requires *absolute* certainty. For such certainty is obtained only for necessary truths; and Reid clearly holds that contingent truths may be known. Thus, the kind of certainty Reid requires is whatever firmness of belief is produced by virtue of being grounded upon the highest degree of probable evidence. We may call this degree of belief ‘fallibilist certainty’.² Hence:

A₅ S’s belief that *p* has a degree of epistemic justification sufficient for knowledge only if S’s evidence for the truth of *p* is such that she holds her belief that *p* with, at least, fallibilist certainty.³

1.5 REID’S EXTERNALISM

In the forgoing, the term ‘justification’ has been used as a way of conveying Reid’s notion of epistemic appraisal. Unfortunately, this term carries its own conceptual baggage. In particular, it has been said to imply or suggest “epistemic deontology”, that is, the view that there are epistemic duties, obligations, requirements, and so forth; and that this view, in turn, motivates internalism.⁴ Hence, our use of this term must be carefully qualified. First, let us define internalism and externalism, broadly, as follows. Where a *justifying factor* is whatever brings it about that a belief is justified:

D₁ Internalism = *df* S’s belief is justified only if all of the justifying factors for that belief are (or could be) cognitively accessible to S; she must be (or be capable of being) aware of them.

D₂ Externalism = *df* S’s belief is justified even if some or all of the justifying factors for that belief are not (or could not be) cognitively accessible to S; he need not be (or be capable of being) aware of them.⁵

Our question, then, is whether Reid is an internalist or an externalist. Reid certainly makes claims that would place him in the former category. As we have seen, he states that a

¹ IP, p. 411. Cf. “judgment extends to every kind of evidence, probable or certain, and to every degree of assent or dissent. It extends to all knowledge as well as to all opinion; with this difference only, that in knowledge it is more firm and steady, like a house founded upon a rock. In opinion it stands upon a weaker foundation, and is more liable to be shaken and overturned.” IP, p. 436.

² It is crucial that my use of the term ‘certainty’ in this formulation as a degree of belief be distinguished from ‘certainty’ taken as a degree of justification, as, for instance, Chisholm appears to do in his definition of the same term: “When we say that he *feels* certain . . . we are saying something about the strength of his conviction or about the felt strength of his conviction, But when we say that something *is* certain for him . . . we may, but of course we need not, be saying something . . . about what he has a right to believe, or what it is reasonable for him to believe. Let us restrict the expression ‘is certain for him’ to this normative and objective sense.” Chisholm, R. M. (1976). *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study*. G. Allen & Unwin: p. 26.

³ Again, fallibilist certainty is not sufficient: S must also have a “sound understanding”, a distinct conception of *p*, and her belief that *p* must be formed “without prejudice”.

⁴ Plantinga, A. (1993). *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: p. 11ff.

⁵ Cf. Bonjour, L. (1992). Externalism/Internalism. In J. Dancy and E. Sosa (eds). *A Companion to Epistemology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell: p. 132.

person must be aware of the evidence for her belief, and that it must seem to her to be evidence. Again, he suggests that we have some voluntary control, if only indirectly, over our beliefs:

“In every case the assent ought to be proportioned to the evidence; for to believe firmly, what has but a small degree of probability, is a manifest abuse of our understanding.”¹

It is important to note that Reid is only saying here that our degree of belief ought to be proportioned to the degree of probability that evidence *actually* has. This does not imply that it is within our power to believe more firmly than is proportionate to that degree of probability which the evidence *seems* to us to have. Such a phenomenon would not be the result of an “abuse of our understanding”, but rather due to some cognitive malfunction:

“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.”²

Hence, we have no obligation to proportion the strength of our belief to what *seems to us* to be a certain degree of evidence. However, it is possible, in Reid’s view, to exert our voluntary intellectual powers so as to bring it about that we fail to gain an accurate perception of the degree of probability that some evidence *actually* has. As a consequence, we may be mistaken in thinking that some evidence has a high degree of probability, and thus form a belief with a higher degree of strength than is warranted. Nevertheless, even with this qualification, Reid would still appear to be an internalist: a belief held to a certain degree is justified to a corresponding degree only if *it appears to the agent* that the evidence has the degree of probability it has in fact.

However, this is by no means the whole story. Our analysis in A₄ omitted the three further conditions Reid placed at the end of his statement regarding how evidence (or justification) is measured, that is, by “the effect it has [i] upon a sound understanding, [ii] when comprehended clearly and [iii] without prejudice.”³ Conditions (ii) and (iii), taken separately, might appear to constitute internalist elements in Reid’s account. However, our exposition of condition (i) will quickly dispose of this perception. First, as we shall see, condition (i) is an entirely *external* justifying factor. We shall also see that if (i) failed to be satisfied, then, even if conditions (ii) and (iii) were satisfied, this would amount to nothing from an epistemic point of view. In other words, the agent may form a distinct conception of what he believes without prejudice, and yet, if his understanding is unsound in some relevant respect, then the belief thereby produced, even if it is true, will fail to have a degree

¹ IP, p. 48.

² IP, p. 481.

³ IP, p. 557. These three conditions are repeated in the context of Reid’s discussion of what it is for a first principle to be ‘self-evident’: “Self-evident propositions are those which appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly, and attends to them without prejudice.” IP, p. 141-42.

of justification sufficient for knowledge. Again, suppose that a small child holds a true belief with fallibilist certainty, and in such a way that conditions (i)-(iii) were satisfied. Now suppose this child was quite unaware of having satisfied any of these three conditions. In Reid's view, it would not follow that the child was thereby deprived of knowledge.

Finally, given our analysis (below) of what Reid means by a "sound understanding", it will be clear that conditions (ii) and (iii) may be absorbed into (i): that is, if the agent's understanding is sound, then the faculties by which she forms her belief will be functioning properly; and this, in part, will involve forming a distinct conception of the proposition believed without prejudice. To this extent, conditions (ii) and (iii) appear to be externalist justifying factors.¹ On the other hand, we shall see that Reid distinguishes (ii) and (iii) for good reason. It is within our power, he argues, to "abuse our understanding", that is, to render it 'unsound'; and it is precisely conditions (ii) and (iii) over which we have such power.² Part of the epistemologist's task, then, is to enable us to understand better this power that we have, and the processes by which we might better direct its exertions so as to ensure that (ii) and (iii) are not violated. In other words, whilst the degree to which our beliefs are justified is not dependent upon our awareness that (ii) and (iii) are satisfied, it is dependent on whether or not we exert our voluntary intellectual operations in a manner which violates (ii) and (iii).

2. SOUND UNDERSTANDING

Reid's second necessary condition for a person's belief obtaining that degree of epistemic justification sufficient for knowledge is that she have a "sound understanding". In this section, I argue that this involves the satisfaction of four conditions.³

Reid argues that our intellectual powers were designed to achieve several purposes: the preservation and well-being of our species, the ability to form correct judgments regarding what is good upon the whole, or what is our duty, and so on.⁴ When we achieve these ends, it may therefore be said that our faculties are functioning properly: that is, they are functioning the way they were designed to function by the Author of our nature.

However, one can easily imagine a Humean world in which these ends are achieved with mostly false beliefs.⁵ Hence, the mere fact that our faculties are functioning properly is not

¹ This 'absorption' is noted in Plantinga, A. (1993). *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: p. 166, n.14.

² Nicholas Wolterstorff presents a similar externalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology in Wolterstorff, N. (1988). Hume and Reid. *Monist* 70, pp. 398-417. However, given the prominent role that Reid gives to the voluntary intellectual powers in satisfying the conditions for epistemic justification, along with Reid's lengthy consideration of 'prejudices to avoid' (IP, Essay VI, Ch.8), I must disagree with Wolterstorff's view that "Reid offers no rules for the direction of the mind, lays down no intellectual obligations - other than the bland injunction to avoid drawing conclusions hastily", p. 410.

³ My exposition in this section, it must be said, is quite similar to the basic outline of Alvin Plantinga's (Reidian) account of epistemic warrant in *Warrant and Proper Function*. However, I have endeavoured to ensure that these conditions are stated in a manner that is faithful to Reid, for instance, by presenting no more philosophical detail than is textually warranted.

⁴ AP, pp. 153-54.

⁵ E.g. where "the whole universe about me, bodies and spirits, sun, moon, stars, and earth, friends and relations, all things without exception, which I imagined to have a permanent existence, whether I thought of them or not, vanish at once" Reid, T. (1785/1997). *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. Edited by Derek R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: p. 4-5. (Hereafter all references to the *Inquiry* are abbreviated by 'HM'); cf. Plantinga's "Is Naturalism Irrational?" in *Warrant and Proper Function*, Chapter 12.

sufficient. It must also be the case that our intellectual powers were designed for the purpose of producing *true* beliefs. In other words, by the condition of “sound understanding”, Reid means, in part, that the powers by which the belief is produced must be functioning in such a way as to bring about at least one particular end for which they were designed, namely, the production of true beliefs:

“OUR intellectual powers are wisely fitted by the Author of our nature for the discovery of truth, as far as suits our present state. Error is not their natural issue, any more than disease is of the natural structure of the body.”¹

“We must judge of the Intention of our faculties from their sound and natural State . . . our Senses are given us by nature not to deceive but to give us true information of things within their Reach”²

The phrases “as far as suits our present state” and “things within their Reach” give us the second condition. As we saw earlier, Reid argues that our faculties were designed to operate in quite specific environments. Thus, even if our faculties are functioning as they were designed to function, there may be occasions when there is a mismatch between the environment and the faculties, such that the beliefs therein produced are mostly false.

Now Reid argues that, as it happens, our faculties *are* presently in that environment for which they were designed; and that any errors produced by a properly functioning power of the mind, such as perception, may be explained by reference to the fallacious application of certain voluntary powers of the mind.³ There is, however, one feature that may be described as ‘environmental’, of which Reid admits the possibility of a mismatch. Reid allows that the mind may continue to function following the death of the body:

“Tho Death puts an End to the power of the Mind over that System of Matter we call the Body & it can no more produce either Vital or Voluntary Motions in it or have Sensations by Impressions made upon it it no wise follows that the other Powers of the Mind should thereby cease”⁴

In the present *earthly* cognitive environment, however, the intellectual powers depend upon certain internal and external physical organs: the internal organs being “nerves and the brain”, and the external, being various body parts, such as the eye. Thus, while there may be no dysfunction in some intellectual power, a disorder in the physical organ to which it is

¹ IP, p. 527; cf. “The understanding, in its natural and best state, pays its homage to truth only.” IP, p. 527-28; “the senses . . . are formed by the wise and beneficent Author of Nature, to give us true information of things necessary to our preservation and happiness.” IP, p. 241-42.

² MS 8/II/22, 2-3.

³ See IP, Chap 22, “Of the Fallacy of the Senses”.

