

REID'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

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By

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## ABSTRACT

Employing the faculty of perception marks the only possible means by which we can gather knowledge of our environment. Despite this, in roughly the century and a half leading up to Reid's *Intellectual Powers*, philosophers had widely turned from viewing this wondrous faculty as our companion in the quest for knowledge. Descartes, along with Galileo and Gassendi, begins a trend which, as Reid sees it, culminates in Hume. These thinkers, in increasing degrees, began to harbor a suspicion that our senses cannot be trusted with any epistemologically important responsibilities. This attitude was grounded upon a belief that the immediate objects of perceptual states are not external objects, but rather ideas and impressions.

Reid argues that this doctrine, which he calls the 'Way of Ideas' and the 'Ideal Theory' was as philosophically feeble as it was popular. In the earliest parts of his philosophical career Reid found himself party to a broadly Berkeleyan view of mind and world, but appreciating the implications of Hume's theories revealed to Reid the error of his ways. From that point onward, Reid takes it upon himself to rehabilitate the study of perception in order to show that, contrary to the Way of Ideas, we—that is, both philosophers and non-philosophers—have knowledge of our environments.

This includes not only knowledge *that* there is an external world, but specific knowledge of some of its contents. While the origins of Reid's interest in the study of perception are perhaps more complicated than they seem, the importance of his work is quite clear, particularly in the face of revivals of the Way of Ideas in contemporary work on both cognition and perception.

The purpose of this work is to systematically present Reid's theory of the mind and its relation to the world. I intend to make clear Reid's differences with his predecessors about the nature of thought, the structure of the process of perception and about perceptual learning.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Jim Van Cleve has read a few of the chapters and I thank him for his comments. I thank Daniel Robinson for an enlightening discussion concerning Reid's analysis of visible figure. This correspondence brought me to see details about visible figure in Reid that I later decided were crucial to an overall understanding of his theory of perception. Phillip Cummins read a version of the chapter on perceptual

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CHAPTER 1:  
GROUNDWORK FOR A STUDY OF REID'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

1. REID'S GOALS FOR HIS THEORY OF PERCEPTION

In order to get clear about just what we are entitled to expect from Reid's theory of perception, we must identify as best we can Reid's own goals in offering it. Reid is not aiming at what some might describe as a 'philosophical analysis' of perception, meaning by this term a set of logically necessary and sufficient conditions. He does not analyze the concept of perception, then apply it to the world.

Instead, Reid's goal is to develop an empirical explanation of the operation of the senses, their relation to objects in the world and their place in an account of mind. Sometimes this empirical method makes Reid appear evasive because he repeatedly dodges demands to define terms like 'perception' and 'conception.' He says, "The most simple operations of the mind, admit not of a logical definition: all we can do is to describe them, so as to lead those who are conscious of them in themselves, to attend to them, and reflect upon them; and it is often very difficult to describe them so as to answer this intention" (I 182b/166).<sup>1</sup> But Reid seeks to explain

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<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Reid 1994) = 'E'; *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (Reid 1994) = 'T'. References to Hamilton will be

the conditions in which human agents actually succeed in perceiving physical objects, which is why he constructs his account of perception in such a way that it arises out of his introspective and scientific study.

When Reid describes the faculty of perception, he refers to one of two things. First we have a magnificent physical apparatus containing the tools that react in varied and subtle ways to our environment. This perceptual apparatus consists in our sensory organs, e.g. nose, skin, and eyes, in addition to those parts of our brains responsible for processing information gleaned from our senses. We each also possess a mental faculty responsible for unifying and interpreting what we receive from our senses, nervous systems and brains. Reid typically takes it for granted that his readers will know that the term ‘perception’ and its cognates are equivocal in this way, and will be able to determine from the context which aspect of the faculty it is—mental or physical—to which he refers.

Reid describes the mental component of perception concisely:

[W]e shall find in [perception] these three things: First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived; Secondly, a strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence; and, Thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (E 258a/96)

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followed by corresponding references to the critical editions prepared by D. Brookes (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 1997 (*Inquiry*) and 2002 (*Intellectual Powers*)).

Taken alone this marks an inadequate characterization of perception. First, Reid does not attempt to include any sensory experience within the scope of a perceptual event, a fact that has befuddled some of his commentators. William Alston is concerned that Reid fails to allow conceptual space for sensation within his mental analysis of perception. (Alston 1989, 37) After all, we take qualitative sensory experience to be what distinguishes perception from other forms of mental activity, like belief. So the above description seems to be too narrow to adequately account for our perceptual experience. Furthermore, the process of mental perception can be fully specified without in any way characterizing its object. From the description above, we are not entitled to infer that “object” refers to mind-independent, physical objects, even though Reid seeks to incorporate this fact into his account elsewhere. Reid also includes within a perception the formation (or application) of a conception and a belief, seemingly imbuing all perceptual acts with two levels of cognitive activity. This raises important questions about the logical relationship between mental contents and perceptual experiences.

The physical component in Reid’s analysis of perceiving is of assistance in supplementing the mental account so as to avoid some of these problems. In *Inquiry*, VI, 21, “Of the Process of Nature in Perception,” Reid describes the physical process of perception as consisting of five stages. The object first must be in contact with an organ of sense, whether immediately (particles from an object enter the nasal cavity) or mediately (rays of light are refracted from the surface of a visible object to the eye).

Secondly, a physical impression is made upon that organ by the object in question. The nervous system must next transmit this impression from the organ in question to the brain. This impression then causes a sensation in the mind, according to Reid, through an as yet unknown process. Finally, the sensation is followed by the perception of the object. (I 186/174ff)

Since, according to this physical description, the object of perception must come into contact with a sense organ, it follows that such an object must be external to our bodies. In addition, when describing the process of perception in these contexts, Reid does make special mention of sensations.

## 2. REID'S METHOD

A complete philosophical account of Reid's theory of perception must describe in detail the mental component of Reidian perception, and take into account what he says about our physical apparatus, but it needn't give equal time to physical components—except to attempt to understand how they are related to mental components. Since we are primarily interested in the psychology of perception and the epistemic goods it delivers us, fully understanding the mental component is our top priority. The central trouble in interpreting Reid is that in his execution of this empirical method—which incorporates philosophical reasoning and experimentation on our sensory organs—he omits explicit discussion of several important aspects of the process.

I will attend to these neglected facets of his theory of perception, but I will leave explicit discussion of his method until the end of this work. This is in part because Reid did not explicitly or self-consciously state his method at the outset of his projects; rather, his approach and working assumptions are revealed as he engages various topics. Another reason for delaying explicit discussion of his method lies in the fact that Reid's method provides a central point of contrast between his philosophy of mind and that of the Way of Ideas. Thus, we can best appreciate the degrees of difference between Reid's method and that of his predecessors only after we understand just what the Way of Ideas asserts.

I can say something, now, about my method in these matters. Given Reid's goals and his empirical method, my approach will contrast significantly with standard interpretations of Reid. Most philosophers who have attempted to interpret Reid's theory of perception have voiced some opinion about whether Reid endorses a direct theory of perception.<sup>2</sup> I do not believe that addressing this question contributes to the body of knowledge about Reid's views and his historical place in the development of the philosophy of mind. First, this is because the stakes on positive or negative responses to this matter of directness are not made clear. The guiding assumption, in this context, is that Reid endorses a direct theory of perception because he thinks that

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<sup>2</sup> A number of interpreters of Reid claim that he endorses a direct theory of perception consistently in both the *Inquiry* and the *Intellectual Powers*, including among Cummins 1974, Pitson 1989 and DeRose 1989. This is in addition to Pappas and Alston, whose interpretations we will consider presently.

it is necessary for avoiding skepticism about perceptual knowledge. But I don't think Reid endorses this assumption (thankfully, since I also believe this assumption is false). Second, many interpreters of Reid do not appreciate the fact that he rarely uses the terms 'direct' and 'immediate' in such ways as to resemble the ways those terms are used in the secondary literature.

While I will say several things about directness in perception, I will do so on Reid's own terms. My approach will be to keep within the bounds of Reid's own method as much as possible, clarifying his views more than interpreting them. As such, some of my discussions will appear orthogonal to debates in the secondary literature. Those interested in learning where my reading of Reid places me vis-à-vis other prominent commentary on him may read the remainder of this chapter. For in the rest of this chapter, I will briefly survey the best among prior interpretations of Reid's theory of perception and contrast my view with them. However, those interested in proceeding directly to my analysis of Reid's theory of perception may proceed from here directly to chapter 2.

### 3. PERCEPTUAL DIRECTNESS AND PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

John Immerwahr (1978) argues that Reid's views were inconsistent over time and should be understood developmentally (a view echoed in Ben-Zeev 1989b). In the face of this, Pappas (1989) has brought some conceptual clarity and a heightened interest in textual consistency to Reid's views. He first distinguishes two axes on



which the issue of direct perception hinges. First, one might be an ‘epistemic direct realist.’ An epistemic direct realist endorses the thesis that most perceptual knowledge of mind-independent objects is “direct or non-inferential, not being based upon immediately known, or immediately justified beliefs about sensations.” (Pappas 1989, 159) Pappas believes Reid is an epistemic direct realist on the basis of passages from the *Intellectual Powers*, even though, he thinks, evidence from the *Inquiry* is ambiguous between ‘EDR,’ as he calls it, and its denial.

The second issue Pappas addresses concerns Reid’s commitment to perceptual direct realism, or ‘PDR’. Such a theory trades upon denying, not that there are any intermediaries between my act of perceiving and a physical object or quality, but denying that there are no *perceived* intermediaries filling this role. Actually, even this is not quite right: there may be perceived intermediaries, but, so long as my perception of some object O is not *dependent upon* my intermediate perception of something else R, then I will directly perceive O. Pappas’ definition is somewhat more involved:

A person S directly perceives an object O at a time t = (1) S perceives O at t; and, (2) it is false that: S would perceive O at t only if S were to perceive R at t, where  $R \neq O$ , and where R is not a part of O nor is O of R, and where R is not a constituent or group of constituents of O, nor is O of R. (156-7)

He marshals textual evidence in favor of attributing PDR to Reid in both the *Inquiry* and the *Intellectual Powers*. One might think that, since Reid remarks that sensations are perceived, their presence would thwart the second condition. But Pappas argues that

the status of sensations does not threaten this attribution. I agree that such an objection is not forceful, and I concur with Pappas, against Immerwahr, that Reid is fairly consistent over time on this point. But there are three general criticisms to be made of Pappas's approach.

First, Pappas' interpretation does not distinguish between different sense modalities in his statements of perceptual and epistemic direct realism. This problem is common in interpretations of Reid. Alston (1989), for example, also overlooks this distinction. In chapter 6, on Reid's theory of visual perception, I argue that we must make such a distinction. Specifically, I argue that visual perception fails to conform to PDR due to the presence and function of what Reid calls 'visible figure.' I provide an analysis of this vexed Reidian concept in Chapter 5.

As important is a second criticism stemming from the (merely) counterfactual nature of the account that Pappas offers. An analysis of Reid's theory of perception must capture the contrast he envisions between his view and those of his predecessors, but I do not believe that Pappas' reconstruction succeeds in doing so. To see that this is so let's very briefly consider a Lockean theory according to which I conceive of and believe in objects, even though the immediate objects of awareness are images or ideas. Let 'O' refer to the Golden Dome at the University of Notre Dame and let 'R' refer to the image of the Golden Dome. Suppose that S conceives of and believes in O at t, fulfilling condition (1). We know that  $O \neq R$ , and that R is neither a part nor a constituent of O. Would S perceive O at t only if S were to

perceive R at t? No. In other words, S can conceive of and believe in the presence of the Golden Dome without conceiving of and believing in the presence of the image of the Golden Dome. Thus *Pappas*' analysis implies that the Golden Dome is directly perceived.

But the present point is that Pappas' analysis is one which a Lockean would readily assent to. Using only Reid's mental construal of 'perception'—where perception is simply conception and belief, minus a 'sensing' component—it is possible to describe his theory of perception in such a way that it does not contrast with the Ideal Theory. In the present case, S might directly perceive O on Pappas' terms even though the immediate object of S's faculty of (in this example) vision is merely a sense-datum of O. In fact, I believe this analysis implies that I might be standing at Simatai looking at the Great Wall or in the basin of King's Canyon staring up at an ancient sequoia, and yet still be directly perceiving the Golden Dome. This example shows that, at least on the definition of perception to which Pappas refers, his analysis is too weak to distinguish Reid's theory from the Ideal Theory's account of perception. Coupled with the further fact that Reid believes that his theory contrasts with Locke's theory of perception, the present analysis does not fully capture Reid's theory.

Pappas might object that he did not intend to adopt Reid's mental analysis of perception in this account. If not, though, what might he mean by 'perceives' in clause (1)? Perhaps Pappas intends something more physical by 'perceives,' for

example, put crudely, when S perceives O he must *sense* O. But such a suggestion falls afoul of some strictures Reid places on visual perception and visible figure which I will discuss below. More importantly, by straying from Reid's description of the mental component of perception, it is unclear just what utility such a revised definition of PDR will have in an attempt to determine the status of perceptual knowledge.

The nature of this problem can be unearthed by another counterexample to this revised definition; this example concerns a case of prosthetic perception. Suppose 'O' refers to a table and 'R' refers to the inside of a leather glove. Suppose S's right hand is in the glove. We arrive at condition (1) and attempt to determine whether or not it is fulfilled. Of course, common sense (and Reid's allegiance to it) dictates that (1) is fulfilled, but it seems as though S does not perceive, i.e. physically sense, the table directly with his right hand since his fingers only directly sense parts of the leather glove. If a theory of direct perception implies that we cannot directly tactually perceive physical objects through our clothes (or visually through glasses, etc.) then it must be rejected as inadequate. For it would then focus upon the causal intermediary, which is philosophically unimportant in this context. For one, construing 'perceives' as 'sense' in this way would wreak havoc on Reid's theory of perception. For two, construing 'perceives' in any other than the way Reid construes his description of the mental component of perception would disrupt Reid's texts.

These difficulties lead us to search for a better understanding of Reid's account of perception.

The third general criticism of Pappas' approach, fully applicable to Alston's views, concerns his discussion of EDR. Here the treatment given Reid is too coarsely grained to represent Reid's views accurately. Consider this time how Alston construes his version of EDR: "*Epistemological directness*. The belief involved is justified, warranted, rationally acceptable, apart from any reasons the subject has for it. It is 'intrinsically credible', '*prima facie* justified', just by being a perceptual belief." (Alston 1989, 37) This definition has problems. Internally, the terms of art in Alston's definition are not all synonymous, and they are not themselves defined, which creates problems with interpreting Alston's 'epistemological directness'. With respect to representing Reid, Alston does not discuss two distinctions that Reid draws. First Reid distinguishes between 'original' and 'acquired' perceptual beliefs. Original perceptions bear only the most rudimentary conceptual content. Original perceptual beliefs are formed by demonstrative acts of perception. Acquired perceptions are the product of more involved conceptualization coupled with requisite perceptual learning.

There are those who have carefully considered this distinction (e.g., Van Woudenberg 2000), but they have not seen an important second distinction between two types of acquired perceptions. 'Inferential' and 'habituated' perceptions (my terms) are two forms of acquired perception, or rather two stages of acquired

perceptions, between which Reid tacitly distinguishes. I argue that Reid endorses this further distinction on the basis of his discussion of acquired perception, his treatment of perceptual error and by a study of Reid's drafts of the *Intellectual Powers*. This case, and my analysis of its importance for Reid's theory of perceptual learning, are contained in chapter 7. The upshot is that Reid's understanding of perceptual knowledge is considerably more nuanced than standard interpretations like Alston's allow. In addition, if I am correct, a noteworthy portion of our perceptual knowledge is actually inferential, according to Reid.

#### 4. SENSATIONS AND PERCEPTUAL INDIRECTNESS

Nicholas Wolterstorff (2000 and 2001<sup>3</sup>) has offered another account of Reid's theory of perception, one which avoids some of the interpretive problems we've noted. For example, he is sensitive to the fact that Reid's standard theory of perception does not cohere well with his theory of visual perception. But in this case, rather than attempting to provide an analysis of the troublesome notion of visible figure, he rests content to make some remarks about perceptual relativity. This marks a lacuna in Wolterstorff's interpretation. There are, though, more substantial hurdles facing his treatment, which are as instructive as those facing the interpretations of Alston and Pappas.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that Wolterstorff 2000 was reproduced as parts of chapters 1 and 5 of Wolterstorff 2001.

Wolterstorff makes a fine contribution to our understanding of Reid through his subtle treatment of directness. He draws a distinction between perceptual directness and conceptual directness, observing that the conceptual form of the thesis is philosophically more fundamental than the perceptual thesis. This is because conceptual directness theses are constitutive of Reid's theses about perception. Wolterstorff thus rights the cart and the horse by refocusing our attention on the nature of Reidian conception. (Wolterstorff's concern with conception and apprehension resemble Alston's thesis of 'presentational directness' (1989, 36), though Wolterstorff is much more explicit about what this conceptual/presentational form of awareness involves.)

Once we distinguish between the various forms of conceiving in Reid, Wolterstorff argues, we will see that, contrary to commentary on the matter, Reid endorses an indirect thesis of perception.<sup>4</sup> This is because the form of conceptual awareness constituent in perceptual events is a form that takes sensory states as objects. Wolterstorff reluctantly gives necessary and sufficient conditions on perception on Reid's behalf. He says,

S perceives external object O if and only if O affects one's sensory organs in such a way as to cause in S a sensory experience which is a sign (indicator) of O, which sensation in turn causes in S an apprehension of O, and an

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Atherton (1984) stands with Wolterstorff on this point, but he does not utilize her support. I discuss her arguments in detail in chapter 3.

immediate belief about O whose predicative content is or implies that O exists as an entity in S's environment. (2001, 103)

But he quickly backs off of this statement, saying that it is a mix of both logically and causally necessary conditions. He is much more interested in attending to the nature of the apprehension at issue. But what that amounts to isn't clear. Wolterstorff proceeds from Reid's definition of 'simple apprehension', which reads:

Conceiving, imagining, apprehending, understanding, having a notion of a thing, are common words, used to express that operation of the understanding which logicians call simple apprehension... . Logicians define simple apprehension to be the bare conception of a thing, without any judgment or belief about it. (E 360a/295)

Simple apprehension is a rudimentary form of conception, while judgments employ richer conceptions—at least in the sense that conceptions in judgments require the use of more predicates than simple apprehensions do. Wolterstorff then cites the term's origin: "Conception is *apprehension*. The clue to what Reid means, in turn, by "apprehension", is its etymology. Apprehension is *having a grip* on something. A mental grip, of course." (2002, 8, and 2001, 11) This mixed-modal metaphor does not seem to be of much help in understanding Reid's theory of conception, or the way in which Reid's theory may be indirect.

Wolterstorff begins to set parameters on what counts as perceptual belief. A perceptual belief is a *de re* belief about an external, mind-independent object. It "is not



just a belief *that* there exists some external object; it's a belief *about* some particular object, viz. the one perceived. Having such a belief presupposes having a conception, that is, an apprehension, of that object." (2002, 8) Wolterstorff is slowly building his requirements on a theory of direct perception. Since perceptual beliefs are necessarily *de re* beliefs about objects, and since simple apprehension is necessarily a component in such beliefs, our simple apprehension of the object of perception must itself be direct if perception is to be direct.

There's the rub. Wolterstorff wants to argue that Reid does not endorse a direct theory of perception because the simple apprehension of the perceptual object is not direct. He argues that our simple apprehension of objects is mediated by sensations, or rather, by our apprehension of sensations. "Not only do sensations evoke perceptual beliefs; in perception they play the role as well of functioning as *signs* or *indicators* of the perceptual object." (2000, 9) Here Wolterstorff contrasts Reid and Kant on the origin of our perceptual concepts. Kant provides us with an architectonic for an *a priori* analysis of the origins of many of our concepts, but Reid doesn't. Reid is more interested in our concepts of specific qualities, like hardness, and their origin in our sensations. Wolterstorff says,

So how, by such standard concept forming operations as abstraction, generalization, distinction, and combination, could we come by our concept of hardness? We can't, says Reid; we have to concede that the concept of hardness is, as it were, a new creation of the mind, evoked in us by the

pressure-sensations we have when we touch hard things. *A priori*, though not innate. (2000, 10)

Wolterstorff attributes to Reid an activity of the mind in perception such that it creates concepts.<sup>5</sup>

Wolterstorff offers two options for explaining the origin of the concept of hardness and like concepts. We can acquire concepts by definite description or by direct acquaintance, following Russell's distinction. I can conceive of the fortieth

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<sup>5</sup> There has been one attempt to improve upon Wolterstorff's views concerning the nature of perceptual and conceptual directness, and it is made by Rebecca Copenhaver (2000). Unfortunately, it threatens to leave the issue on murkier conceptual ground.

She says that "a direct theory of perception holds that perception of external objects is not mediated by any mental entity whose intrinsic character licenses a move from the mental entity to the external object presented in perception." Wolterstorff claims that sensations are this sort of intermediary. It is not immediately clear whether Copenhaver denies this, or whether she affirms this but thinks that this is not a sufficient condition for indirect realism.

Voicing her own view she says that "Sensations are signs not in virtue of their intrinsic character but in virtue of the relations they bear to other items in the perceptual process. Independently of these relations, nothing about the intrinsic character of sensations makes them signs. According to a direct realist interpretation, sensations present us with nothing." She then continues, saying that "Reid's direct realism is anchored not in opposition to mediation *as such*, but in opposition to a mediating mental entity that represents external objects in virtue of some intrinsic quality possessed by that entity." (2000, 18; cf. 28) To that end she cites passages in Reid in which he states that God could have arranged sensations in any which way, e.g. an olfactory sensation could represent, or better, 'signify,' the quality of hardness. Hence, there is nothing intrinsic to sensory states that uniquely fix their reference to one quality alone.