⁴ MS 4/II/4, 1. “We grant that the Soul is presently so connected with the body as to be greatly affected by the good or bad state of it. But it follows not from this that it may not continue to exist when that connexion is totally broke. We may with better reason conclude on the contrary, that as the operations of the Mind are limited and confined by its connexion with the body, those operations will be more free & unconfined when that connexion is dissolved.” MS 4/II/19, 2.

regularly conjoined, will tend to produce false beliefs:¹

“our Senses ought not to be accounted fallacious because we are sometimes deceived by them when the Organs are disordered and in some unnatural State. We must judge of the Intention of our faculties from their sound and natural State and not from any disorder of them which is accidental. And thus we actually Judge in other cases. Thus every man judges that a Mans feet & legs are fitted by nature for his walking upon them; Nor is it any Objection to this that some Men are lame & unable to walk upon their legs. In like Manner our Senses are given us by nature not to deceive but to give us true information of things within their Reach, and it is no objection to this that when there is any disorder that is accidental & preternatural in our organs of perception we may from that cause be led to judge wrong.”²

The third condition arises due to the following problem: even if the preceding two conditions were satisfied, it may yet be that our beliefs turn out to be mostly false. For the design itself, and the actions of the designer in bringing about the relevant effects, may be defective: in short, Author of our nature may, in this respect, be unreliable. Hence, the following condition is required: if the faculty (or set of faculties) that produces a person’s belief is designed to produce true beliefs, and is functioning properly in an appropriate cognitive environment, then it must be more probable than not that the belief in question is true.³

The crucial question, of course, is whether this condition is satisfied for (most of) our beliefs. Reid’s response here is to argue that there are no beliefs within a theistic metaphysic, that would entail or render it more probable than not that this condition would fail to be satisfied:

“we have no reason to think that God has given fallacious powers to any of his creatures: This would be to think dishonourably of our Maker, and would lay a foundation for universal scepticism”.⁴

This response should not be taken to mean that theism plays a Cartesian role in Reid’s

¹ Ben-Zeev argues to the effect that any direct realist account of perception, such as Reid’s, requires, for the epistemic justification of perceptual beliefs, the satisfaction of the first two externalist conditions we have mentioned above: “it would make no (religious, evolutionary, pragmatic, etc.) sense to assume that the perceptual system is false when it is properly functioning”. Ben-Zeev, A. (1986). Reid’s direct approach to perception. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 17: p. 110.

² MS 8/II/22, 2-3; cf. “The imagination, the memory, the judging and reasoning powers, are all liable to be hurt, or even destroyed, by disorders of the body, as well as our powers of perception; but we do not on this account call them fallacious.” IP, p. 291; We must acknowledge it to be the lot of human nature, that all the human faculties are liable, by accidental causes, to be hurt and unfitted for their natural functions, either wholly or in part: But as this imperfection is common to them all, it gives no just ground for accounting any of them fallacious.” IP, p. 301.

³ Cf. Plantinga’s formulation of this condition: “the design governing the production of the belief in question [must] be a good one; still more exactly . . . the module of the design plan governing its production must be such that it is objectively highly probable that a belief produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly according to that module (in a congenial environment) will be true or versimilitudinous.” *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 17.

⁴ IP, p. 244. Cf. “it seems to be a very unfavourable account of the workmanship of the Supreme Being, to think that he has given us one faculty to deceive us, to wit, our senses, and another faculty, to wit, our reason, to detect the fallacy.” IP, p. 243; “if we should take for granted all that [philosophers] have said on this subject, the natural conclusion from it might seem to be, that the senses are given to us by some malignant Dæmon on purpose to delude us, rather than that they are formed by the wise and beneficent Author of Nature, to give us true information of things necessary to our preservation and happiness.” IP, p. 241-42.

epistemology.¹ For this, Reid argues, would be tantamount to epistemic circularity:² that is, where one may commit epistemic circularity in one of two ways: (i) in attempting to show that *one* faculty is reliable, it is assumed in the process, that that faculty is reliable; or (ii) in attempting to show that *every* faculty is reliable, it is assumed that *at least one* faculty is reliable. Reid does not therefore pretend to show that our faculties are reliable by inference from the existence of a benevolent Creator; for this would assume that at least one faculty is reliable: whether the faculty of reasoning, or, as Reid holds, some faculty that gives rise to a self-evident belief.³

Of course, this problem will be true for *any* position. For example, we might decide that, in view of our inability to provide any good reason for trusting our faculties, scepticism is the only rational option. But we cannot arrive at this position without exerting at least one of our faculties. Again, we might take an agnostic view, withholding any belief until such time as there is sufficient evidence to justify a belief in the reliability of our faculties. However, as Reid states, such agnosticism would, of necessity, be a permanent predicament. For how could we ever be persuaded out of our agnosticism, when it entails that we refuse to believe that our faculties are reliable until we exert our faculty of reasoning so as to conclude that they are reliable?

“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 withhold 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.”⁴

Finally, except in cases of ‘metaphysical lunacy’ and cognitive dysfunction, it is not within our power to refrain from believing that the deliverances of our faculties are, for the most part, reliable. Indeed, we give expression to this belief whenever we act:⁵

“Although some writers on this subject have disputed the authority of the senses, of memory, and of every human faculty; yet we find, that such persons, in the conduct of life, in pursuing their ends, or in avoiding dangers, pay the same regard to the authority of their senses, and other faculties, as the rest of mankind. By this they give us just ground to doubt of their candour in their professions of scepticism.”⁶

¹ As Daniels seems to think: “Reid’s only defense against the sceptical 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 (p. 117) . . . Reid justifies natively given ‘common sense’ beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a nondeceiver” (pp. 119-20). Daniels, N. (1974). *Thomas Reid’s Inquiry*. New York, N.Y.: B. Franklin.

² This term derives from Alston, W. P. (1989c). Epistemic Circularity. In *Epistemic Justification*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press: Essay 12. See also, Alston, W. P. (1985). Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2, 435-52: pp. 444-45.

³ “every argument offered to prove the truth and fidelity of our faculties, takes for granted the thing in question, and is therefore that kind of sophism which Logicians call *petitio principii*.” IP, p. 571; “Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity; and this we must do implicitly, until God give us new faculties to sit in judgment upon the old.” IP, p. 481. This last phrase is puzzling, given that any *new* faculties would fall under the same problem.

⁴ IP, p. 480.

⁵ “The Sceptic may perhaps persuade himself in general, that he has no ground to believe his senses or his memory: But, in particular cases that are interesting, his disbelief vanishes, and he finds himself under a necessity of believing both.” IP, p. 412.

⁶ IP, p. 46.

Reid's position, then, is this: all of us cannot help but place some degree of trust in the reliability of our cognitive faculties:

“The judgments grounded upon the evidence of sense, of memory, and of consciousness, put all men upon a level. The Philosopher, with regard to these, has no prerogative above the illiterate, or even above the savage. Their reliance upon the testimony of these faculties is as firm and as well grounded as his.”¹

Given this state of affairs, the primary task for epistemologists is to propose a metaphysic that is superior to any other by virtue of its capacity to preserve better the *rationality* of the trust we cannot help but place in our faculties. Reid's contribution, in this respect, is to argue that, within the context of a theistic metaphysic, there is no good reason to believe that scepticism is a live possibility. For a theistic metaphysic consists of a set of beliefs, no member of which either affirms or leads to the denial of the reliability of our faculties, a feature that could not be claimed of a system such as that advanced by David Hume.² In short, Reid's view is that, within a theistic universe, it is more probable than not that a person with a ‘sound understanding’ will form (mostly) true beliefs.

Reid's requirement that the agent have a “sound understanding” may therefore be analysed as follows: where F = the faculty (or set of faculties) by which S 's belief that p is produced at t :

A_6 S 's belief that p has a degree of epistemic justification sufficient for knowledge at t only if (a) F is designed to produce true beliefs; (b) F is functioning properly at t , (c) F is functioning in an environment for which it was designed to function at t , and (d) if conditions (a)-(c) are true, then it is more probable than not that p is true.

3. DISTINCT CONCEPTION

Reid states that “indistinct conceptions of things are, for the most part, the cause not only of obscurity in writing and speaking, but of error in judging. . . . a sound judgment seems to be the inseparable companion of a clear and steady apprehension”.³ To be precise:

A_7 S 's belief that p has a degree of epistemic justification sufficient for knowledge at t only if S forms a distinct conception of p .

Reid holds that there are two kinds of distinct conceptions: “direct conceptions” and “general conceptions”. Corresponding to these, are conceptions that fail to be distinct: “obscure” conceptions; and the “gross and indistinct” conceptions we obtain by our external

¹ IP, p. 412.

² Cf. “there are no propositions [the theist] already accepts just by way of being a theist, which together with forms of reasoning . . . lead to the rejection of the belief that our cognitive faculties have the apprehension of truth as their purpose and for the most part fulfil that purpose.” Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper function*, p. 237.

³ IP, p. 308.

senses and consciousness.¹ In the following two subsections, I examine the important interpretative problems raised by these two kinds of indistinct conceptions.

3.1 OBSCURE CONCEPTIONS

Reid advances the following as a first principle of metaphysics: the “qualities which we perceive by our senses must have a subject, which we call body, and . . . the thoughts we are conscious of must have a subject, which we call mind”.² Now this principle only tells us how it is that the *qualities* of body and the operations of mind are known, namely, by means of perception and consciousness. Reid therefore owes us an account of how we obtain knowledge of bodies and minds, taken as the *subjects* of such qualities. To this end, he distinguishes between three kinds of conception:³

- A₈ *S* has a direct conception of *x* if and only if *S*'s conception of *x* arises immediately upon her perception or consciousness of *x*.⁴
- A₉ *S* has a relative conception of *x* if and only if (i) *S* has a direct conception of *y*; (ii) *S* conceives of *x* as that which is either the subject or the cause of *y*, and (iii) *S* may or may not have a direct conception of *x*.⁵
- A₁₀ *S* has a *mere* relative conception of *x* if and only (i) *S* has a direct conception of *y*, (ii) *S* conceives of *x* as that which is either the subject or the cause of *y*, and (iii) *S* does not have a direct conception of *x*.⁶

Reid's claim, then, is that our conception of mind is *merely* relative. That is to say, (i) we have a direct conception of operations such as judgment and perception; (ii) we conceive of something we call 'mind' as being the subject of these operations; but (iii) we do not have a direct conception of this subject. The crucial epistemic issue, however, is whether we have any *good evidence* for thinking that our operations of mind are attributes of a subject. Reid's response here is to distinguish between two ways by which we come to know of relations.

¹ “the first notions we have of sensible objects are . . . neither simple, nor are they accurate and distinct: They are gross and indistinct, and like the *chaos, a rudis indigestaque moles* [‘a rough, unordered mass of things.’]” IP, p. 416.

² IP, p. 495.

³ Reid uses the terms “knowledge”, “notion” and “conception” interchangeably in speaking of direct and relative conceptions. But, as we shall see, they are strictly speaking, quite distinct.

⁴ More precisely, the objects of perception are primary and secondary qualities, and it is only the primary qualities of which we have a direct conception: “all the primary qualities of body . . . we have a direct and immediate knowledge from our senses. To this class belong also all the operations of mind of which we are conscious.” AP, p. 10.

⁵ “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.” IP, p. 201; “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*.” AP, p. 9. I have specified the relations *being a subject of* and *being a cause of* in the formulations above, as these are the only relations Reid has in mind.

⁶ This definition is required given the possibility of a conception that is both direct and relative: “I can directly conceive ten thousand men or ten thousand pounds, because both are objects of sense . . . But I can form a relative notion of the same number of men or of pounds, by attending to the relations which this number has to other numbers, greater or less.” AP, p. 11.

We may call the first *direct* relational knowledge ($Rxy = x$ stands in the relation R to y):

A₁₁ S knows directly that Rxy only if (i) S has a direct conception of both x and y , (ii) upon comparing x and y , it is either self-evident to S that Rxy , or Rxy comes to have the evidence of reasoning for S .¹

For example, I know that “my foot is longer than my finger” only if (i) my foot and my finger are both objects of my perception, (ii) I compare my foot with my finger, (iii), upon making this comparison, it is self-evident to me that my foot is longer than my finger. Again, I know that “the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal” only if I have a direct conception of both the angles at the base of the triangle, and I construct a sound argument, the conclusion of which is that these angles are equal.²

Now, A₁₁ is immediately ruled out as the means by which we come to know of the relation between an attribute and a substance: for we do not have a direct conception of any substance. However, to conclude that substances do not exist on these grounds alone would, Reid argues, be quite unjustified. For, upon careful reflection, we will discover a second source of our knowledge of relations. We may call this *indirect* relational knowledge:

A₁₂ S knows indirectly that Rxy only if (i) S has a direct conception of x , (ii) S does not have a direct conception of y , and (iii) upon attending to x , it is self-evident to S that there must be some y such that Rxy .³

This is precisely the means, Reid argues, by which we know that the operations of which we are conscious are attributes of a substance. For we have a direct conception of these operations, and no direct conception of mind. Yet, upon attending to the operations, it is self-evident to us that they cannot exist without a subject to which they belong, and of which they are attributes.⁴

Now Reid is very careful to accentuate the severe limitations of our knowledge of mind. Its content, after all, is nothing but a mere relative conception; and such conceptions always fail to be “clear and distinct”.⁵ In short, *all* that we know about mind, is that it is that subject

¹ “by comparing the related objects, when we have before had the conception of both . . . we perceive the relation, either immediately, or by a process of reasoning.” IP, p. 422. I will later argue that Reid holds that a true belief accompanied by either ‘self-evidence’ or the ‘evidence of reasoning’ has a degree of justification sufficient to convert a true belief to knowledge.

² IP, p. 422.

³ “by attention to one of the related objects, we perceive or judge, that it must, from its nature, have a certain relation to something else, which before perhaps we never thought of; and thus our attention to one of the related objects produces the notion of a correlate, and of a certain relation between them.” IP, p. 422; “It is not by having first the notions of mind and sensation, and then comparing them together, that we perceive the one to have the relation of a subject or substratum, and the other that of an act or operation: on the contrary, one of the related things, to wit, sensation, suggests to us both the correlate and the relation.” HM, p. 37-38.

⁴ “By attending to the operations of thinking, memory, reasoning, we perceive or judge, that there must be something which thinks, remembers, and reasons, which we call the mind.” IP, p. 422; cf. IP, pp. 257-58. Other examples of A₁₂ include the conception of causes by their effects (AP, p. 313), of design and purpose in a cause (IP, pp. 627-28), and of space by bodies (IP, p. 518).

⁵ Reid argues in the *Intellectual Powers* that a mere relative conception must always be obscure, “because it gives us no conception of what the thing is, but of what relation it bears to something else.” IP, p. 236. However, in the AP, he allows that, “our relative conceptions of things are not always less distinct . . . than those that are direct” AP, p. 11. However, every example Reid gives is of an object of which we also have a direct conception, that is, the examples are of relative, rather than *mere* relative conceptions. They are also all examples in which the object of the relative conception is a number or quantity, rather than a quality of body or an operation of mind. Either or both of these differences together, may account for the difference in clarity and distinctness.

without which certain attributes cannot exist.¹ This concession is not without problems, however. If Reid holds that one necessary condition for knowledge is that the agent have a distinct conception of the object of her belief, how can he consistently hold that we have only a mere relative conception of mind and also that we can have a knowledge of mind?

Reid's response to here would be to distinguish between (a) a conception of mind as that which has the essential relation of *being the subject of*; and (b) a conception of the other relations of mind. With respect to (a), our conception of mind is sufficiently distinct to distinguish this essential relation from other relations, such as *being a cause of*. With respect to (b) no such conception exists: the *only* essential attribute or relation of mind of which we have any conception, is that it is the subject of certain operations. Nevertheless, if our conception of one of the relations of mind is sufficiently distinct to enable us to distinguish it from other relations, it must be possible to form a general conception of that relation. But general conceptions are distinct conceptions; hence, in Reid's view, we can at least know, of some mind (or indeed of any substance), both that (i) it exists and that (ii) it is the subject of certain attributes.²

3.2 GROSS AND INDISTINCT CONCEPTIONS

We begin our analysis of the interpretative problem here by examining the operation of consciousness. We will then approach the same problem as it arises in relation to the operation of sensation.

Reid distinguishes between the operations of consciousness and reflection in the following manner. First, the objects of consciousness are present operations of mind, and there are no present operations of mind of which we are not conscious.³ Hence:

A₁₃ *S* is conscious of *x* at *t* if and only if *x* is an operation of mind occurring in *S* at *t*.

Second, the objects of reflection are also present operations of mind: however, reflection includes within its range those operations that have occurred in the recent past, and so are "fresh" in our memory. Moreover, unlike consciousness, not all operations of mind are the object of reflection.⁴ Hence:

¹ "Nature teaches us, that thinking and reasoning are attributes, which cannot exist without a subject; but of that subject I believe the best notion we can form implies little more than that it is the subject of such attributes." IP, p. 361.

² I take this interpretation to be supported by the following texts: "though the relation between a Substance and its qualities be in some respects obscure, it is easily distinguished from all other relations" MS 3061/1/4, 2; in Reid, T. (1995). *Thomas Reid on the Inanimate Creation: Papers Relating to the Life Sciences*. Edited by Paul B. Wood. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press: p. 174 (Hereafter this work will be abbreviated as *IC*): "however imperfect or obscure our notion of Substance may be, we must admit their existence, and that qualities cannot subsist without them" MS 3061/1/4, 5; in *IC*, p. 176; "There are other relative notions that are not taken from accidental relations . . . but from qualities or attributes essential to the thing. ¶ Of this kind are our notions both of body and mind. . . if it should be asked, What is mind? It is that which thinks. I ask not what it does, or what its operations are, but what it is? To this I can find no answer; our notion of mind being not direct, but relative to its operations" AP, p. 10. Cf. IP, p. 326. This account, I believe, answers Chisholm's question regarding Reid's view on whether or not we can know the essential attributes of substances. See Chisholm, R. M. (1990). Keith Lehrer and Thomas Reid. *Philosophical Studies* 60, pp. 33-38: p. 36.

³ "Consciousness is . . . that immediate knowledge which we have of . . . all the present operations of our minds." IP, p. 24.

⁴ "All men are conscious of the operations of their own minds, at all times, while they are awake; but there are few who reflect upon them, or make them objects of thought." IP, p. 58.

A₁₄ *S* reflects on *x* at *t* if and only if (i) *x* is an operation of mind occurring at *t*, or an object of *S*'s short-term memory at *t*; and (ii) *S* directs her attention toward *x* at *t*.¹

Third, consciousness and reflection differ further in respect of the kinds of conception we obtain by their exertions. If *S* is *merely* conscious of some operation *O*, then she will obtain only an indistinct conception of *O*.

"[Consciousness] is insufficient of itself to give us clear and distinct notions of the operations of which we are conscious, and of their mutual relations, and minute distinctions."²

Reflection, on the other hand, is that operation by which we may obtain a distinct conception of the objects presented to us by consciousness.

"it is by reflection upon the operation of our own minds that we can form any distinct and accurate notions of them, and not by consciousness without reflection"³

The interpretative problem, then, is this: First, Reid takes it that consciousness gives us "that immediate knowledge which we have of . . . all the present operations of our minds".⁴ Second, Reid argues that a person's belief can obtain that degree of justification sufficient for knowledge only if she has a *distinct* conception of the object of her belief. Third, Reid tells us that consciousness may be distinguished from reflection by virtue of the fact that only the latter provides us with distinct conceptions. Hence, Reid appears to state both that consciousness does and that it does not provide us with a distinct conception of the operations of mind.

There are two ways we can render Reid's account consistent. First, we can take Reid's statements regarding the knowledge we obtain by consciousness to be a periphrasis for the more precise claim that knowledge of the operations of mind is obtained only by the operation of consciousness conjoined with that of reflection.⁵ However, this would require

¹ Bourdillon argues that Reid makes a three-fold distinction between consciousness, attention and reflection: "consciousness is the receptacle in which all mental operations . . . reside; attention, a relatively mundane act, brings these operations to the surface; and reflection, a far more sophisticated act, gives us clear and distinct notions of these operations." Bourdillon, p. (1975). Thomas Reid's Account of Sensation as a Natural Principle of Belief. *Philosophical Studies* 27: p. 25. However, Reid gives a very clear definition of 'attention' in the *Active Powers*, according to which reflection just *is* attention directed toward the operations of mind. The following text makes this especially clear: "when we make [the various operations of our minds] the objects of our attention, either while they are present, or when they are recent and fresh in our memory, this act of the mind is called *reflection*." IP, p. 42.

² IP, p. 472.

³ IP, p. 422. This text, in particular, resolves the apparent interpretative difficulty that arises from those passages in the *Inquiry* where Reid speaks of 'perceiving sensations'. For example: "A sensation, which can have no existence but when it is perceived" HM, p. 43. The term 'perceived' here, I suggest, is merely functioning in the same sense that 'reflection' functions in the passage above. That is, Reid's talk of "reflection upon the objects of sense" is extensionally equivalent to the act of perception. Likewise, his talk of sensations being "perceived" in the *Inquiry* is extensionally equivalent to the act of reflecting upon sensations. This interpretation is shared by Cummins, P. D. (1990). Pappas on the Role of Sensations in Reid's Theory of Perception. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1: p. 760. See also Armstrong, who argues, as Reid does, that we do not, strictly speaking, perceive sensations; rather we have or feel them. Contrary to Berkeley, "The 'esse' of sensations is not 'percipi' but 'sentri'." Armstrong, D. M. (1961). *Perception and The Physical World*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: p. 5.

⁴ IP, p. 24. See also IP, pp. 41, 58, 66, 191, 421, 470.

⁵ This appears to be Bourdillon's solution, with the qualification that he distinguishes (mistakenly) between attention and reflection: "On those occasions when Reid says, for example, that we find it impossible to doubt the existence of those things of which we are conscious . . . he is generally alluding either to pain or to other mental operations of which we are not merely conscious, but to which we also pay attention." Bourdillon, 1975: p. 26.

us to take Reid as holding that we might be conscious of an operation, and yet fail to know that it exists; but there is no textual evidence in the entire Reid corpus that would support this view, and a great deal against it. The second option is this: whilst consciousness alone may give us immediate knowledge, it cannot give us the more detailed kind of knowledge obtainable by reflection. This interpretation is strongly supported by the following texts:

“The difference between consciousness and reflection, is like to the difference between a superficial view of an object which presents itself to the eye, while we are engaged about something else, and that attentive examination which we give to an object when we are wholly employed in surveying it.”¹

“The operations of our minds are known . . . by consciousness, the authority of which is as certain and as irresistible as that of sense. In order, however, to our having a distinct notion of any of the operations of our own minds, it is . . . farther necessary that we attend to them while they are exerted, and reflect upon them with care, while they are recent and fresh in our memory.”²

Moreover, this interpretation is consistent with Reid’s developmental view of the voluntary intellectual powers. Attentiveness or reflection is rarely present in childhood:

“reflection does not appear in children. Of all the powers of the mind, it seems to be of the latest growth, whereas consciousness is coeval with the earliest”.³

Again, the degree of attention required for the most accurate and scientific study of the mind’s operations is, Reid argues, practiced by only a minority:

“attentive reflection upon those operations, making them objects of thought, surveying them attentively, and examining them on all sides, is so far from being common to all men, that it is the lot of very few”.⁴

Now to preserve Reid’s view that consciousness may yet give us *knowledge*, these texts must be read with great care. Reid is not, I suggest, referring here to reflection taken as a *kind* of operation, but rather as a certain *degree* to which that operation is exerted, namely, that degree which is only found, if at all, in the later stages of a person’s intellectual development. Reflection as an operation, however, may be present even to a very weak degree. Indeed, I suggest that Reid’s view entails that it *must* be present from the moment we obtain any knowledge of the operation of our minds. As we have seen, Reid holds that (1) it is not within our power to form a belief that has a degree of justification sufficient for knowledge unless we can distinctly conceive of the object of our belief; and that (2) consciousness alone cannot give us any such conception. But then, if, as he states, (3)

¹ IP, p. 59; cf. “we cannot be unconscious of the . . . sensation of the mind . . . If we can only acquire the habit of attending to our sensations, we may know them perfectly.” HM, pp. 175-76.