But why wed this claim about the "extrinsic" nature of the representational capacity of sensations to any directness claim? Her inference that, 'because sensations extrinsically represent objects, Reid is properly interpreted as a direct realist,' is unwarranted. (To the contrary, it seems that a claim that sensations do not

president of the U.S. without having any acquaintance with the person, which is a case of conception by description. Alternatively, suppose I meet Ronald Reagan and form concepts and beliefs about him. Due to my acquaintance with him, I do not need to employ descriptive concepts to form my conception of him. The ethos of Reid's theory of perception and his opposition to the Way of Ideas is *prima facie* evidence in favor of an interpretation on which concepts of hardness arrive via direct acquaintance. Wolterstorff recognizes this but says, "My own conclusion is that Reid was not of the view that in perception we enjoy Russellian acquaintance with external objects." (2000, 12) This is in part because "one cannot have a *de re*/predicative belief about some item in one's environment unless one somehow apprehend [sic.] that item—somehow gets it in mind. What's required in addition then is that one have an apprehension of that external object. Last, that apprehension must be evoked by that object." (2001, 101) The latter requirement for a direct theory of perception is his sticking point. Wolterstorff thinks that, for Reid, our apprehension of external objects is not "evoked" directly, but rather brought about by prior attention to a sensation. Reid's theory of perception is not direct because sensations, not external objects or qualities, are direct objects of attention and conception.

Wolterstorff claims that Reid thinks "that sensations are on that account a sort of *medium* between the external object and our perception thereof." (2000, 11) This is thought to be an insight ripe with philosophical implications. Since Wolterstorff seeks

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intrinsically represent objects might better accord with an *indirect* theory of

to show that Reid adopts a ‘concepts by description’ account, he must show that Reid believes that sensations are conceptual intermediaries in the process of perception. In other words, he must show that in order for me to conceive of the quality of hardness, I must first conceive of my sensation of hardness. To this end Wolterstorff emphasizes the interpretive work we must do to understand the ‘signs’—Reid’s term for the role of sensations in perception—that cue our awareness of external objects. Wolterstorff says, “Perception involves reading the signs, interpreting the symbols” (2001, 119) and, “Reid regularly speaks of ... conception and immediate belief ... as *interpretations* of signs” (2001, 148; his emphasis). Textually, though, his support for this attribution is weak, consisting in a single passage in which Reid uses the term ‘interpretation,’ viz. “Nature hath also taught us the interpretation of the signs—so that, previous to experience, the sign suggests the thing signified, and create the belief of it.” (I 195a/190) Not only does this usage occur far from Reid’s discussion of sensations, but even here Reid’s use of ‘interpretation’ is ambiguous. It does not obviously favor the sort of reading—on which ‘interpretation’ refers to higher-order cognitive activity on the part of agents—that Wolterstorff endorses. Here ‘interpretation’ must refer to something that occurs “previous to experience.” Used in this nativist sense, clearly ‘interpretation’ must be devoid of the cognitive exertion Wolterstorff brings to the term.

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perception.)

But Wolterstorff has another argument, this one more philosophical in nature. He thinks that if sensations were not objects of interpretation, there would be “a very odd superfluity of information in perception... .” He says that, for Reid, the sensation “transmits information about the object to the perceiver.” (2000, 12) If we were directly acquainted with objects, though, then this information from our sensations would be overkill. “Given acquaintance with external entities, the sensory experience functioning as sign of the external entity is otiose; given the sensory experience functioning as sign of the external entity, acquaintance with the external entity is otiose.” (2000, 13) Wolterstorff repeats this point elsewhere, adding that “Something seems definitely wrong here.” (2001, 148)

Wolterstorff assumes that a sensory experience is not otiose and is instead necessary, from which he uses *modus tollens* to conclude that our concepts of qualities are not direct. But this assumption is not fully justified. Reid is an ‘anti-sensationalist’ (DeRose’s term) because in Reid’s conceptual experiment (upon which he stakes his philosophical system, as was the custom of the time) he argues that sensations do not account for our repertoire of concepts, hence are unnecessary for *acquiring concepts*. This alone does not imply sensations are unnecessary *tout court*. To think so is to overlook Reid’s point that sensations are intended by God for and are physically necessary for *our survival*. (I 112a-114b/40-43) I explore Reid’s account of sensations in chapter 8, where I argue that he explains them and their relation to perception in quasi-evolutionary terms. This interpretation corresponds with texts better than does

Wolterstorff's, and it doesn't involve the presumption that the only way sensations can be useful to our species is by serving as objects of our interpretation.

## 5. CONCEPTUAL DIRECTNESS

Wolterstorff's views about Reidian sensations and their role in perceptual events thus allow for improvement. The same can be said for his treatment of conceptual directness, though I give him much praise for guiding us to a philosophically important sense of directness. There are two ways we can improve upon Wolterstorff's account of conceptual directness.

First, a Reidian account of directness must explicate Reid's uniquely epistemic distinction between primary and secondary qualities. One way to describe my interpretation of Reid on conceptual directness is to say that our apprehension of primary qualities is direct, but that our apprehension of secondary qualities is not direct. This is because our apprehension of secondary qualities is typically mediated by our apprehension of our sensations. (Thus, modified and restricted, Wolterstorff's position retains some truth.) In chapter 7 I show that Reid's distinction between primary and secondary qualities is drawn precisely along this conceptual-cum-epistemic divide.

Most contrasts between Reid and the Ideal Theory have been thought to concern perception, even though we've seen some interpretations that do not render this contrast clearly. But what I shall argue is that a more philosophically fruitful

divergence from the Ideal Theory lies in Reid's philosophy of mind. His understanding of the nature of intentionality and the language of thought contrasts sharply with Hume's views. Attention to these points marks the second major way I improve upon Wolterstorff's (and others') accounts of directness.

Wolterstorff claims that "Perception, on Reid's analysis, is at bottom an information-processing activity" (2000, 9), or a "special sort" of "information processing." (2001, 106) I'm not certain what substantive philosophical work this term is doing for Wolterstorff. Presumably this is said in order to indicate that, for Reid, human agents are grandiose input/output devices capable of transducing information without requiring the use of concepts or of consciousness. 'Information processing' might describe the perceptual processes possessed by artificially intelligent visual arrays. At least, this seems to be the way the term was brought into philosophical contexts. I pointedly disagree with interpreting Reid in this way. Indeed, interpreting Reid as offering an 'information processing' theory of perception or conception threatens to undermine his signal divergence from his predecessors.

Reid argues, in effect, that Hume endorses what today we would regard as an information-processing theory of cognition. Once he has established that Hume's explanations for mental content appeal only to syntactic states, Reid performs a *reductio* on Hume's theory of cognition. I show this is so in chapter 2. The notion that the mind might simply be the central processing unit for inputs like impressions—inputs that are themselves devoid of cognitive content—describes

Hume and the Ideal Theory as Reid interpreted it. Reid has little sympathy for any analysis of human cognition that forcibly removes human agency from psychological explanation, and that undercuts our privileged access to our own mental states.

Reid's positive view is not nearly as clear as is his criticism of Hume on this count. I attempt to state Reid's positive theory of cognition in chapter 3. Reid believes that the Medievals must be in part correct in contending that the only way to account for intentionality and our innate ability to have thoughts about external objects is via an appeal to formal causes. This Reid is clearly not the ally of cognitive science we have come to expect from, for example, the work of J.C. Smith (1986, 1990, 2002), who has argued that facets of Reid's analyses of perception, sensation and intentionality anticipate aspects of the computational model of the mind. On the contrary, I argue that Reid's positive views share much more with resolute, contrarian voices on this topic, including John Searle (1983) and Laurence Bonjour (1991). Like Reid, they question what has become the guiding assumption of cognitive science and much of contemporary philosophy of mind, namely that cognition can be reduced to the operations of sufficiently complex syntactic states. This is, in effect, a contemporary variant of the theory of ideas, as its proponents and critics (including Jerry Fodor, at once both) have recognized.

Readers may be skeptical that the proper interpretation of Reid will take us to such metaphysical heights as a commitment to formal causes. I am mindful that Reid still remains through it all a commonsense philosopher. In order to understand Reid's



theory of cognition it is imperative to understand that Reid thinks of himself as upholding a commitment to commonsense in the course of rejecting the information-processing model of the mind. This commitment to commonsense is manifest in his undying devotion to a robust body of knowledge for us, which he sees threatened by the Ideal Theory's appeal to impressions in an explanation of cognition.

Nowhere does this doughty devotion to epistemological concerns become more apparent than in Reid's treatment of fictional objects. We would not think it possible of a commonsense philosopher to endorse a Meinongian account of fictional objects, according to which we can predicate of fictional objects but according to which fictional objects do not exist. Yet Reid subscribes to just such a theory. This is because he thinks that a Meinongian theory is the only plausible way to preserve self-knowledge of mental contents. I can predicate of a unicorn that it is white, and I know what it is to do this. When I conceive of a centaur, Reid says, the object of conception "is not the image of an animal—it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other without any danger or mistake" (E 373a-b/321-22). The Ideal Theory claims, in contrast, that when I think that the intentional object of my thought is a unicorn, I'm mistaken—it is actually a representation, an idea, of a unicorn. On this basis Hume and friends have clearly foreshadowed something similar to what has come to be known as the 'language of thought' hypothesis.

Reid's theory of cognition stands in sharp contrast to it, even though the contours of his own theory remain sketchy. I show that Reid adopts a Meinongian position on the basis of some heady epistemic principles about first-person access to the contents of our thoughts. This analysis illustrates the commonsense epistemological motivations that lie behind Reid's rejection of Humean accounts of cognition and affirmation of some form of a direct theory of cognition. But before examining Reid's commitment to Meinongianism, in chapter 4, we must first understand the motivations and contours of Reid's analysis of cognition.

CHAPTER 2:  
WHERE THE IDEAL THEORY WENT WRONG

1. “DIRECT REALISM”

‘Direct realism’ stands proxy for a cluster of theses—perceptual, conceptual, and epistemic. The perceptual and epistemic theses can be clarified by identifying them with, respectively, the thesis that at least some perceptual events take as their immediate objects mind-independent objects, and the thesis that we obtain some knowledge non-inferentially. The concern of this paper is to explain what Thomas Reid’s thesis of *conceptual* directness is and why he endorses it.

Three facts motivate this study. First, for Reid perception is not merely a sensory or physical process; a conceptual component is included in his definitions of “perception” (see E 258a/96, E 326b/226 and I 183a/168). In these places Reid says that perception incorporates a “conception and belief” of an external object. His analysis of the faculty of perception incorporates detailed discussion of conception and abstraction. And he asserts that conception occurs within both perception and belief. As a result, one might suppose that the conceptual thesis of Reid’s direct realism is philosophically prior to and more important than the epistemic and perceptual theses.

Second, analyses of Reid's theory of perception have concentrated on the perceptual and epistemic senses of directness at the exclusion of the conceptual thesis. It is no wonder why since, with respect to perception and epistemology, we can easily understand Reid's views, whereas his theory of conception is neither very clear nor *prima facie* plausible.

Reid's farthest reaching objections to the Ideal Theory are not his arguments according to which the Ideal Theory reduces to perceptual skepticism.<sup>6</sup> Rather, his strongest arguments are directed at the Ideal Theory's inability to show that some of our mental states have content.<sup>7</sup> (I will use the term 'content' to refer to that property of mental states by which they have intentional directedness and the capacity for representation.) Appreciating the depth of Reid's arguments against the Ideal Theory marks the third motivation of this study.