² IP, p. 96.

³ IP, p. 421.

⁴ IP, p. 472.

consciousness “is common to all men at all times”, and (4) we have an immediate knowledge of *any* operation of which we are conscious, then Reid must, on pain of inconsistency, also hold that (5) our ability to form distinct conceptions of the objects of consciousness by way of some act of reflection, with however weak a degree, must be coeval with the first exertions of that power. In other words, consciousness and reflection do not operate *successively*. We are not presented with indistinct conceptions, upon which the operation of reflection then performs its task of analysis. The operations of consciousness and reflection must be taken to operate at the same time, such that every conception we form by way of consciousness is also a conception we form by way of reflection, even though the two operations perform distinct functions.¹

We can perhaps gain more clarity on this point by examining the interpretative problem as it arises for the external senses. First, Reid states that our senses alone give us a “gross and indistinct” conception of their objects:

“There are therefore notions of the objects of sense which are gross and indistinct; and there are others that are distinct and scientific. The former may be got from the senses alone; but the latter cannot be obtained without some degree of judgment.”²

Second, Reid draws a parallel between the kind of conception presented by consciousness, and that presented by the external senses:

“Consciousness, being a kind of internal sense, can no more give us distinct and accurate notions of the operations of our minds, than the external senses can give of external objects.”³

The second parallel Reid draws is between the operation of reflection and the operations required for distinctly conceiving the objects of the external senses:

“Reflection upon the operations of our minds, is the same kind of operation with that by which we form distinct notions of external objects. . . . so it is by reflection upon the objects of sense, and not by the senses without reflection, that we can form distinct notions of them.”⁴

Now there would appear to be an interpretative puzzle here of the first importance. On the one hand, Reid appears to think of the conceptions we obtain by our senses as being that “which Nature immediately presents to us”; that is, they are prior to and distinct from those conceptions that arise by way of the operations of distinguishing and generalising.⁵ Yet, Reid

¹ This interpretation, of course, implies that we form beliefs about *all* our sensations, and so, as Pappas suggests, leaves open the possibility of an inference from sensation-beliefs to beliefs about the external world. However, Reid holds that sensations themselves, and not any belief about sensations, are the (non-inferential) occasion of perceptual beliefs. Again, Reid held that the evidence for a belief is not merely a necessary condition for its justification, but that which gives rise to it. Hence, he must reject the view that our perceptual beliefs are justified only if inferred from sensation-beliefs. But all this may still be true, even if consciousness gives rise to sensation-beliefs. In other words, my interpretation is not inconsistent with Reid’s account of the formation and justification of perceptual beliefs. See Pappas, G. (1989). *Sensation and Perception in Reid*. *Nous* 23, pp. 155-167: p. 160.

² IP, p. 419.

³ IP, p. 421.

⁴ IP, p. 421.

⁵ IP, p. 309.

also makes the following counterfactual claim: If we *were* so constituted as to be incapable of distinguishing the attributes and relations of an object, then our consciousness and our senses *would* give us only “one complex and confused notion of all these mingled together”.¹ The implication of this second claim is that, for certain kinds of attributes and relations, it is not the case that there are two temporally distinguishable phases or stages in the process of forming a distinct conception: we are not presented with a confused, complex indistinct conception, upon which we then set to work analysing the elements thereby presented.²

Perhaps Reid might have helped us here by suggesting, as he does in another context,³ that this two stage view is mistakenly analogous to the process of painting. That is, where we might think that:

- (a) *S* produces a clear and distinct picture of some object *x* by first quickly sketching a blurred and indistinct representation of *x*, followed by a closer study and analysis of *x* so as to produce a more refined and distinct representation;

by analogy, we might also think that:

- (b) *S* forms a clear and distinct conception of some object *x* by first immediately forming an “gross and indistinct” conception of *x*, followed by the acts of distinguishing and generalising, so as to produce a distinct conception of *x*.

But of course, the analogy is seriously mistaken. The act of conception does not produce anything: there is no mental representation that we might set out to refine or develop. Rather there are two ways of conceiving the objects of our senses: (i) that by which we are made directly aware of an object or by which it is immediately presented to us, and (ii) that by which we distinguish and generalise. However, these different ways of conceiving do not occur in parallel or sequentially, but rather, at the same time. In other words, we may distinguish between two kinds of immediacy:⁴

D₃ *x* has presentational immediacy for *S* =_{df} the manner in which *S* conceives of *x* is such that she is made directly aware of *x*.

D₄ *x* has conceptual immediacy for *S* =_{df} the manner in which *S* conceives of *x* is such that she forms a distinct conception of some attribute or relation of *x* at the same time that she is directly aware of *x*.

Naturally, a great deal more textual evidence is required to support and clarify this interpretation of Reid as advocating the notion of conceptual immediacy; in particular, we

¹ IP, p. 417. See also IP, p. 327.

² If I understand Alston correctly, he takes Reid to hold this ‘two-stage’ view. See Alston, 1989a: pp. 43–45. For example, “it is clear that [Reid] takes conception to be present where no general conceptions are being deployed”. (p. 43.)

³ IP, p. 300.

⁴ D₃ is similar to a formulation found in Alston, 1989a: p. 36.

would need to examine Reid's direct realism and his view of the role of sensations in perception. Unfortunately, space precludes a full presentation here. However, it will be important to focus briefly on Reid's view of how it is that we form our conception of external objects.

Reid held that the objects of perception are two kinds of individual attributes, primary and secondary qualities. These, Reid argues, are distinguished merely by virtue of the kinds of conceptions we form: the primary qualities are attributes in a body that occasion sensations in us that, in turn, lead to the formation of *direct* conceptions of those attributes; the secondary qualities are attributes in a body that occasion sensations in us that, in turn, are the occasion of *relative* conceptions of those attributes. Now as we have seen, a relative conception of some object x arises immediately upon our obtaining a distinct conception of something y to which x stands in a relation, such as 'being the effect of' or 'being the subject of'. Moreover, a relative conception will not give us any conception of x itself; it merely informs us that there is something, namely x , that stands in a certain relation to y . In this case, our conception of some secondary quality F is relative just because the only conception of F that arises in us, is that F is the occasion of a certain sensation.¹ In sum:

D₅ F is a primary quality if and only if (i) F is an attribute of an external object, (ii) it is possible that, for some agent S , F is conjoined to a sensation x in S , and x is conjoined to a direct conception of F in S .

D₆ F is a secondary quality if and only if (i) F is an attribute of an external object, (ii) it is possible that, for some agent S , F is conjoined to a sensation x in S , and x is conjoined to a relative conception of F in S .²

The question that arises for us is this: when Reid speaks of that "gross and indistinct" conception of external objects which "Nature immediately presents to us", is he referring here to sensations? Are we to think of sensations as giving us a direct awareness of an object, which is, at the same time, conjoined with a (direct or relative) conception of those objects? I suggest that this is precisely Reid's view of the matter.

First, Reid held that, in general, (i) the sensations which are the occasion of our conception of external objects and (ii) those conceptions themselves, are not only "produced at the same time", but "coalesce in our imagination":³ more precisely, we "consider them as one thing", we tend to "confound their different attributes", and find it "very difficult to separate them in thought, to attend to each by itself"⁴ In short, Reid, as Pappas suggests,

¹ "The only notion therefore my senses give is this, That smell in the rose is an unknown quality or modification, which is the cause or occasion of a sensation which I know well. . . . secondary qualities . . . are conceived only as the unknown causes or occasions of certain sensations with which we are well acquainted." IP, p. 202; "the quality in the body, which is the cause or occasion of this sensation, is likewise real, though the nature of it is not manifest to our senses." IP, p. 207.

² Bruce Silver argues, convincingly, that Berkeley had some influence on Reid's account of primary and secondary qualities, in Silver, B. (1974). A Note on Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision* and Thomas Reid's Distinction between Primary and Secondary Qualities. *S7 Phil* 12: pp. 253-63.

³ IP, p. 199, 210

⁴ IP, p. 210.

seems to take “the phenomenal character of sensation to appear simultaneously, and without apparent distinction, as features of the external object of direct awareness.”¹ In sum, Reid holds that we have conceptual immediacy with respect to external objects.²

We can be even more precise by examining the distinct ways in which we form concepts of the primary and secondary qualities. Take, for example, Alston’s interpretation of Reid:

“What it is natural to refer to as an awareness of colours, warmth, and odours (or of objects as coloured, warm, and odorous) Reid construes as *modes* of feeling (awareness), as ways of being aware, directed on to no object beyond themselves. And these sensations are sharply distinguished by Reid from the conception and belief that constitute perception.”³

Now Reid would agree with this interpretation, but only up to a point. For he would argue that it fails to take account of the manner in which our conception of secondary qualities arises. It is true that our sensations, when analysed in abstraction, are to be sharply distinguished from our conception of the secondary qualities of colours, warmth and odours. However, we have only a relative conception of these secondary qualities. To be precise, we have *no* conception of colour, warmth and odour apart from that they are whatever qualities in external objects are the occasion for certain sensations. Indeed, Reid argues that this is precisely why secondary qualities are so often confused with the sensations that are occasioned by them. They are not *merely* antecedent conditions for some immediately succeeding conception of secondary attributes. The phenomenal character of sensations themselves “bear a capital part” in the conception we form of such attributes. In other words, what we are directly presented with in sensation is an awareness of objects as being coloured, warm, odorous, and so on. Hence, we have, by means of our sensations, conceptual immediacy with respect to the secondary qualities.⁴

What of the primary qualities? Surely objects are also directly presented to our awareness as being textured, shaped, and so on. The problem here, is that Reid did not consider sensations to “bear a capital part” in the conceptions we form of the primary qualities.⁵ However, he did think that those sensations which function as the occasion of primary qualities are such that, once they have performed their natural function, they “immediately

¹ Reported in Alston, 1989a: p. 45. Pappas’ suggestion is intended to be a “modified Reidian view”. I am of course taking his suggestion, or something very like it, to be Reid’s *own* view.

² This interpretation is similar to Ben-Zeev’s: “we do not find in [Reid’s] approach the traditional problematic transition from a sensory raw material which is completely noninformative (meaningless) to an informative (meaningful) perceptual stage. The very first perceptual (or sensory) stage is informative (meaningful). . . . Sensation, in Reid’s mature view, is not a raw material awaiting cognitive processing, but refers to a noncognitive aspect of our perceptual experience.” Ben-Zeev, 1986: p. 105.

³ Alston, 1989a: p. 44.

⁴ “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 in 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. We give the same name to both, and are apt to confound them together.” IP, p. 204.

⁵ “It appears as evident, that this connection between our sensations and the conception and belief of external existences cannot be produced by habit, experience, education, or any principle of human nature that hath been admitted by philosophers.” HM, p. 61; “no sensation can give us the conception of material things, far less any argument to prove their existence.” IP, p. 200.

disappear and are forgot”.¹ Now the effect of this phenomenon, as Reid describes it, would, once again, be that, in any act of perception, it would appear to us that external objects are directly presented to our awareness as being shaped, extended and so on. I suggest, therefore, that Reid took it that we also have, by our sensations, conceptual immediacy with respect to the primary qualities.

This concludes my attempt to show how Reid’s characterisation of certain conceptions as being “obscure” or “indistinct” might be rendered consistent with his view that a distinct conception is a necessary condition for epistemic justification.

4. THE PREJUDICES

We come now to Reid’s fourth necessary condition for that degree of epistemic justification sufficient for knowledge. Following Bacon, Reid argues that there are four classes of prejudices, or causes of error: *idola tribus*, *idola specus*, *idola fori* and *idola theatri*. I shall argue that, for Reid, a belief formed with any such prejudice has the following three features: (i) it has ‘doxastic immediacy’ for us; (ii) it does not have ‘epistemic immediacy’ for us, and so, is not a self-evident belief; and (iii) it arises by virtue of the inclination of a ‘vicious doxastic habit’, and so, is such that we are accountable, to some extent, for its formation.

4.1 SELF-EVIDENCE

We begin with Reid’s notion of self-evidence. First, Reid identifies at least six “distinct and original kinds of evidence”,² each of which, he states, “may afford just ground of belief”:³

“the evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, the evidence of consciousness, the evidence of testimony, the evidence of axioms, the evidence of reasoning”⁴

Second, Reid holds that the first five kinds of evidence, in contrast to the evidence of reasoning, are such as give rise to what he calls ‘self-evident’ beliefs. We may define these as follows: Earlier we identified two kinds of immediacy in Reid’s thought: presentational and conceptual immediacy. There are, however, two further kinds of immediacy:⁵

D_7 p has doxastic immediacy for $S =_{df}$ S ’s evidence for the truth of p is such that she holds her belief that p with, at least, fallibilist certainty; and S believes that p at the same time that she forms a distinct conception of p .

¹ “When a primary quality is perceived, the sensation immediately leads our thought to the quality signified by it, and is itself forgot.” IP, p. 204; cf. The sensation “carries my thought immediately to the thing signified by it, and is itself forgot, as if it had never been.” IP, p. 195-96; “the sensations belonging to primary qualities . . . carry the thought to the external object, and immediately disappear and are forgot. Nature intended them only as signs; and when they have served that purpose they vanish.” IP, p. 205.

² HM, p. 32.

³ IP, p. 229.

⁴ IP, p. 229.

⁵ These formulations are similar to those found in Alston, 1989a: p. 36.

D₈ p has epistemic immediacy for $S =_{df}$ p has doxastic immediacy for S ; and S 's belief that p has a degree of justification sufficient for knowledge.

Reid's analysis of a self-evident belief, then, may be given as follows:

A₁₅ p is self-evident for S if and only if p has epistemic immediacy for S .¹

Likewise, a belief having the evidence of reasoning may be defined in terms of doxastic and epistemic mediacy, that is, where:

D₉ p has doxastic mediacy for $S =_{df}$ S 's evidence for the truth of p is such that she holds her belief that p with, at least, fallibilist certainty; and S believes that p only when she has both formed a distinct conception of both p and q and performed an inference from q to p .

D₁₀ p has epistemic mediacy for $S =_{df}$ p has doxastic mediacy for S ; and S 's belief that p has a degree of justification sufficient for knowledge.

Reid holds that:

A₁₆ S 's belief that p has the evidence of reasoning if and only if p has epistemic mediacy for S .²

4.2 MERE DOXASTIC IMMEDIACY

We shall see that propositions believed with prejudice have doxastic, but not epistemic immediacy for us: more concisely, they have *mere* doxastic immediacy for us. By way of clarification, then, we need to examine Reid's view of how such a phenomenon is possible: that is, how a proposition can have *mere* doxastic immediacy for us.

First, we need to clarify what is meant by epistemic immediacy. All justified beliefs are, for Reid, only *prima facie* justified. What he means by this is that they are justified only in the absence of undercutters and rebutters, that is, where:

¹ "Self-evident propositions are those which appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly, and attends to them without prejudice." IP, p. 141-42; "[Self-evident propositions] 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." IP, p. 452.

² "By Knowledge, I think, we mean, Belief upon good Evidence. We know what is self evident, & we know what we can give good Evidence for. But we sometimes believe upon bad Authority or from Prejudice; & such Belief is not called Knowledge. All knowledge therefore implies belief; but belief does not imply Knowledge. I know what I distinctly perceive by my Senses; I know what I distinctly remember; I know when I am pained; I know that two & three make five. In all these cases the knowledge is immediate. There is no *medium* or proof, but there is belief upon good Evidence." Reid, T. (1778/1965). Letter to Kames, 1 Dec. 1778, pp. 37-38. In "Unpublished Letters of T. Reid to Lord Kames, 1762-1782". Edited by Ian Ross, in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, VII, Spring.

A₁₇ r is an undercutter for S 's belief that p if and only if (i) r is good reason for S to believe that not- q , and (ii) q is a justifying factor for S 's belief that p .

A₁₈ q is a rebutter for S 's belief that p if and only if q is good reason for S to believe that not- p .¹

Now we might think that a *self-evident* belief could have no undercutter if q is taken to be some proposition from which the agent infers her belief that p . But of course, a justifying factor, for Reid, need not be a *belief*. The justifying factors for some self-evident belief would, for Reid, be certain states of affairs, such as *being produced by a properly functioning faculty*. Moreover, Reid, being an externalist, would not suggest that a justifying factor for a self-evident belief is that the agent believe any such states of affairs have obtained.

This is not to say that Reid thought we have no cognitive access to whether or not a proposition has *mere* doxastic immediacy for us; nor did he suppose that we could not divest ourselves of such beliefs. For if an agent is aware of that any one of the necessary states of affairs has failed to obtain, then, under normal conditions, this will effect the sustenance of his belief. Suppose S forms a perceptual belief that p at t , but, as it turns out:

(i) he was hallucinating at t .

Now, as we have seen:

(ii) a belief has a degree of justification sufficient for knowledge only if the faculty by which it is formed is functioning properly at the time.

Hence, (i) and (ii) together constitute an undercutter for his belief that p , whether or not S believes (i) and (ii). But if S does come to believe in (i) and (ii), then, under normal conditions, this will bring it about that he no longer believes that p . For his belief that p would no longer *seem* to him to be properly grounded upon the evidence of his senses; and so, it would not be within his power to continue believing that p .

To be quite clear about Reid's position here, we need to rule out several claims: First, Reid does not hold that any belief that *seems* to us to be self-evident, is *in fact* so. That is, he rejects the following principle:

(a) p has epistemic immediacy for S if p has doxastic immediacy for S .

For Reid argues that not all of those beliefs that we take to be self-evident are instances of genuine first principles. In other words, a proposition will have epistemic immediacy for us

¹ "all mankind have a fixed belief of an external material world, a belief which is neither got by reasoning nor education, and a belief which we cannot shake off [for extended periods], even when we seem to have strong arguments against it [i.e. rebutter], and no shadow of argument for it [either because it is self-evident, or because of what seems to us to be an undercutter]." HM, p. 76. My inserted qualification 'for extended periods' is explained below.

only if it satisfies the ‘marks’ of a first principle.¹ It should be emphasized that this does not, as we have seen, entail that the degree of justification possessed by a self-evident belief comes by way of any inference from our having judged that it satisfies these ‘marks’. For, in that case, (i) the belief would not be epistemically immediate; and (ii) the inference would be epistemically circular. Second, Reid does not hold that:

- (b) p has epistemic immediacy for S only if it seems to S that there are no undercutters or rebutters for p .

For, given Reid’s externalism, it is quite possible that a person be mistaken in thinking that there is an undercutter or a rebutter for her belief and yet, she might have a sufficient degree of justification for knowledge nevertheless. A good example of this, for Reid, is the phenomenon of philosophers who suppose they have good reason to be sceptical with regard to their senses. Again, a person might have a sufficient degree of justification for knowledge when she believes that p on the evidence of her senses, and yet she may not have even thought about whether or not there are any undercutters or rebutters for p . She may not have considered the question of whether or not her belief is epistemically justified, or what it would take for her belief to be so justified. It might, of course, be “the perfection of a rational creature” that she countenance such second-order questions; but if this kind of reflection were required either (i) for it to seem to her that she had evidence for the truth of some proposition p , or (ii) for her to hold her belief that p with, at least, fallibilist certainty, then, Reid argues, she would have perished in her infancy—either due to the lack of belief or the lack of a certain strength of belief, that is, where such is required for life-preserving action.²

4.3 EPISTEMIC IMMEDIACY

We have seen, then, that it is possible for a proposition to have *mere* doxastic immediacy for us. But why should we think that there are any propositions that have epistemic immediacy for us? Reid’s response to this question comes by way of two arguments, both of which attempt to show that scepticism with regard to at least some propositions having epistemic *immediacy* for us would be inconsistent with the view that some propositions have epistemic *mediacy* for us.

First, Reid has often been read as claiming that self-evident beliefs (or beliefs in the instances of first principles) are irresistible for us, even in the face of undercutters and rebutters. But precision is crucial here. Reid does not hold that, if p is self-evident for S , then it is not within S ’s power to refrain from believing that p , even if seems to S that there is

¹ See IP, pp. 467–490.

² “we are merely animal before we are rational creatures; and it is necessary for our preservation, that we should believe many things before we can reason. How then is our belief to be regulated before we have reason to regulate it? has Nature left it to be regulated by chance? By no means. It is regulated by certain principles, which are parts of our constitution” IP, pp. 238–39.

some undercutter or rebutter for her belief that p .¹ For example, suppose, after engaging in a lengthy and intricate philosophical train of reasoning, S comes to believe that her faculty of perception cannot be proven trustworthy. Since the evidence of her senses no longer *seems* to her to be evidence, she would refrain from believing in an external world, or at least not of the kind presented to her by her senses. It follows that the resistance to a self-evident belief is, in Reid's view, quite possible. However, Reid also sets down an important rider. A genuine self-evident belief is resistible in just the same sense as swallowing one's food or breathing is resistible. That is to say, just as our resistance to instinctive actions can only be sustained temporarily and in abnormal circumstances, so it is with our resistance to a self-evident belief. Like the inclination of instincts, a genuine self-evident belief will soon reassert itself, either when normal circumstances resume, or when the agent is forced to decide between his continued resistance and his preservation or well-being.²

Now the example we have given above, of an agent resisting the evidence of her senses, is especially interesting. For her reasoning is based upon the following principle:

A_{19} S 's belief that p has a sufficient degree of justification for knowledge if and only if p has epistemic immediacy for S .

Take, for instance, our belief in an external world. A_{19} requires the following: (i) we must find some proposition (or set of propositions) p , such that we have a distinct conception of p , and our belief that p has a sufficient degree of justification for knowledge; and (ii) we must construct a sound argument, the premise of which is p and the conclusion, that there is an external world. However, suppose we discover that the only propositions that do not beg the question, and which satisfy condition (i), are those that describe our sensations. There are two problems here. First, no one, Reid argues, has ever provided a sound deductive or inductive inference from sensations to an external world. But then, it follows from A_{19} that we do not know that there is an external world. The second problem is that our belief in the external world has doxastic immediacy for us: that is, as soon as we find ourselves within a normal environment, we cannot help but immediately form beliefs in the existence of external objects.³

Of course, the sceptic might respond by accepting it as a phenomenon of nature that he cannot, for extended periods, "throw off" his belief in an external world; but this, he might

¹ As Michaud seems to think: "Reid says that [first principles] are judgments of nature, original principles of belief, that reason can neither give birth to them nor destroy them. . . . it is somewhat embarrassing that such strong and irresistible principles could ever be challenged, even by lunatics if not by sceptics." Michaud, Y. (1989). *Reid's Attack on the Theory of Ideas*. In M. Dalgarno and E. Matthews, eds. *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*. Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, PSS 42: p. 16.