The chapter is in three main parts. First, I'll develop and partially defend Reid's two arguments against the Ideal Theory's analysis of cognition, which I will

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<sup>6</sup> See Greco 1995, and Sleight 1987.

<sup>7</sup> See Haldane 1989 and 2000, and the final chapter of Lehrer 1989a. The present examination of the argument differs with their analyses in a few ways. (1) I want to present a textually thorough case for the presence of Reid's anti-representational argument, whereas Lehrer does not cite any text and Haldane's textual case is brief. (2) Lehrer misreads the argument as being an application of Ockham's razor (Lehrer 1989a, 289-90). (3) Haldane interprets Reid in light of Aquinas, but I argue, historically, Ockham is a much better model. (4) Neither Lehrer nor Haldane attempt to situate Reid's theory of thought in his philosophy of mind or show how it comports (if in fact it does) with his analysis of sensation and perception, and his Meinongian thesis about non-existent objects.

explain. In order to explicate these arguments I will make exegetical use of the contemporary manifestations of them. Second, Reid does not replace the view he rejects with a comprehensive theory of his own, and I will explain the reasons for what I call Reid's 'quietism' about mental content. Third, I will respond to a pair of related objections to the interpretation of Reid I offer. The first, presented by Margaret Atherton, alleges that Reid actually subscribes to a representational theory of cognition rather than the direct sort of theory I believe he accepts. The second, presented by John Wright, alleges that Reid subscribes to a theory of innate ideas, in contrast to his disavowal of ideas both in conception and in perception.

## 2. SENSES OF "CONCEPTION"

Before we proceed any further, we must pay heed to Hume's warning, at Treatise 1.3.7 that an error "inculcated in the schools" "consists in the vulgar division of the acts of the understanding, into *conception*, *judgment* and *reasoning*..." (T 96/67). Hume claims that such a distinction is erroneous in part because these three forms of cognition "all resolve themselves into the first, and are nothing but particular ways of conceiving our objects" (T 97/67). This is in part because we can "consider" a "single object," we can dwell on several objects, and we can consider objects in a certain order. These acts of cognition depend upon the mind producing mental states that are about either other mental states, or about mind-independent objects and their qualities.

Reid agrees with Hume's analysis on this point (though Reid would not put it in terms of ideas). Reid's primary use of "conception" involves the *de re* intentional awareness of objects. This term refers to the direct, unmediated mental representation of objects that are external to our minds. Reid sometimes characterizes states of *de re* intentional awareness as conforming to a special subspecies of conception, what he calls "apprehension." Thus we are said to *apprehend* objects, or *apprehend* that an object O is F.

In order to apprehend something, one's cognitive state must be about that thing; as Wolterstorff says, we get a (mental) grip on the thing. Less metaphorically, Reid says that "Conceiving, imagining, apprehending, understanding,..., express that operation of the understanding, which the logicians call *simple apprehension*. ... Logicians define simple apprehension to be the bare conception of a thing, without any judgment or belief about it." (E 360a/295) This emphasizes the fact that states of apprehension take an object, which Reid states as a necessary condition, saying, "he that conceives must conceive something." (E 368a/311); and that, "without apprehension of the objects concerning which we judge, there can be no judgment." (E 243a/65)

In fact, apprehension is the form of conception upon which all other cognition depends according to Reid, for he says that "It may be observed that conception enters as an ingredient in every operation of the mind. Our senses cannot give us the belief of any object, without giving some conception of it at the same

time.” Reid thinks that this form of awareness underlies other mental operations, like judgment:

It is true of judgment, as well as of knowledge, that it can only be conversant about objects of the mind, or about things which the mind can contemplate. Judgment, as well as knowledge, suppose the conception of the object about which we judge; and to judge of objects that never were nor can be objects of the mind, is evidently impossible. (E 427b-428a/438)

Reid claims in the remainder of this passage that memory, reason, desire, love and pain are states that have apprehension “at the bottom, like the *caput mortuum* of the chymists, or the *materia prima* of the Peripatetics.” (E 361a/296) Apprehension marks the rudimentary intentionality of all higher-order cognitive states.

In what follows, when I attempt to explain Reid’s *theory of cognition*, I will be attempting to explain his theory of apprehension construed as the process by which we have *de re* intentional mental contents. Thankfully, Reid’s commentators are largely agreed that this is the sense of “conception” most important to Reid and the one at work in his theory of perception (which has as a necessary condition that the object of perception also be the object of conception). Wolterstorff places this sort of interpretation at center stage (Wolterstorff 2001, 1-22). Alston says, “the conception of an external object that is involved in perception can be understood as a direct awareness of the object, rather than as the application of it to some general concept” (Alston 1989, 44).

Let me, though, isolate a couple other senses of “conception” at work in Reid in order to prevent confusion. One other notion of conception is a *predicative* one. Reid does not mention *concepts* in his description of apprehending, which will seem amiss to those who think of conceiving as a compositional mental process whereby some concepts are applied to others. We may conceive of Homer Simpson *as being* a fictional character. We thereby bring the predicate “Homer Simpson” under the concept “fictional character” for purposes of classification. This predicative mode of conception is present in Reid. His account of generalization and abstraction explicates this form of conception in some detail.

Reid employs a notion of conception *de dicto*, what we can call a *propositional* sense of the term. This form of conception explains the term’s use in the following sort of passage: “May not a blind man be made to conceive, that a body moving directly from the eye, or directly toward it, may appear at rest?” (I 133b/79) What is being conceived of is not a mind-independent object, but rather a sentential predicate. In addition to conceiving of tables, unicorns and pains (all apprehensions), we can conceive that certain states of affairs are the case.

Formalizing these distinct uses of “conception” is unnecessary for my purposes, since I will be focused entirely with explicating Reid’s notion of apprehension. But notice that the predicative and propositional species of conception are also at work in Reid’s theory of perception and perceptual belief. Reid’s discussion of acquired perception explains the way in which we are capable of



applying predicates to objects of perception and thereby perceiving, e.g., a bottle of Coke *as* a bottle of Coke. For someone like Reid who holds that perception typically issues in belief states, the *de dicto*, propositional form of conception will be of explanatory use. But it is our first sense of conception involving *de re* intentional mental states that is foundational to the perceptual process.

### 3. REID'S INTERPRETATION OF HUME'S THEORY

Reid combines certain theses from Hume's work and argues that, together, they are incapable of showing how it is that our thoughts have intentional content. Reid doesn't deserve extra credit for creating this argument—since Hume himself foresees something quite like it—but Hume's recognition of the problem does not solve it.

Reid does not document at any length just what in Hume's system engenders this problem with intentional content. In part this is because Reid thought that Hume was sufficiently unclear in his use of key concepts—foremost among the, “impression”—that Reid could not pin the theory down. In this section will explain what little Reid says by way of interpreting Hume on what we call content. Then, in the following section, I will conduct the guided tour through Hume's corpus that I imagine Reid would give in this context.

Reid spends considerable time early in the *Inquiry*, as he sets up his own project, discussing the Ideal Theory's speculation about the nature of ideas, and of

thought generally. There Reid stresses that according to Hume “thought may be without a thinking being.” In other words, thoughts may exist even though there is no substantial self thinking them. He does not say that thought may be without any content. Instead, he adds that “It is a fundamental principle of the ideal system, that every object of thought must be an impression or an idea—that is, a faint copy of some preceding impression” (I 108b/33). But do ideas or impressions themselves have content? Are ideas and impressions, our thoughts, necessarily *about* something?

Reid says that, Hume’s “ideas are as free and independent as the birds of the air, or as Epicurus’s atoms when they pursued their journey in the vast inane” (I 109a/34). Reid describes them, again through metaphor, a bit further on, saying that “these self-existent and independent ideas look pitifully naked and destitute...” While “Descartes, Malbranche, and Locke” “treated them handsomely” and “made them representatives of things,” Hume did not. Writing in the passive Reid says that, for Hume, ideas and impressions are “turned out of house and home, and set adrift in the world, without friend or connection, without a rag to cover their nakedness” (I 109b/35). Given the sharp contrast Reid effects between Hume and his predecessors, and given the fact that for his predecessors, ideas were representational, I infer that Reid thinks Humean ideas are not representational, or at least Reid cannot determine whether they are or not. I make of this parody that Humean ideas have connection neither to an agent thinking them nor to any objects in the world to tie them down.

Put in 18<sup>th</sup> century terminology, this resembles the claim that Humean ideas do not have intentional content.

When discussing the use of terms referring to the operations of our minds, Reid also criticizes Hume on this point. Reid says, “Most of the operations of the mind, from their very nature, must have objects to which they are directed, and about which they are employed.... To perceive, without having any object of perception, is impossible.” He adds that “What we have said of perceiving, is equally applicable to most operations of the mind.” At this juncture Reid pointedly remarks that Hume’s account of thought does not clearly distinguish a thought’s content from the operation by which the content is expressed. This passage is worth quoting at some length:

[A]ll mankind have distinguished these three things as different—to wit, the operations of the mind, which are expressed by active verbs; the mind itself, which is the nominative to those verbs; and the object, which is, in the oblique case, governed by them.

It would have been unnecessary to explain so obvious a distinction, of some systems had not confounded it. Mr Hume’s system, in particular, confounds all distinction between the operations of the mind and their objects. When he speaks of the ideas of memory, the ideas of imagination, and the ideas of sense, it is often impossible, from the tenor of his discourse, to know whether, by those ideas, he means the operations of the mind, or the

objects about which they are employed. And, indeed, according to his system, there is no distinction between the one and the other. (E 224a/26)

Reid asserts that Hume's description of the intentional objects of cognitive states—whether they be states of memory, imagination or perception—is severely impoverished: perhaps our thoughts do have intentional contents, and thus take “objects,” perhaps not.

In his encapsulated retelling of the history of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy—equivalent to the history of the triumph of the Ideal Theory—Reid also addresses the nature of these Humean commitments. According to the Ideal Theorist “I am certain of the existence of the idea, because I immediately perceive it. But how this idea is formed, or what it represents, is not self-evident; and therefore I must find arguments...” (E 274b/126). Reid makes two importantly different points in this passage. The Ideal Theory is unable to prove that we know, of a particular idea, that it represents a specific mind-independent, external object. More important for present purposes, Reid's statement of the point indicates that the Ideal Theorist is unable to prove that we know, of a particular idea, that it represents anything at all, i.e. that it possesses intentional content of some sort.