² "My belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the earth. And the greatest sceptic will find himself to be in the same condition. He may struggle hard to disbelieve the informations of his senses, as a man does to swim against a torrent; but ah! it is in vain. It is in vain that he strains every nerve, and wrestles with nature, and with every object that strikes upon his senses. For after all, when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers." HM, p. 169; "when they condescend to mingle again with the human race, and to converse with a friend, a companion, or a fellow-citizen, the ideal system vanishes; common sense, like an irresistible torrent, carries them along; and, in spite of all their reasoning and philosophy, they believe their own existence, and the existence of other things." HM, p. 35-36.

³ "Many eminent Philosophers thinking it unreasonable to believe, when they could not show a reason, have laboured to furnish us with reasons for believing our senses; but their reasons are very insufficient, and will not bear examination. Other Philosophers have shewn very clearly the fallacy of these reasons, and have, as they imagine, discovered invincible reasons against this belief; but they have never been able either to shake it in themselves, or to convince others." IP, p. 230.

say, does not in the least imply that he has any evidence for the truth of his belief, or at least no more evidence for it than against. It certainly does not suggest that his belief has a degree of justification sufficient to convert it to knowledge.¹

Reid would argue that this reply is patently inconsistent. No one can even form a belief unless it seems to her that there is at least some evidence for its truth, or more evidence than against. The instant that it seems to *S* that her evidence for *p* is less than or equal to not-*p*, is the instant that she will no longer believe that *p*. But if this is so, it must follow that, despite the sceptic's apparent adherence to *A*₁₉, he must accept that it seems to him that he does have *some* evidence for the existence of external objects, indeed, that he has more evidence for than against: otherwise he would not find himself forming beliefs about the external world.

Reid might, at this point, be read as simply making the claim that those who find they cannot resist the evidence of their senses, and yet continue to deny that there is more evidence for an external world than against, are so far forth inconsistent. But he can also be read as making a much stronger claim regarding the epistemic status of external world beliefs:

First, if such a sceptic is honest, he will accept that, for the most part, he holds his ordinary external world beliefs - such as 'there is a large ditch before me' - with, at least, fallibilist certainty. Second, as a sceptic, he will nevertheless hold that such beliefs do not have a sufficient degree of justification for knowledge. Third, he must therefore hold that one or more necessary conditions for knowledge fail to be satisfied in this instance; and he cannot appeal to the absence of good arguments, since such beliefs will have doxastic immediacy for him.

Now let us suppose, not unreasonably, that this sceptic accepts at least *one* of Reid's necessary conditions for knowledge. If so, we can then say that he must deny either that (i) his cognitive faculties are functioning properly, or that (ii) his environment - whatever that may be - is suited to his epistemic apparatus, or that (iii) his faculties were designed to produce (mostly) true beliefs, or that (iv) this design was not radically faulty, or that (v) he formed a distinct conception of the object of his belief, or that (vi) he did not form the belief without prejudice. The problem is, as we have seen, if an agent thinks he has reason to think that any of the conditions (i)-(vi) are false, it will thereby seem to him that he has an undercutter or rebutter for his belief, which is to say that it will no longer seem to him either that he has evidence for the truth of his belief or that his evidence is such as to warrant the fallibilist certainty with which he holds that belief.

In short, any reflection on the matter will force the sceptic into an extremely uncomfortable dilemma: either (i) he must discard his external world beliefs altogether, or at least significantly decrease the degree of strength with which he holds those beliefs; or (ii)

¹ This, Reid thought, was Hume's solution: "Our author indeed was aware, that neither his scepticism, nor that of any other person, was able to endure this trial, and therefore enters a caveat against it. . . . 'all our reasonings concerning causes and effects, are derived from nothing but custom, and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our nature'." IP, pp. 571-72; cf. "There is nothing so shameful in a philosopher as to be deceived and deluded; and therefore you ought to resolve firmly to withhold assent, and to throw off this belief of external objects, which may be all delusion." HM, p. 169.

he must accept that (most of) his external world beliefs have epistemic immediacy for him. But since it is not within his power to bring about the former (for extended periods), he must, on pain of inconsistency, accept that his external world beliefs are self-evident for him.¹

4.4 FOUNDATIONALISM

Reid's second argument for the existence of propositions that have epistemic immediacy for us is very familiar:² Reid takes "just reasoning" to be a process whereby a person takes propositions she believes and connects them together into a sequence in such a way that, for each proposition p in the sequence, there is some proposition (or set of propositions) earlier in the sequence that constitutes "just ground" for S 's belief that p .³ However, as Reid notes, such a process cannot continue backwards indefinitely.

Take "synthetical reasoning": we take a proposition (or set of propositions) p and deduce from p another proposition q and from that r , and so on "in a connected chain until we come to the conclusion which is the end of our Reasoning".⁴ If our belief in the conclusion is to be justified, then the belief that p must be justified. But if the belief that p is justified by being based on other justified beliefs, each of which are themselves likewise justified, an infinite regress results. Again, take "analytical reasoning": if a person examines upon what evidence a proposition immediately rests, he will find either that it is supported by no other proposition, or that "it rests upon one or more propositions that support it". If the latter, then:

"The same thing may be said of the propositions that support it; and of those that support them, as far back as we can go. But we cannot go back in this track to infinity. Where then must this analysis stop? It is evident that it must stop only when we come to propositions, which support all that are built upon them, but are themselves supported by none".⁵

Reid does not, unfortunately, tell us precisely why he thought an infinite regress would prevent justification;⁶ nor does he mention, in this context, the problem of circular justification. He does, however, state elsewhere that "reasoning in a circle proves nothing",⁷ and we have seen this manifested in his rejection of epistemic circularity. But Reid clearly did hold that the only way to terminate the regress, and so provide justification, would be if there were some beliefs that are justified by something other than being grounded upon

¹ "All we would ask of this kind of Sceptic is, that he would be uniform and consistent, and that his practice in life do not belie his profession of scepticism with regard to the fidelity of his faculties: For the want of faith, as well as faith itself, is best shown by works. If a Sceptic avoid the fire as much as those who believe it dangerous to go into it, we can hardly avoid thinking his scepticism to be feigned, and not real." IP, p. 572.

² Cf. Alston, W. (1989d). Two Types of Foundationalism. In *Epistemic Justification*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press: p. 19.

³ Cf. Pollock, J. (1986). *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*. London: Hutchinson: p. 47.

⁴ MS 4/I/8a, 4.

⁵ IP, p. 455; "we trace things backward until we come to premises that are not founded upon any antecedent truth but upon our constitution" MS 4/I/8a, 4.

⁶ See Moser, P. K. (1985). *Empirical Justification*. Holland: D. Reidel.

⁷ IP, p. 491.

other justified beliefs. In other words, if we accept that at least some of our belief are justified to *some* degree, and, more to the point, if we accept that some beliefs are justified to a degree sufficient for knowledge, then we must also accept that some propositions have epistemic immediacy for us.¹

4.5 DOXASTIC INSTINCTS

We have one more element to examine before we proceed to Reid's account of the prejudices. We have suggested that the error of each kind of prejudice arises just because a person mistakenly takes a proposition that has *mere* doxastic immediacy for them to have epistemic immediacy for them. Now Reid took there to be two kinds of beliefs that have doxastic immediacy for us: those that arise by what I shall call 'doxastic instincts', and those that are formed upon the inclination of what I shall call 'doxastic habits'. I shall argue, then, that all four kinds of prejudices arise by way of the exertion of our voluntary intellectual powers to form beliefs upon insufficient evidence with a frequency sufficient to form a 'vicious doxastic habit'. To reach this conclusion, however, we must first articulate Reid's notion of a doxastic instinct.

First, Reid distinguished between instinctive actions² that occur only in infancy or early childhood, and those that occur in adulthood.³ There is a similar distinction he makes with regard to beliefs that are regulated by the first principles.⁴ Some are present from infancy, others continue into adulthood. Thus I shall use the phrase 'doxastic infant-instincts' to denote the former, and 'doxastic instincts', the latter:

A₂₀ *S* has the doxastic infant-instinct *I* to form or sustain belief *B* if and only if (i) *S* is inclined by *I* toward forming or sustaining *B*, (ii) *B* is not an object of *S*'s will, (iii) *B* is indirectly necessary for her preservation or well-being, (iv) *S*'s intellectual development is such that (a) *S* could not yet have discovered that *B* is indirectly necessary for her preservation or well-being, (b) *S* could not yet have confirmed *B*, (v) *S* could not have learned or otherwise acquired the habit of forming or sustaining *B*.

¹ "without first principles, analytical reasoning could have no end, and synthetical reasoning could have no beginning; and that every conclusion got by reasoning must rest with its whole weight upon first principles, as the building does upon its foundation." IP, p. 455. "if there were not first principles of belief for which no reason can be given, which are not acquired but natural original and constitutional, Synthetical reasoning could have no beginning, no bottom or foundation to rest upon; it would be merely hypothetical; and on the other hand analytical Reasoning would have no end nor could ever be brought to an issue. . . . There must therefore in all other Sciences, as well as Mathematicks, be Axioms into which all our reasonings in that science are resolved". MS 4/I/8a, 4.

² "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" AP, p. 78.

³ "To return to instincts in man; those are most remarkable which appear in infancy, when we are ignorant of every thing necessary to our preservation, and therefore must perish, if we had not an invisible Guide, who leads us blind-fold in the way we should take, if we had eyes to see it." AP, p. 82.

⁴ Elsewhere, I have argued that the general propositions Reid presents as first principles (e.g. "those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be" IP p. 476) are not regarded by Reid as 'self-evident'. Rather they serve two functions: first, they refer to innate principles or laws of the intellectual constitution according to which the formation of self-evident beliefs are governed or regulated; second, they pick out the various kinds of propositions, of which the objects of our self-evident beliefs are instances (e.g. for any instance in which we distinctly perceive some object *x* as having the quality *F*, it will be self-evident for us that: *O* really exists and is *F*). Brookes, D. R. (1996). *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*. Ph.D Dissertation, Vol. I., Department of Philosophy, Australian National University: Chapter 4, § 7.

A₂₁ *S* has the doxastic instinct *I* to form or sustain belief *B* if and only if (i) *S* is inclined by *I* toward forming or sustaining *B* (ii) *B* is not an object of *S*'s will, (iii) *B* is indirectly necessary for her preservation or well-being, (iv) *S*'s intellectual capacity is such that (a) *S* can discover that *B* is indirectly necessary for her preservation or well-being, (b) *S* may confirm *B*; (v) *S* could not have learned or otherwise acquired the habit of forming or sustaining *B*.

Several comments on these analyses are in order: First, with respect to (iii), Reid appears to hold that beliefs are not *directly* necessary for an agent's preservation or well-being: for, as immanent acts of the mind, they have no effect beyond their own exertion.¹ However, every action that *is* directly necessary for an agent's preservation or health, presupposes a certain belief in the agent: the action would not be performed unless the agent held the appropriate belief. It is in this sense, then, that a belief is said to be *indirectly* necessary for an agent's preservation or well-being.

Second, with respect to (iv) (b), Reid appears to suggest that, in adulthood, we may confirm the epistemic credibility of beliefs that seem to us to be self-evident, either on theological or inductive grounds:²

"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."³

"The credit we give to [the testimony of our senses] is at first the effect of instinct only. When we grow up, and begin to reason about [it], . . . the credit given to the testimony of our senses, is established and confirmed by the uniformity and constancy of the laws of Nature."⁴

However, this act of confirmation must be understood with great care. Given Reid's rejection of epistemic circularity, any such confirmation must proceed by an internal or reflexive evaluation: for example, we might think that the "uniformity and constancy" of the relation we have found to exist between the presence of certain material objects and our

¹ "Conceiving as well as projecting or resolving, are what the schoolmen called *immanent* acts of the mind, which produce nothing beyond themselves. But painting is a transitive act, which produces an effect distinct from the operation, and this effect is the picture." IP, p. 300.