While Reid does identify Hume's position with a theory on which our thoughts, for all we know, may not be about anything at all, Reid is not as explicit about offering this interpretation as we might like him to be. Reid's interpretive perspective closely resembles that put forward by Jerry Fodor. In his

“Methodological Solipsism” paper, Fodor charts the historical ancestor to the computational thesis he advocates to Hume, which he begins with an epigram from Hume. The computational thesis asserts that cognition is composed of processes that are symbolic, by being defined over representations, and formal, by applying to representations in virtue of the syntax of the representations (Fodor, 226). In fact, Fodor effectively defines “formal” as “nonsemantic.” (232) Fodor claims that, “If mental processes are formal, then they have access only to the formal properties of such representations of the environment as the senses provide. Hence, they have no access to the *semantic* properties of such representations, including the property of being true, of having referents, or, indeed, the property of being representations *of the environment*.” (231) A further consequence of the formality of our cognitive operations is that they are no longer transparent to us; as Fodor says, “transparency is a semantic notion.” (239) He claims that this thesis about the formality of cognitive operations derives directly from Hume, and he quotes the following, from the *Treatise*, as evidence of the claim: “...to form the idea of an object and to form an idea simply is the same thing; the reference of the idea to an object being an extraneous denomination, of which in itself it bears no mark or character.” (T 20/18) Reid is in complete agreement with Fodor that Hume endorses this commitment to the formality of cognition, and that doing so has the—Reid thinks unfortunate—skeptical implications about intentional content and transparency.

Thankfully, for the purposes of my larger argument, it is not of crucial importance that we cannot find more explicit texts in Reid advocating such an interpretation of Hume. What is somewhat important is that Reid's attributions to Hume can be warranted on the basis of Hume's own texts, even if Reid hasn't done the legwork for us.

#### 4. HUME'S THEORY

I propose to briefly examine Hume's texts in order to show that one plausible interpretation of his corpus is that he held views implying that our thoughts fail to bear intentional content. Notice this is not to claim that Hume *believed* that our thoughts fail to bear intentional content, or even that the *best possible interpretation* of Hume is that he held a theory on which our thoughts fail to bear intentional content. Instead, I want to say enough about Hume to make what Reid says about Hume reasonable. This is done in order to motivate Reid's own theory of cognition, which will be presented in the section following this one.

Hume analyzes cognition as associative relations between impressions and ideas. Ideas and impressions are said by Hume to lie on the same ontological plane, differing only in the force with which they strike us. Impressions are phenomenal mental states that seem to be caused by associative relations in the mind; their causes lurk far below the surface of conscious experience. Consistent with his reductive analyses, Hume allows appeal only to certain mental relations—resemblance,

contiguity, and causation—to explain intentional content. The greatest of these, “the most extensive” (T 12/13), is causation. Hume does not privilege mental content as Reid does; rather Hume seeks to build contentful states from states that are not themselves bearers of content. Humean impressions are, to the agent, meaningless syntax, but they are the ingredients out of which contentful states can be built. This Newtonian tale of reverberating impacts in the mind has won Hume friends in the field of contemporary cognitive science, which favors the intuition that intentional content can be reduced to non-contentful states and relations. (Hume’s analysis of impressions is touted by numerous cognitive scientists as being the conceptual ancestor of modern-day connectionism.) But just how is it that, for Hume, intentional content reduces to non-contentful states?

The only difference between Hume’s impressions and ideas is qualitative in nature; otherwise they are otherwise the same (T 2/7-8).<sup>8</sup> Hume claims, though, that impressions cause more forceful and vivacious phenomenological effects in us than do ideas. This allows Hume to say that the class of impressions is constituted by “sensations, passions and emotions,” whereas ideas are “the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning” (T 1-2/7-8). Assuming Hume grants the existence of mental contents in the first place, those states must be a species of idea. The contents of ideas arise, or “proceed either mediately or immediately,” entirely from our experiences of impressions (T 7/10). Hume says, “Now since all ideas are deriv’d

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<sup>8</sup> Hume 1978, hereafter “T”.

from impressions, and are nothing but copies and representations of them, whatever is true of the one must be acknowledg'd concerning the other. Impressions and ideas differ only in their strength and vivacity" (T 19/18). Here Hume describes the relation between impressions and ideas by saying (i) that ideas are "deriv'd" from impressions, and (ii) that ideas are "representations" of impressions.

On the basis of this and other passages, Reid wants to milk from Hume's texts something like the following thesis:

(R) Contentful mental states, i.e. ideas, represent non-contentful states, i.e. impressions.

He also interprets Hume as endorsing something like the following compositional thesis:

(C) Contentful mental states, i.e. ideas, are built up from non-contentful states, i.e. impressions.

(C) constitutes an account of content whereby contentful states are reducible to syntactic states, whereas (R) is a thesis identifying the class of immediate intentional objects of contentful states with non-contentful mental states. The non-contentful states themselves *ex hypothesi* do not have any intentional content. (Fodor attributes something quite like (C) to Hume, calling it a computational thesis.)

Non-contentful, purely syntactic mental states can take a variety of forms, but perhaps the most representative of Hume is a reading on which they are phenomenal states. This seems well-justified on the basis of *Treatise*, Book 1, even though there



may be other attributions, inconsistent with (R), that are also justified from Book 1. I will leave the precise nature of these non-contentful states open so as not to beg questions. Since Reid's argument is completely general, doing so is not dialectically important.

In Hume these two principles are typically not separated. In fact, early in Book 1 Hume combines them into "one general proposition." He takes it as obvious and as a statement that "requires no farther examination" that complex ideas like beliefs, possessors of intentional content, are formed from simple ideas, themselves copies of simple impressions of sensation. He then says that "we shall here content ourselves with establishing one general propositions, *That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent*" (T 4/9). Here a compositional thesis like (C) is conjoined with a representational thesis like (R).

Marjorie Grene, in a very thorough analysis of the term "object" in Hume, has argued that Hume endorses the theses I have stated as (R) and (C). Let's first briefly examine what she says about a presupposition lying behind both these theses, namely that ideas are contentful and impressions of sensation are not. Grene says, "Ideas directed to a target, ideas of or about something, certainly occur. True, simple ideas are copies of simple impressions, which they wholly resemble. At first sight, there seems to be no trace of "intentionality" in such a crude conception. Nevertheless, ideas are also presented as *of* their corresponding impressions, which are their

objects” (166). She then argues that impressions are unlike ideas in this key respect: they do not have intentional content. She says, “In contrast to ideas, impressions, or rather, impressions of sensation, which are the chief starting point in Book I... arise, we know not how (or as moral philosophers know not how), and cannot be “about” anything else” (166-7). Impressions of sensations, which Hume sometimes calls “appearances of objects” (e.g., T 638/46), do not possess any intentional content.

Hume sometimes speaks as though impressions do have intentional content. Grene persuasively argues that, when Hume speaks of the way in which such impressions “change their objects” (T 142/97) for example, he is adopting the vulgar way of putting the point, purposefully speaking in a “deluded” manner (Grene 1994, 167).

Grene addresses evidence for (R) as well. She contends that impressions of sensation are the primary objects of attention and perception throughout Book 1. Hume virtually identifies “object” with “impression” in several places, e.g. at T 266/173 and T 37/29, where he says that “[i]deas always represent the objects or impressions.” Grene says that “the objects of our attention are impressions or copies of impressions. ... Ideas are *of* “objects”...; those objects are impressions, since in the main, or strictly speaking, it is impressions *to* which our attention is directed. They are the items about which we think, reason, imagine, the items to which we attribute causal connections” (169). This establishes that ideas, Hume’s content-bearing states, take as their intentional objects impressions, themselves non-contentful states. (R) is

thus not only well justified by Book 1, but marks a foundational principle of Hume's method.

What of explicit evidence for (C)? (C) states a reductive account of intentional content in a way that does not make use of anachronistic terminology. Thus I use the term "built up" rather than "reduced to" or its cognates. Hume typically writes that ideas are "deriv'd" from impressions. He clearly does not mean to imply that there is any heady cognitive operation we must perform in order to move from impression of sensation to contentful mental state; "deriv'd" connotes, not a derivation, but rather a type of composition. He frequently uses the locution "deriv'd from" to describe the relation between contentful ideas and non-contentful impressions (quoted above at T 4/9, but also at T 19/18, 33/27, 204/136). This thesis is a necessary result of Hume's interest in confining our reasoning to the bounds of experience, for it is impressions of sensation that constitute experience at its most liminal. (C) serves as a central methodological principle in Hume's reductive explanations of concepts like space, time, pride, extension and person.

Reid is justified in believing that Hume endorses a reductive, representational account of intentional content, but let me say what I take this to mean. There is one trivial sense in which every explanatory philosophy of mind must be representational: so long as the mind does not contain the very objects to which its states are directed, then the mind must contain what are, broadly speaking, representational states, which in some way stand for objects in the world. Even Medieval views according to which

forms of objects enter the mind are representational in this weak sense (although perhaps eliminativist theories would not be explanatory theories of the mind in this sense if they are taken to deny that there are any such things as representational mental states). This sense of ‘representation’ is excessively weak for contemporary tastes, so we are led to draw a distinction between two types of representationalism, which I will call ‘reductive’ and ‘non-reductive.’

A *reductive* construal of representation means that contentful states are built up from properties of the mind or brain that are themselves not contentful. On the type of reductive representationalism that Hume endorses, the sub-contentful states from which contentful states arise are phenomenal states. This needn’t be the case. Sub-contentful states are today thought to be either neurochemical states (connectionism) or syntactic states in mentalese (computationalism). On *non-reductive* forms of representationalism, states either intrinsically represent what they do or they bear some other privileged, intimate relationship with what they represent. I dub such theories ‘non-reductive’ because they assert that, despite the fact that the relations in question are not discoverable by science, they nonetheless exist and are sufficient to secure content. Non-reductive theories are representational in the trivial sense described above, though they are clearly anathema to contemporary construals of mental representation. On these terms, Reid advocates a non-reductive theory of mental content and Hume a reductive theory.

Given (R) and (C), cognition is the process by which we experience phenomenal states and their relations. In Hume's words, "All kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but a comparison, and a discovery of those relations either constant or inconstant, which two or more objects bear to each other" (T 73/52). Hume says, "[T]he understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect, when strictly examin'd resolves itself into a customary association of ideas... . [T]he very essence of these relations consists in their producing an easy transition of ideas" (T 259-60/169). This movement from impression and idea to impression and idea is determined "by custom or a principle of association" (T 97/67). Of course, by "objects" here Hume refers to impressions, since only they can be objects of thought.

## 5. THE METAPHYSICAL OBJECTION

Reid's first criticism of Hume's commitments begins with a philosophical intuition. Reid's intuition is that any reductive form of mental representation will fail adequately to ground an account of intentional content. Reducing content to relations amongst items without content is inadequate. Through this point we can understand Reid to be arguing that the burden of proof is Hume's, since we should take it as foundational that many of our thoughts are intentionally directed.

Reid's central point is that the relations that non-contentful states bear to contentful states are arbitrary. He does not mean that there may not be patterned

causal relations between the two. They are arbitrary in the sense that the appeal to the concatenations of non-contentful states is insufficient to explain why the mental state has the content that it does. After arguing that there is no privileged connection between material impressions and sensations Reid proceeds to argue that, on his terms, there is no privileged connection between sensations and conceptions. He says, “Nor can we perceive any necessary connection between sensation and the conception and belief of an external object. For anything we can discover, we might have been so framed as to have all the sensations we know have by our senses, without any impressions upon our organs, and without any conception of any external object” (E 327a/227). No phenomenal state (i.e., on Reid’s interpretation of Hume, no Humean impression) is intrinsically related to any perceptual content, which is why DeRose (1989) calls Reid an “anti-sensationalist.” In other words, there is no necessary connection between *sensations* and mind-independent objects.