² This view is very similar to that found in Alston's epistemology of 'doxastic practices': "(1) By engaging in SP [i.e. the doxastic practice of sense-perception] and allied memory and inferential practices we are enabled to make predictions many of which turn out to be correct and thereby we are able to anticipate and, to some considerable extent, control the course of events. (2) By relying on SP and associated practices we are able to establish facts about the operation of sense perception that show both that it is a reliable source of belief and why it is reliable. Our scientific account of perceptual processes shows how it is that sense experience serves as a sensitive indicator of certain kinds of facts about the environment of the perceiver." Alston, W. P. (1991). *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press: p. 173.

³ IP, p. 232; "if we believe that there is a wise and good Author of nature, we may see a good reason, why he should continue the same laws of nature, and the same connections of things, for a long time: because, if he did otherwise, we could learn nothing from what is past, and all our experience would be of no use to us. But though this consideration, when we come to the use of reason, may confirm our belief of the continuance of the present course of nature, it is certain that it did not give rise to this belief; for children and idiots have this belief as soon as they know that fire will burn them. It must therefore be the effect of instinct, not of reason." HM, p. 196; "This is one of those principles, which, when we grow up and observe the course of nature, we can confirm by reasoning. We perceive that Nature is governed by fixed laws, and that if it were not so, there could be no such thing as prudence in human conduct; there would be no fitness in any means to promote an end; and what, on one occasion, promoted it, might as probably, on another occasion, obstruct it. ¶ But the principle is necessary for us before we are able to discover it by reasoning, and therefore is made a part of our constitution, and produces its effects before the use of reason." IP, p. 489.

⁴ HM, p. 171.

having certain sensations and beliefs, is confirmation that the evidence of our senses is a just ground of belief: that is, the instinct by which we form perceptual beliefs is, on the whole, reliable. But, of course, we must trust the deliverances of this very instinct to establish the uniformity of this relation.

So why should we take this kind of confirmation at all seriously? One good reason is that we can easily imagine a world in which we found things to be very different. We might, for instance, have found that the majority of our instinctive perceptual beliefs are either inconsistent with one another, or with the output of some other faculty of mind.¹ However, we do not find that this is the case in our world. The inconsistencies or errors that appear to be the product of our senses may be explained by reference either to (i) our having drawn “rash” conclusions from our immediate or original perceptual beliefs, whether explicitly or by the more immediate process of acquired perception,² or (ii) to cognitive malfunctioning, an inappropriate cognitive environment, and so on.

Now there is a possible objection to this account of confirmation. The detection of inconsistency can only be achieved by the exertion of our faculty of reason; but then it would seem that we may confirm the reliability of our faculty of perception without employing that faculty itself. In short, the act of confirmation would appear not to involve any epistemic circularity, unless, of course, it is the faculty of reasoning we are seeking thereby to confirm.

However, whilst we may conclude that certain propositions p and q are inconsistent, we cannot then go on to infer that the source of our beliefs in p and q (say, the faculty of perception) is unreliable unless we are justified in believing the following propositions:

- (a) our faculty of reasoning is reliable;
- (b) p and q are the deliverances of our faculty of perception;
- (c) our memory of (a), (b) and the deliverance of our faculty of reasoning with respect to the inconsistency of p and q (and so forth) is reliable.

The problem is that, with respect to (a), there is no non-circular confirmation available for the deliverances of the faculty of reasoning; again, we can only know (b) by the faculty of consciousness, and (c) by the faculty of memory. But there is no non-circular confirmation available for the deliverances of either of these faculties.³

¹ Cf. “If two perceptual beliefs contradict each other, at least one is false. The existence of even one pair is sufficient to show that SP is not perfectly reliable. A large number of pairs, relative to the total output, would show that SP is not sufficiently reliable to be source of justification for the beliefs it generates and hence that it is not rational to engage in it, or would not be rational if we had a choice in the matter.” (p. 170.); “a massive and persistent inconsistency between the outputs of two practices is a good reason for regarding at least one of them to be unreliable.” (p. 171) Alston, 1991.

² IP, p. 207ff.

³ “it seems to have been a common error of Philosophers to account the senses fallacious. And to this error they have added another, that one use of reason is to detect the fallacies of sense. It appears, I think, from what has been said, that there is no more reason to account our senses fallacious, than our reason, our memory, or any other faculty of judging which Nature hath given us. They are all limited and imperfect; but wisely suited to the present condition of man. We are liable to error and wrong judgment in the use of them all; but as little in the informations of sense as in the deductions of reasoning.” IP, p. 251-52. Cf. Alston, 1991: p. 176-77.

The difference between infant and adulthood instinctive beliefs, is, then, merely that adults normally have the capacity to engage in an internal, reflexive evaluation of their doxastic instincts; and thereby, to determine the laws of nature according to which they operate, and the ends for which these instincts are necessary means. But this kind of evaluation *cannot* demonstrate the epistemic reliability of those faculties.¹ At best, its conclusions can serve only to contribute to the rationality of the trust we cannot help but place in the reliability of our faculties.²

Third, with respect to (v), in the two analyses above, we have seen that some instinctive actions are such that the ability to perform them could only be the result of a process of education, imitation, reasoning and extensive practice leading to the formation of a habit; but since no such process either has or could have occurred, the action must therefore be instinctive. Now we have also seen Reid argue that some beliefs are such that, under normal circumstances, we might have expected them to arise only as a result of extensive deliberation or reasoning. But no such process either has or could have occurred; hence, her belief must be instinctive.

We may be more precise, however. Reid held that there are three kinds of instinctive actions, each of which has a particular function or end for which it was designed. The first kind is designed to enable the agent to perform actions that she *can* will to perform, and which are required for her preservation, but which she cannot in fact perform without first performing an action that is of such complexity, that no human agent could make it an object of her will.³ The second is designed to enable the agent to perform actions with a frequency that is required for her preservation or health, but which, if she had to take the time and effort required to will such actions, then she would not be able to perform any other action.⁴ And the third is designed to enable the agent to perform an action with a speed or immediacy that is required for her preservation or health, but which, if she were to take the time necessary both to determine that she must perform that action, and to will to perform it, she would not be able to perform it with the immediacy required.⁵

Now I suggest there are, in Reid, three kinds of instinctive beliefs individuated by the same analyses he gives for instinctive actions. The first kind of instinctive belief is designed to enable the agent to form beliefs that (i) she could otherwise form as a result of exerting a voluntary intellectual power, namely, deliberation, and which are (ii) required for her preservation, but which (iii) she cannot in fact form without first performing an act of deliberation that is of such complexity, that no human agent could make it an object of her will.

¹ "the truth and fidelity of our faculties can never be proved by reasoning; and therefore our belief of it cannot be founded on reasoning." IP, p. 572.

² Alston takes this kind of confirmation "to function as a way of strengthening the prima facie claim of a doxastic practice to a kind of practical rationality, rather than as something that confers probability on a claim to reliability." Alston, 1991, p. 174.

³ AP, p. 82.

⁴ AP, p. 83.

⁵ AP, pp. 83-84.

The second kind of instinctive belief is designed to enable the agent to form beliefs with a frequency that is required for her preservation or health, but which, if she had to take the time and effort required to will such beliefs, then she would not be able to form any other belief. Reid gives, as an example that captures both of these kinds of beliefs, our belief that the attributes we perceive belong to bodily substance:

“Sensible qualities make so great a part of the furniture of our minds, their kinds are so many, and their number so great, that if prejudice, and not nature, teach us to ascribe them all to a subject, it must have a great work to perform, which cannot be accomplished in a short time, nor carried on to the same pitch in every individual. We should find not individuals only, but nations and ages, differing from each other in the progress which this prejudice had made in their sentiments; but we find no such difference among men. What one man accounts a quality, all men do, and ever did.”¹

The third kind of instinctive belief is designed to enable the agent to form beliefs with a speed or immediacy that is required for her preservation or health, but which, if she were to take the time necessary both to determine that she must form that belief, and will to form it, she would not be able to do so with the immediacy required. For example, take the instinctive belief that all fire burns. Now children normally form this belief upon having only one instance of experiencing the burning sensation occasioned by fire. But, clearly, while no inductive argument would justify such a conclusion, if the child were to take the time and effort required to construct such an argument, based upon numerous experiences of being burnt by fire, before she consented to the general proposition that fire burns, the probability of her survival or health would decrease significantly.²

4.6 DOXASTIC HABITS

As we stated earlier, Reid holds that some propositions that have doxastic immediacy for us, arise by way of what I call ‘doxastic habits’. There are two kinds of doxastic habits: namely, imitative-habits and general-habits. Reid’s definition of ‘instinctive imitation’, applied to belief, runs as follows:

D₁₁ Instinctive imitation = *df* the formation of the belief that *p* in circumstance *C* toward which an agent is inclined by her observation of the frequent expression of the belief that *p* in *C* by some person or group of persons, and which is not an object of her own deliberation with respect to *p*.³

¹ IP, p. 218.

² “Thus, a child who has once burnt his finger, by putting it in the flame of one candle, expects the same event if he puts it in the flame of another candle, or in any flame, and is thereby led to think that the quality of burning belongs to all flame. This instinctive induction is not justified by the rules of logic, and it sometimes leads men into harmless mistakes, which experience may afterwards correct; but it preserves us from destruction in innumerable dangers to which we are exposed.” IP, p. 374.

³ “human nature disposes us to the imitation of those among whom we live, when we neither desire nor will it.” AP, p. 84; cf. IP, p. 345.

Now, as with habits of action, if an agent were to be inclined by a doxastic instinct toward imitating the beliefs of others merely once or twice in her lifetime, then she would not acquire a doxastic imitative-habit of forming the same kind of belief. However, if her instinctive imitation is a frequent occurrence, then, eventually, she would acquire a doxastic imitative-habit. Henceforth, her judgments would be inclined by the doxastic imitative-habit, rather than her previous instinct to imitate. Thus:

A₂₂ *S* has the doxastic imitative-habit *H* of believing that *p* in circumstance *C* if and only if (i) *H* inclines *S* toward the belief that *p* in *C* without the exertion of will, and (ii) *S* was inclined by instinct toward imitating the belief that *p* made by other persons in *C* to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of *H*.¹

The formation of a doxastic general-habit requires that the agent consistently form the same kind of judgment in the same kind of circumstances; and this may well be the consequence of a general fixed purpose² to exert her voluntary powers of deliberation and attention so as to bring it about that her judgment remains of the same kind with respect to a certain subject domain. This result may be achieved by either (i) failing to attend to or deliberate about any new evidence, such as might constitute an undercutter or rebutter for her belief; or by (ii) failing to attend to or deliberate about the original evidence upon which the agent first formed her belief, and which produced the general fixed purpose to judge likewise at any time in the future, that is, beyond the recollection that the evidence seemed to be sufficient at the time.

This kind of doxastic habit, whereby a general fixed purpose produces a doxastic general-habit, Reid calls a “habit of the understanding”.³ Thus:

A₂₃ *S* has the doxastic general-habit *H* of believing that *p* in circumstance *C* if and only if (i) *H* inclines *S* toward believing that *p* in *C* without the exertion of either her own deliberation or attention, and (ii) *S* was inclined by some general fixed purpose toward believing that *p* in *C* to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of *H*.⁴

¹ “How many awkward habits, by frequenting improper company, are children apt to learn, in their address, motion, looks, gesture and pronunciation. They acquire such habits *commonly from an undersigned and instinctive imitation*, before they can judge of what is proper and becoming.” AP, p. 88; “It is owing to the force of habits, *early acquired by imitation*, that a man who has grown up to manhood in the lowest rank of life, if fortune raise him to a higher rank, very rarely acquires the air and manners of a gentleman.” AP, p. 89. (*My italics*)

² A general fixed purpose is, in Reid’s view, a determination of the agent’s will to regulate her future actions by some general rule, such that if, at any future time or place in which certain circumstances occur, she will perform a certain action so as to bring about some general end. See AP, pp. 65-66.