Reid adds that, on the Ideal Theory, there is no necessary connection between my *ideas*, my mental contents, and the objects which they are thought to be about.

Reid adds that, on the Ideal Theory,

There are ideas present in the mind, representations of things that are external or have passed away; the mind, conscious of these ideas, perceives things that are external and have passed away with the ideas playing a middle role. Now, granted that there are ideas of things in the mind of which the mind is conscious, by what skill or by what indications, I ask, can the mind either

know or even portend that these ideas are representations of other things?

(Reid 1989, 61)

Reid recognizes that anything resembles anything else in one fashion or another, but Hume has given us no reason to think resemblance (and/or contiguity and/or causation) can adequately ground representation, i.e. can account for the contentful features of mental states in such a way as to avoid skepticism about content.

Hume, of course, concurs with these observations, but rather than giving up on the project of finding naturalistic, non-normative relations, he looks elsewhere—not just to resemblance but also to contiguity and causation. Hume calls these ‘associative relations’, whereas Reid calls them ‘principles of human nature.’

But Reid attempts to block this appeal. Reid says that “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” (I 122b/61). Here Reid has in mind Hume’s explanatory appeal to principles of human nature to ground such relations. These contingent, associative relationships can neither individually establish that a certain mental state has the content it does, nor imply that a certain mental content is about what we think it is about. Though Reid uses the term ‘or’ in the above passage, it is quite clear he also intends to imply that no *set* of associative relations can ground the intentionality of our mental contents.

Taking these two points together, Reid is making the following claim. None of Hume's associative relations (or sets of them), posited as holding between ideas (contentful states) and mind-independent objects or between impressions (phenomenal states) and mind-independent objects, is sufficient to ground the fact that our concepts are in fact about what we think they are. The term 'is sufficient to ground' is a fudge term of sorts, since just how Reid wants to draw this conclusion is indeterminate. He may be making an epistemic claim to the effect that Hume cannot justify the commonsensical belief that I know that contentful state C is about object O. He may be making a metaphysical claim to the effect that Hume cannot show that there is any fact about this matter; in other words, states that seem to possess intentional content in fact do not. I rather think he has this metaphysical point in mind, in large part because Reid explicitly attempts to turn the tables on Hume to argue that associative relations provide no "necessary connection" between concepts and objects.

In order to be able to easily refer to and make use of this criticism in the remainder of this work, I will attribute to Reid a metaphysical thesis about the representational relationship between ideas and impressions:

(S) The contingent, empirical relations (or sets of them) that a subject's phenomenal states and that mind-independent objects bear to mental states do not account for the intentional content of our mental states.



(S) can be used to undermine (R), which reads “Contentful mental states, i.e. ideas, represent non-contentful states, i.e. impressions.” If Reid is correct that the Ideal Theory’s account of relations in the mind implies (S), then the Ideal Theory has a problem grounding any account of intentional content. If the Ideal Theory does not or cannot ground an account of intentional content, then any claim, like (R), in which appeal to intentional content is made, would not be justified or justifiable upon the principles of the Ideal Theory.

Don Ross, forthright about difficulties plaguing Humean accounts of cognition, introduces just this problem in his attempt to improve upon Hume’s account of intentional content. “From the causal and mechanical perspective,” he says, “this tale of reverberating impacts [of impressions in the mind] is, for Hume, the whole story of mind. It provides us, however, with no account of the *content* of thought, since the notion of content appeals to *semantic*, and not merely mechanical, *structure*.” (Ross 1991, 346) Ross concurs that Hume’s theory of cognition, as stated by Hume himself, seems to fail for Reid’s reasons. Ross does not concede Hume’s defeat, however. He says only that “We do not need, as Hume insists, *metaphysical foundations* for resemblance; but we do need more *details* about it.” (Ross 1991, 349) Waxman boldly says that we bark up the wrong tree when we want to know any more than Hume tells us when describing associative relations. Waxman rests satisfied

without even the details Ross demands (Waxman 1994, 51; T 84/59).<sup>9</sup> Reid couldn't disagree more.

Though distinctly in the minority (as was Reid), a handful of philosophers of mind have recently voiced similar, and similarly broad, considerations against the

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<sup>9</sup> Here's one argument Hume might use to account for content without falsifying the plausible assumption that we have first-person access to the contents of our own thoughts, and without positing an internal interpreter of representational states, an homunculus. Following Hume, let's use 'perceptions' to refer to impressions and ideas. Hume might distinguish between (a) the relations holding between two perceptions, and (b) the relations holding between perceptions of those perceptions, i.e. between second-order and first-order perceptions. This distinction is motivated by Hume's description of the nature of identity attributions. Specifically, when attributing identity to oneself, one appeals to the adroitness one observes in the mind's movement from one perception to the next. This invokes a third-person perspective from which one views perceptions. The subject seems identical through time because, from the observer's point of view, the transitions from perception to perception are swift. Likewise one may reflect on this scenario by employing third-order perceptions. In this case one would stand over two subjects, as it were. How would Hume know that the observer and the subject are identical? So long as the transition from a first-order perception to a second-order perception was itself straightforward, then the agent at the third remove would think the other two are identical, or so it might be alleged.

There are several problems to which this attempt succumbs. This would only work if Hume held that we are only necessarily conscious of perceptions at the first-order level. But he says that we are conscious of all perceptions. (Hume says, for example, that "The only existences, of which we are certain, are perceptions, which being immediately present to us by consciousness, command our strongest assent, and are the first foundation of all our conclusions." He continues: "as no beings are ever present to the mind but perceptions; it follows that we may observe a conjunction or a relation of cause and effect between different perceptions, but can never observe it between perceptions and objects" (T 212; see also 193).

Second, this view seems to leave the advocate of the representational theory of the mind with a self precisely divided between various strata of observers and subjects. (This itself might be strangely inconsistent with Hume's bundle theory.) Even if it succeeds, it only shows that Hume can evade the problem of an inner interpreter of representations; this, though, does not absolve the representational

contemporary, reductive version of Hume's representational theory of mind. This group includes Boghossian (1989), Bonjour (1991) and Searle (1983, 1993). Searle, for example, can be read as nicely capturing the conclusion of Reid's metaphysical objection to Hume. He says, "intentional notions are inherently normative. They set standards of truth, rationality, consistency, etc., and there is no way that these standards can be intrinsic to a system consisting entirely of brute, blind, non-intentional causal relations" (Searle 1993, 51). In effect, Searle makes appeal to a metaphysical principle about the basicity of intentionality.

This is distinct from the point of Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment. In his Chinese Room the individual handling scraps of paper with notation scrawled on them does not even know that the notation is representational, let alone what the specific bits of syntax represent. I believe that Reid also states a similar *epistemic* objection to the reductive representational theory of mind he finds in the Ideal Theory, to which we now turn.

## 6. THE EPISTEMIC OBJECTION

Suppose for the sake of argument that the foregoing objection is ineffective and that empirical relations amongst Humean impressions of sensation can and do account for how (some) mental states possess intentional content. Reid has a further argument to the effect that, if this were the case, Hume's theory of cognition would

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theory of mind from the need to preserve first-person knowledge of one's mental

nonetheless fail. If Hume's recipe for building contentful states is correct then, Reid argues, we would know neither (i) that contentful states are contentful, nor (ii) what the contents of those states are.

Reid holds that common sense informs us that, of at least some beliefs we holds, we can introspectively know their content. We can individuate at least some of the contents of beliefs from the inside on the basis of what they are about. (I say 'some' because Reid can grant that in some cases (e.g., twin earth cases) contents are determined by factors external to the mind.) The central texts pointing to this epistemological argument occur in his commencement addresses delivered at the University of Glasgow, which explains why the argument is largely unknown.

Consider this passage:

For by what divination could I be taught that these images painted in my *camera obscura* are representations? How am I to be taught that the forms present and imprinted on my mind represent things that are external or that have passed out of existence? (Reid 1989, 62)

Here Reid distinguishes two problems for the Ideal Theory's analysis of cognition.

First, if Hume is right, how does one know *that* these phenomenal states are representations? Second, even if Hume can answer that question, how then does one know *what* the representation depicts?

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states.

Reid amplifies this two-fold problem while commenting on Hume's commitment to (R), the representational thesis. Reid asks us to suppose that ideas represent things like symbols; in this way, words and writing are known to express everything. Let the intellect, therefore, be instructed by ideas, not in the manner of a *camera obscura* with painted images but like a written or printed book, teaching us many things that are external, that have passed away, and that will come to be. This view does not solve the problem; for who will interpret this book for us? If you show a book to a savage who has never heard of the use of letters, he will not know the letters are symbols, much less what they signify. If you address someone in a foreign language, perhaps your words are symbols as far as you are concerned, but they mean nothing to him. Symbols without interpretation have no value.

(Reid 1989, 62)

Given the rhetorical nature of these remarks and the context in which they were delivered, Reid doesn't make explicit the premises of an argument here. Let's do this on his behalf.

Suppose that Hume's thesis (R)—contentful mental states, i.e. ideas, represent phenomenal states, i.e. impressions—is true. Then we argue as follows:

- (1) The brute phenomenal states posited in (R) *ex hypothesi* occupy only syntactic, not intrinsically contentful, roles in our cognitive operations.
- (premise from Hume)

(2) An agent must have an interpretation to apply to sets of phenomenal states in order for those sets of states to become contentful. (From (R) and (1))

Reid endorses (2) with his quip that “symbols without interpretation have no value.”

(3) Any further set of states  $S_2$  used to interpret the first set  $S_1$  will be a conjunction of non-contentful states, the members of which themselves require an interpretation. The same is true of the members of any set  $S_3$  used to interpret the members of  $S_2$ , and so on *ad infinitum*. (From (R) and (2))

(4) Hence, in order to know the contents of our thoughts, we must engage in an intellectual process of interpreting syntactic states. That is, we do not have privileged, non-inferential access to the contents of their thoughts.

(5) But it is clear from introspection that when I entertain (what seem to be) contentful thoughts, I know their contents without engaging in the sort of intellectual process described above.

(4) follows where ‘privileged access’ denotes the ability to understand the contents of one’s thoughts immediately and without interpreting sub-contentful states. Despite its absence from discussions of Reid, this marks Reid’s most sweeping argument against the Ideal Theory.

I mentioned that this epistemic objection is reminiscent of Searle’s point in his Chinese Room thought experiment. But the most direct and clear contemporary statement of Reid’s epistemological objection comes from Bonjour. Bonjour’s target

is the contemporary analog of the Ideal Theory, which he dubs “the linguistic conception of thought.” According to this theory,

all that is present in my mind (or brain) when I think contentful thoughts is symbols of the appropriate sorts; these symbols are meaningful or contentful by virtue of relations of some sort in which they stand, but this meaning or content is represented in the mind only by the symbols themselves, not by any further content-bearing element or feature. But...merely having access to a symbol or set of symbols does not by itself yield any access to their representative content. (BonJour 1991, 336)

Cognition according to the linguistic conception of thought is explained in virtue of one’s having some syntax (of mentalese or another internal syntactic system) in the mind. From the point of view of the agent, such tokens play the role of symbols in cognition, much like Humean impressions. What the symbols represent is only determined by an interpretation put upon them from outside and is by definition not intrinsic to them. For this reason we can only awkwardly speak of them as “symbols” for they are syntactic states until they are given an interpretation, at which point they symbolize other states. This is because only the sub-contentful features of these symbols play any role in explaining the contents of one’s thoughts. But it seems by all counts that I am able to determine by introspection the intentional contents of my thoughts. As Reid observes, I have no need for an interpreter of any internal language. BonJour’s conclusion from this simple argument is Reid’s conclusion: the

reductive representational theory of mind cannot account for first-person access to the contents of thoughts.