³ “When a man is come to years of understanding, from his education, from his company, or from his study, he forms to himself a set of general principles, a creed, which governs his judgment in particular points that occur. If new evidence is laid before him which tends to overthrow any of his received principles, it requires in him a great degree of candour and love of truth, to give it an impartial examination, and to form a new judgment. Most men, when they are fixed in their principles, upon what they account sufficient evidence, can hardly be drawn into a new and serious examination of them. They get a habit of believing them, which is strengthened by repeated acts, and remains immoveable, even when the evidence upon which their belief was at first grounded, is forgot. . . . [This] may be called . . . a habit of the *understanding*. By such habits chiefly, men are governed in their opinions” AP, p. 68-69.

⁴ “what we have been accustomed to do, we acquire, not only a facility, but a proneness to do on like occasions” AP, p. 89.

4.7 VICIOUS DOXASTIC GENERAL-HABITS

It follows from this account, that an agent may be held *directly* accountable for the acquisition of a doxastic general-habit, and *indirectly* accountable for those beliefs toward which she is inclined by that general-habit. Moreover, she may be blameworthy or praiseworthy for the kind of doxastic general-habits that she has acquired. For the acquisition of a doxastic general-habit involves the exertion of the voluntary operations of deliberation and attention; and there are certain obligations attached to these intellectual acts.¹ More precisely:

A₂₄ *S* will acquire a virtuous doxastic general-habit *A* with respect to believing that *p* in circumstances *C* if and only if (i) *S* has a general fixed purpose *P* to regulate her acts of deliberation and attention with respect to believing that *p* in *C* according to the obligations attached, and (ii) *S* adheres to *P* to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of *A*.²

An agent may also acquire a vicious or blameworthy doxastic general-habit by the consistent failure to adhere to the obligations that attach to attention or deliberation, thus producing a culpably irresistible inclination to resist these obligations,³ which in turn will tend to incline an agent to do so to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of a vicious doxastic general-habit:

A₂₅ *S* will acquire a vicious doxastic general-habit *A* with respect to believing that *p* in circumstances *C* if and only if either (i) *S* has a general fixed purpose *P* to regulate her acts of deliberation and attention with respect to believing that *p* in *C* according to the obligations attached, and *S* fails to adhere to *P* to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of *A*; or (ii) *S* merely violates the obligations of deliberation and attention with respect to believing that *p* in *C* to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of *A*.

¹ For example, Reid gives the following Rules of Deliberation: (i) if it is perfectly clear to *S* that she ought to perform action ϕ , then *S* ought not to deliberate about whether or not to perform ϕ ; (ii) if (a) it is not perfectly clear to *S* that she ought to perform ϕ , (b) ϕ is of sufficient importance, and (c) there is sufficient time for deliberation, then *S* ought to deliberate with that degree of care and seriousness that is proportionate to the importance of ϕ ; (iii) *S* ought to form a judgment as to whether or not she ought to perform ϕ only if she has (a) done what is within her power to identify the arguments for and against, (b) given equal consideration to each, and (c) allowed each argument the weight she thinks it ought to have in determining her judgment; (iv) if *S* is deliberating about whether or not she ought to perform ϕ at *t*, then she ought to form a judgment, one way or the other, prior to *t*. (AP, p. 63.)

² "There are good habits, in a moral sense, as well as bad; and it is certain, that the stated and regular performance of what we approve, not only makes it easy, but makes us uneasy in the omission of it." AP, p. 89; "all virtuous habits, when we distinguish them from virtuous actions, consist in fixed purposes of acting according to the rules of virtue, as often as we have opportunity." AP, p. 72.

³ Reid argues that there are two cases in which an agent may be held culpable even if the inclination of an animal principle (appetite, affection, passion) is irresistible. First, suppose that, for agent *S*, some animal principle *A* is opposed to a rational principle (prudence, duty); and that, over a certain period, *S* continuously fails to resist *A*. As a consequence of this 'indulgence', the strength of *A*'s inclination increases to such an extent that it is no longer within *S*'s power to resist *A*. In such a case, Reid would argue, *S* is morally blameworthy for yielding to the inclination of *A*, even though it is not within *S*'s power to do otherwise. (AP, p. 95.) The second case is this: Suppose again that, for agent *S*, some animal principle *A* is opposed to a rational principle, and that *S* knows that the inclination of *A* is irresistible; but suppose she also knows that *A* inclines her only in certain circumstances *C*; and that, for the most part, she is free with respect to whether or not she places herself in *C*. In such a case, Reid argues, *S* would be morally blameworthy for yielding to the inclination of *A*, even if *A* is irresistible. (AP, p. 57.)

Now I suggest that this analysis of vicious doxastic general-habits captures precisely the intent of Reid's account of the prejudices. Take the prejudices of *idola specus*: Reid states that these arise from "the particular way in which a man has been trained, from his being addicted to some particular profession, or from something particular in the turn of his mind".¹ Put in our terms, a person's judgment may be erroneous just because, over time, his domain of interest or expertise has been such as to bring it about that he violates the obligations of deliberation and attention with respect to certain kinds of beliefs in certain circumstances to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of a vicious doxastic general-habit. For example, it is an obligation of deliberation that an agent does what is within her power to identify the arguments for and against some proposition p , and give equal consideration to each. But if the agent has confined his attention to the subject domain of her profession, it is likely that, if p lies outside of that domain, she will identify arguments for and against p that arise from within the domain and which may therefore be irrelevant to the truth of p . For example:

"The mere Mathematician is apt to apply measure and calculation to things which do not admit of it. Direct and inverse ratios have been applied by an ingenious author to measure human affections, and the moral worth of actions."²

Again, a good example of vicious doxastic general-habits that arise from instinctive imitation is the set of prejudices that fall under Reid's *idola theatri*: that is, prejudices that arise from the agent's being exposed to or trained in a "false system" or "sect", thus producing a habit of forming beliefs according to or consistent with the tenets of that system. That is, a person's belief that p in C may be erroneous just because she has formed that belief by instinctively imitating the manner in which her immediate culture or peer group forms beliefs of that kind; and this has been such as to bring it about that she violates the obligations of deliberation and attention with respect to the belief that p in C to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of a vicious doxastic general-habit.³

Finally, most doxastic instincts, Reid suggests, are such that the application of deliberation and attention is eventually required, so as to modify or correct its deliverances. The failure to do so, results in the class of prejudices he calls *idola tribus* and *idola fori*. For example, we have a doxastic infant-instinct "to receive implicitly what we are taught"⁴. However, this instinct must, as we mature, be modified so as to take account of the prevalence of dishonesty and falsehood.⁵

¹ IP, p. 537.

² IP, p. 537.

³ "A false system once fixed in the mind, becomes, as it were, the medium through which we see objects: They receive a tincture from it, and appear of another colour than when seen by a pure light. . . . A certain complexion of understanding may dispose a man to one system of opinions more than to another; and, on the other hand, a system of opinions, fixed in the mind by education or otherwise, gives that complexion to the understanding which is suited to them." IP, p. 540-41.

⁴ IP, p. 528.

⁵ "In all matters belonging to our cognisance, every man must be determined by his own final judgment, otherwise he does not act the part of a rational being. Authority may add weight to one scale; but the man holds the balance, and judges what weight he ought to allow to authority." IP, p. 528.

Unfortunately, through “laziness or indifference about truth” we may fail to exert our powers of deliberation and attention, so as to judge for ourselves the weight we should give to authority; and instead, persist in adhering to the deliverances of this infant-instinct. The result is that we are likely to form a doxastic instinctive-habit, the deliverances of which are erroneous.¹

4.8 OVERCOMING PREJUDICES

Reid holds that there are several ways in which the agent may exercise the power of self-government over her instincts and habits. Reid also thought, I suggest, that these apply straightforwardly to *doxastic* instincts and habits. First, Reid argues that the inclination of an instinct or habit may, on any single occasion, be *resisted* by the exertion of will. By constant resistance, however, the agent may acquire an ‘opposing-habit’, and thus eliminate the doxastic instinct or habit in question.² More precisely, where:

A₂₆ *A* is an opposing-doxastic habit with respect to some doxastic instinct or habit *B* for agent *S* if and only if (i) *A* inclines *S* toward believing that *p* in circumstance *C*, (ii) *B* inclines *S* toward believing that *q* in *C* (iii), since *p* and *q* are incompatible, *S* cannot believe both *p* and *q* in *C* at the same time.

and where:

A₂₇ *S* may acquire an opposing-doxastic habit *A* with respect to some doxastic instinct or habit of belief *B* if and only if *S* exerts her will to resist the inclination of *B* to a frequency sufficient for the acquisition of *A*;

Reid would hold that:

A₂₈ *S* can eliminate some doxastic instinct or habit *B* if and only if *S* acquires an opposing-doxastic habit with respect to *B*.

For example, Reid argues that the vicious doxastic-habit whereby a person is inclined to “measure things less known, and less familiar, by those that are better known and more familiar”³ might be “cured” by acquiring an opposing doxastic-habit: namely, that habit whereby a person is inclined to respond to the unfamiliar with the attitude that further

¹ “As there are persons in the world . . . who may be called mere beggars with regard to their opinions. Through laziness and indifference about truth, they leave to others the drudgery of digging for this commodity; they can have enough at second hand to serve their occasions. Their concern is not to know what is true, but what is said and thought on such subjects; and their understanding, like their clothes, is cut according to the fashion. This distemper of the understanding has taken so deep root in a great part of mankind, that it can hardly be said that they use their own judgment in things that do not concern their temporal interest; nor is it peculiar to the ignorant; it infects all ranks. We may guess their opinions when we know where they were born, of what parents, how educated, and what company they have kept. These circumstances determine their opinions in religion, in politics, and in philosophy.” IP, p. 529.

² “when the habit is formed, such a general resolution [to forbear it] is not of itself sufficient; for the habit will operate without intention; and particular attention is necessary, on every occasion, to resist its impulse, until it be undone by the habit of opposing it.” AP, p. 88.

³ IP, p. 529.

research and expert consultation is required before she can form a sound judgment on the matter; a doxastic-habit that is most likely to be acquired when the agent seeks to extend the range of “different ranks, professions, and nations” with which she is presently familiar.¹

CONCLUSION

By way of a conclusion, I present below my reading of Reid’s analysis of knowledge: Where F = the faculty (or set of faculties) by which S ’s belief that p is produced at t :

A₂₉ S ’s true belief that p has a degree of epistemic justification sufficient for knowledge at t if and only if (i) S ’s evidence for the truth of p is such that she holds her belief that p with, at least, fallibilist certainty; (ii) (a) F is designed to produce true beliefs, (b) F is functioning properly at t , (c) F is functioning in an environment for which it was designed to function at t , and (d) if (a)-(c) are true, then it is more probable than not that p is true; (iii) S forms a distinct conception of p , and (iv) S ’s belief is not formed by means of a vicious doxastic general-habit.²

¹ “It is commonly taken for granted, that this narrow way of judging of men is to be cured only by an extensive intercourse with men of different ranks, professions, and nations; and that the man whose acquaintance has been confined within a narrow circle, must have many prejudices and narrow notions, which a more extensive intercourse would have cured.” IP, p. 530.

² I am grateful for the comments on an earlier version of this paper, given by William P. Alston, Keith Campbell, Knud Haakonssen, and David F. Norton.

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