## 7. ELIMINATIVISM AND CONTENT

One might think that if the Ideal Theory would only give up its commitment to explaining cognition by sole appeal to phenomenal states, it would be able to account for intentional content. Specifically, one might seek to reinterpret Hume so that his use of “impressions” refers to brain states rather than phenomenal states—on which basis one might attempt to overcome Reid’s objections.

Reid sketches a specific objection to analyses of mental states that reduce them directly to material impressions on brains, bypassing theses about intermediate representations like (R). These models shun a commitment to phenomenal and syntactic states and instead assert something like:

(B) Cognitive operations are identical to collections of brain events.

He attributes this sort of position to “the common theory of ideas” (E 353a/279-80).

Though Reid says that we are not “totally ignorant” of the nature of brain impressions, a brain state “can have no resemblance to the object perceived, nor does it in any degree account for that sensation and perception which are consequent upon it” (E 353b/280-81). To identify an “impression upon the brain” with a memory belief, for example, “is absurd, if understood literally” (E 354a/281). Reid does not believe that any reductive account of content on which it is identical to either



phenomenal states (“sensations”), raw syntax (“symbols”) or neurological states (“impressions on the brain”) succeeds.

One reason he gives against the last of the three accounts, the eliminativist reduction, invokes an intuition about epistemic possibility. He says that it is “impossible to discover how thought of any kind should be produced, by an impression on the brain, or upon any part of the body” (E 354a/281). This was a sure mark that the Ideal Theory was positing hypotheses—theses unconfirmable by experience, whether scientific or introspective. This gives Reid reason to reject such a physicalist account as mere speculation. (This doesn’t directly address (B) because Reid is objecting to a brain *state’s* being identified with a thought. He’s thus addressing a type of token eliminativist identity theory. To extrapolate from the texts, Reid would also think for the same reasons that thoughts cannot be identical with a complex *network* of brain states.)

Reid emphasizes the inability of appeals to brain states to account for the content-bearing properties of memory beliefs, which he illustrates with an example:

If a philosopher should undertake to account for the force of gunpowder in the discharge of a musket, and then tell us gravely that the cause of this phenomenon is the drawing of the trigger, we should not be much wiser by this account...[I]f the cause of memory, assigned by this theory, did really exist, it does not in any degree account for memory. (E 354a/281)

Naming causes, making reductions and positing identity relations between

neurological events (or networks of them) and thoughts does not account for content, nor does the move from phenomenal or syntactic states to neurological states show how we can have privileged access to the contents of our thoughts. Hence, Reid argues, this new philosophical maneuver cannot overcome his metaphysical and epistemological objections.

This objection mustn't be taken as evidence that Reid does not allow *any* role for matter in his account of the mind. He gives the brain and body a greater role than most of his predecessors do, whether from the British Isles or Europe. The claim that thoughts have content and that we have privileged access to at least some of their contents is non-negotiable for Reid, which will be explored in the following chapter. But he also asserts that "although impressions upon the brain give no aid in *accounting for* memory, yet it is very probable that, in the human frame, memory is *dependent on* some proper state or temperament of the brain" (E 354b/282; my emphasis). Here he seems to draw a valuable distinction between exhaustively *reducing* a mental state to a brain state, as opposed to holding that mental states *supervene* upon brain states (where supervenience is not understood as mere token identity). Reid seems to affirm a weak form of the latter, namely that "a certain constitution or state of the brain is necessary to memory" and perception (E 354b/282).

CHAPTER 3:  
THINKING, FROM REID'S POINT OF VIEW

1. REID'S QUIETIST ALTERNATIVE

Reid's arguments led him to postulate an irreducible class of intrinsically intentional states, which even in his day amounted to a radical suggestion. Reid's commonsense commitments and methodology prevent him from speculating about just what this position involves, thus he stays quiet about the metaphysics behind it. I want to gather the few things he does say and examine his positive view in outline.

Reid calls the faculty that gives us access to our mental states "consciousness." The presence of this faculty and the reliability of its operation is conceptual bedrock in Reid's philosophy of mind. Amongst his First Principles, he distinguishes between a principle on which "we know certainly the existence of our present thoughts and passions" (E 231b/42), one on which we know in what those thoughts inhere, i.e. substantial self (E 232a/42-3), and one more according to which we know the contents of our thoughts. Reid's statement of this third principle naturally does not use terminology familiar from contemporary ways of stating theses of first-person privileged access, but, given the way this principle differs from the surrounding two, it is clear this is its meaning. He says,

We take it for granted, therefore, that by attentive reflection, a man may have a clear and certain knowledge of the operations of his own mind; a knowledge no less clear and certain than that which he has of an external object when it is set before his eyes.

This reflection is a kind of intuition, it gives a like conviction with regard to internal objects, or things in the mind, as the faculty of seeing gives with regard to objects of sight. A man must, therefore, be convinced beyond possibility of doubt, of everything with regard to the operations of his own mind, which he clearly and distinctly discerns by attentive reflection. (E 232a/42)

One can reasonably infer from this that Reid thinks that, by reflection alone, I can know what are the contents of my thoughts. He uses this thesis about privileged access in arguing that we introspectively know whether we're thinking about a centaur or a representation of a centaur: "This one object which I conceive, is not the image of an animal—it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other without any danger of mistake" (E 373a-b/321). (We'll explore Reid's views on fictional objects in chapter 4, with an eye toward understanding the depth of his epistemological motivations.) The comparison with our sense faculties is important here because Reid advocates a form of direct perception such that the immediate objects of perceptual states are the bodies or qualities of mind-

independent objects. Likewise, through introspection or “intuition” we have direct, unmediated access to the objects of our thoughts.

## 2. CONTENT IN THE *INQUIRY*

When Reid offers hints about the nature of intuition and its power to give us privileged access, he lurches in two directions. First, Reid employs his theory of signs in service of his analysis of cognition. In the *Inquiry* he argues that the Ideal Theory cannot account for the cognitive connections between symbols, what he calls “signs,” and the things they signify. (Given the *Inquiry*’s empirical orientation, he does not repeat the argument we’ve drawn from his commencement addresses there.) He distinguishes between three types (at I 121-122/59-60):

1. Signs suggesting physical states of affairs wherein the connection between the sign and state of affairs is established only by experience.
2. Signs suggesting mental states wherein the connection between the sign and state of affairs is “natural” and not discovered by experience.
3. Signs suggesting mental states wherein the connection between the sign and mental content is mysterious.

Discovering connections of the first type is the province of scientific research. We empirically discover that solvents dissolve certain substances and not others, for example. The second set of connections includes those fixed by our seemingly innate tendencies to make certain gestures and expressions—to use what Reid calls our

“natural language.” When a child exhibits a certain facial pattern, e.g. a grimace, other human beings can identify the mental state of the child without making any inference.

The third class of signs refers to the origins of our mental contents, and is the one of interest in the current discussion. Reid says that these natural signs refer to “those which, though we never before had any notion or conception of the thing signified, do suggest it, or conjure it up, as it were, by a natural kind of magic, and at once give us a conception and create a belief of it” (I 122a/60).<sup>10</sup> Reid says we obtain a concept of hardness in virtue of “an original principle of our nature, annexed to that sensation which we have when we feel a hard body” (I 122b/60). The sensation cues or calls to mind our concept of hardness. But Reid does not believe the experience of sensations is *sufficient* to account for the origin of our concept of hardness, let alone all our other concepts, because the intentional content of a thought about hardness cannot be generated by purely non-contentful, phenomenal sensation of hardness.

This point is focal to Reid’s “experimentum crucis,” in which he claims that the Ideal Theory cannot show that concepts like hardness are ideas of sensation. Sensations themselves are insufficient to enable the formation of concepts of qualities, and of other concepts. He remarks that “...the power or faculty by which we acquire those conceptions, must be something different from any power of the

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<sup>10</sup> This may sound familiar, if only as a foil for contemporary theories. Hilary Putnam, e.g., has vilified contemporary theories like Reid’s by calling them “magical theories of reference” (Putnam 1981, 3).

human mind that hath been explained, since it is neither sensation nor reflection” (I 128a/70). (This position presages BonJour’s response to the incapacity of contemporary representational theories of the mind to explain content. BonJour believes their failure is so abject that he has readied himself for a solution that “will have to involve metaphysics of a pretty hard-core kind” (BonJour 1991, 346). He suggests that it would be “foolish in the extreme” to “shackle ourselves in advance with the constraints of the vague naturalism that has been so pervasively invoked in recent discussions in this area” (BonJour 1991, 347). The gap between experience and content must be bridged by “something different” indeed.)

This is where Reid leaves the matter as of the *Inquiry*, and on that basis we cannot attribute to Reid any *theory* of cognition. While this may seem disappointing to us, from Reid’s particular perspective in the history of philosophy his ‘quietism,’ as I will call it, is apropos. The commonsense methodological commitments which disappoint us also prevent him from positing hypotheses. He took this to be a noteworthy, if controversial, improvement upon the theories of cognition offered by his predecessors.

### 3. CONTENT IN THE *INTELLECTUAL POWERS*

Reid maintains his quietism in the *Intellectual Powers*, though here he does give some hints about how one might construct a theory of cognition. With respect to the

nature of conception he favorably appeals to “the schoolmen.” The schoolmen say conception “is an act of the mind, a kind of thought... . Conceiving, as well as projecting or resolving, are what the schoolmen called *immanent* acts of the mind, which produce nothing beyond themselves” (E 363a/300). By cognizing, we do not engage in any transaction between impressions and ideas, sensations and mental contents. The object of thought is immanent; its form causes us to conceive of it in the way we do.<sup>11</sup>

Passages pointing to the relevance of Aristotle and Medieval philosophers to Reid’s suggestions also occur in his commencement addresses. Following his critical arguments there Reid says that the Ideal Theory, “if it proves anything, proves too much, for it compels us either to recall the intelligible forms of the Peripatetics... or to surrender to the Skeptics and to believe that there is nothing in the nature of things except ideas of which we are not conscious” (Reid 1989, 61). This disjunction is in the consequent of a conditional whose antecedent (a statement of the Ideal

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<sup>11</sup> Brentano echoes the scholastics using the same terminology of “immanence” that Reid uses. Brentano says, famously,  
 Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the scholastics of the Middle Ages referred to as the intentional (and also mental) inexistence of the object, and what we, although with not quite unambiguous expressions, would call relation to a content, direction upon an object (which is not here to be understood as a reality) or immanent objectivity. (Brentano 1973, 88)  
 Reid would not universally generalize the claim that mental states are intentional as Brentano does, nor would Reid claim that the intentional objects are mere phenomena, but Reid does, with Brentano, take intentionality as primitive and irreducible. Roderick Chisholm’s position (in 1957, ch. 11) is closer to Reid’s, though Chisholm doesn’t explicitly draw on Reid there.



Theory) Reid denies, so it is unclear what we can take from it to assist us in identifying his own views. Reid clearly denies the second disjunct. In addition, he makes favorable remarks about the first.

[I]s it not necessary, I ask, for this intermediate object [an idea] to be joined also to the object perceived? Without doubt, this is necessary, for in no other way can the mind affect the object, or the object the mind... . This point appears to have been fully grasped by Aristotle who for this reason taught that ideas or forms were sent forth from the object. (Reid 1989, 61)

At the very least, Reid understands and sympathizes with the motivations that lead Aristotle to this position.

Of course, this falls far short of offering a theory of cognition. It seems Reid's musings on cognition vacillate between (i) suggesting in the *Intellectual Powers* that thinking of some object O may involve a mind's participation in O's formal cause, and (ii) suggesting in the *Inquiry* that a thought of O intrinsically represents and signifies O-things in the world, and that is all we can say on the topic. These two suggestions do not seem to be consistent insofar as (i) posits an apparatus of formal causes to explain (if that's the right word for it) intentional contents, whereas (ii) seems to deny that such an artifice, with its robust ontology, is of any genuine explanatory assistance.

If we were interested in determining what is Reid's positive view, we might adjudicate between these two interpretations by using Ockham and Aquinas, since

Aquinas appeals to formal causation and Ockham to intrinsically representational mental signs. (See Appendix A for a comparison of their views as they relate to Reid's.) But as an interpretation of Reid, looking at these historical figures is largely fruitless. We've observed that Reid is up front about the fact that concepts and mental content are products of "a natural kind of magic" (I 122a/60). With this stab in the dark comes a warning: Ideal Theorists

assert that apprehension takes place by the use of ideas or species existent in the mind that represent things to us [but] we have dared to dispense freely with this belief about the existence of ideas or images in the mind. ...

Although the manner in which cognition of things enters the mind escapes us, we must not for that reason fashion hypotheses. It is a fine thing and one worthy of a philosopher, to confess that he does not know what he does not know rather than to contaminate philosophy with fictitious hypotheses. (Reid 1989, 73)

My conclusion is thus that Reid offers no theory of intentional mental content, where that is taken to refer to a set of philosophical principles that he thinks are (i) more intrinsically plausible than the phenomena they are used to explain, and (ii) explain the phenomena in question by appeal to more basic mechanisms. Intentional content constitutes a real and irreducible fact about the mind.

#### 4. WHY REID IS NOT A REPRESENTATIONALIST

There are two objections I must discuss and refute, since either, if true, would imply that the interpretation of Reid's philosophy of mind offered thus far is erroneous. The first alleges outright that Reid advocates a representational theory of perception and cognition, while the second claims that mental contents are, for Reid, innate.

We've seen above that Reid objects to Hume's theory of cognition for, among other reasons, its implication that one's thought of X is of X due to the roles played by phenomenal mental states. It is difficult to determine whether Hume himself conceives of impressions as genuinely representing states of affairs in the external world. Other proponents of the Ideal Theory, e.g. Locke, were sufficiently concerned with perceptual knowledge to hold that between our thoughts of external objects and objects themselves there are representational intermediaries. For Locke these are ideas. The interpretation of Reid that I have offered pits him against Locke's theory of cognition as well as against Hume's. Since at least some thoughts are intrinsically contentful, for Reid, positing another class of mental entities to serve an intermediating role between thoughts and the external world is otiose.

There are those who argue that an interpretation of Reid like the one I present is erroneous because Reid himself endorses a representational theory of thought much like Locke's. Margaret Atherton (1984) bristles at Reid's criticisms of Locke on this score and argues that Reid falls prey to the very objections he brings against the

Ideal Theory.<sup>12</sup> Reid succumbs to these objections—and also, presumably, to the arguments we’ve already explained—because Reid too was in the throes of a representational theory of cognition (and of perception). Atherton concludes that “Reid and Locke have a common picture of what thinking is like. They both take thinking to be a matter of the conscious apprehension of or having ideas...” (Atherton 1984, 163). Atherton’s charge is that, for Reid, the immediate objects of cognition are representations.

Consider the way she states what she calls “direct realism,” which she attributes to Reid. “Direct realism is a claim that in perception we are equipped, in a straightforward manner, for learning about the material world, that the content of perceptual ideas can be taken as directly reflective or informative of the contents of states of the world” (Atherton 1984, 153). This is an awkward formulation of a direct realist thesis since it invokes “perceptual ideas.” Reid, and, following him, most others writing about this issue, take “perceptual ideas” to be paradigmatic intermediating states. Atherton herself takes ideas in just this way, as we will see in a

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<sup>12</sup> Others—specifically John Immerwahr (1978), Vere Chappell (1989), and Nicholas Wolterstorff (2000, 2001)—have voiced similar arguments, though their arguments are directed at Reid’s account of perception, whereas Atherton’s arguments are directed against both Reid’s theory of perception and theory of cognition. I will save discussion of their charge that sensations are perceptual intermediaries for chapter 8, and focus here upon Atherton’s argument. For the record, I hold that Reid endorses direct accounts of both cognition and perception, as will become clear.

moment, which leaves unclear why she calls this view “direct realism.” For, though ideas may be states whose immediate intentional objects are mind-independent bodies and qualities, they themselves are objects of a second class of intentional contents. In other words, on this version of direct realism, my mental contents are about ideas, which are in turn about objects in the world. Atherton thus gives ideas an intermediating role between our minds and physical objects.

According to Reid’s overly simplified historical analysis, the British empiricists in effect deny that there is any difference between a theory of cognition and a theory of perception because all mental content is derivative from sensory impressions. On this point lies Atherton’s biggest grievance with Reid. Instead of explicitly raising the question of the origin of mental content in Reid’s corpus and marshalling textual evidence for (C) in Reid, she assumes that Reid *assents* to (C), which compromises her interpretation.

She arrives at this version of direct realism and attributes it to Reid on the basis of a passage in Reid’s *Inquiry* in which he does indeed refer to the role of ideas in thought. Reid says,

When a coloured body is presented, there is a certain apparition to the eye, or to the mind, which we have called the appearance of colour. Mr. Locke calls it an idea; and indeed it may be called so with the greatest propriety. This idea can have no existence but when it is perceived. It is a kind of thought, and can only be the act of a percipient or thinking being... . The ideas of sight, by

these means, come to be associated with, and readily to suggest, things external and altogether unlike them. (I 137b/86)

She draws a lesson from this passage: “Reid, then, agrees with Locke that what we are aware of when we look at a flower, Reid’s appearance of color, is perceiver-dependent” (Atherton 1984, 159). This allegedly gets Reid into serious problems.

Reid’s epistemological intuitions lead him to identify what we think about with the objects of the world, but since he does not reject Locke’s psychological assumptions, he finds himself identifying the content of our thoughts with an object whose nature seems hidden behind a veil of sensation. It is because Reid accepted this confluence of epistemological and psychological views that he is guilty of the representationalist error. (Atherton 1984, 164)

In contrast, Locke “wants to conclude that our ideas are not reflections of the underlying structure of the world...” (Atherton 1984, 164).<sup>13</sup>

This interpretation is uncharitable, however. In fact, one way to understand the error in Atherton’s interpretation is that she has made some of the same unstated assumptions as the Ideal Theorist. First, I make two small criticisms. This passage, in which Reid does use the term “idea,” must be balanced with the sorts of texts we have cited above, in which Reid expresses disdain for identifying thoughts with purely

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<sup>13</sup> Atherton’s reasoning is similar to that of Robert Stecker (1992), who argues that Reid is a representationalist in a peculiar sense. Reid differs with Locke in believing that ideas are conceptual acts and not static objects of thought. Nonetheless, for Stecker, these acts of thought represent states of affairs in the world in virtue of their causes.

formal-syntactic features. It must also be balanced with texts in which he explicitly argues against representational theories of *perception*. Second, Atherton's interpretation assumes that Reid's suggestion relation is representational in nature. It is not. Admittedly Reid does not package it well since, at least in the passage upon which Atherton alights, he uses the term "associated with," which might lead one to hold that the suggestion relation is as metaphysically fragile as Hume's relations of association. However, we have observed that the specific suggestion relation or "sign" (the third in our above enumeration of them) that accounts for the way we think about physical objects is on solid metaphysical ground. To repeat, Reid calls this relation "a natural kind of magic" (I 122a/60). Far from Reid's resources being insufficient for fixing intentional relations, one is inclined to think that the metaphysical basis of such relations in Reid is so robust as to be dubious.

Third, Atherton alleges that "what we are aware of," for Reid, is "perceiver-dependent." She follows this up by saying, "For Reid, as for Locke, mental work has to begin with things as they seem to us, sensations, which, following Berkeley, Reid also calls signs. So there is a sense in which Reid, like Locke, is a representationalist" (Atherton 1984, 159). There is better reason to think of Reid's theory of *visual* perception as representational than there is to think of his analyses of the *other* senses as admitting such interpretations. But this concession on my part is prompted by

Reid's views about visible figure and not by the considerations about sensations that Atherton brings to light.

We must distinguish between Atherton's phrase "what we are aware of" from what I would put in its place: "one thing we are aware of." We are aware of both the sensation of color *and* the visible figure of a flower. The sensation of color is perceiver-dependent but it is not a representational, intentional state; Reidian sensations are never about anything. The visible figure of the flower is a perceived property of the mind-independent flower. Visible figures are perceiver-dependent but only in a very weak sense. What below I call the 'seen figure' of a flower is dependent on one's eyes being located at a specific set of coordinates, and so, any visible figure of an object will be relative to a set of coordinates from which it is viewed. But *anyone* viewing the flower from those coordinates will see the same visible figure, which is why this sense of "perceiver dependence" is innocuous. Seen figure is not perceiver-dependent in the much stronger sense that colors are perceiver dependent. Atherton's failure to make this Reidian distinction foils her objection that the objects of perception are as fleeting and unreliable as Lockean ideas. Furthermore, the connection between perceiver-dependence and representationalism is dubious. Reidian visible figures are perceiver-dependent in some sense but nonetheless are not merely representations of mind-independent objects. This is because they are relational properties holding between a mind-independent object and one's eye. (The



full argument for the conclusion that Reidian visual perception is direct in this way occurs in chapter 5.)

Atherton's case for the representational structure of Reid's theory of *visual perception*—the topic which the texts she adduces are about—is therefore overstated. This result is especially unfortunate for her case because she assumes that Reid's theory of visual perception is paradigmatic not only of Reid's theory of perception as a whole (which it is not), but also of Reid's theory of *cognition*. Atherton marshals little evidence to show that Reid affirms a representational theory of cognition, despite the fact that she concludes, as I've noted, that "Reid and Locke have a common picture of what thinking is like. They both take thinking to be a matter of the conscious apprehension of or having ideas..." (Atherton 1984, 163). Even if Reid's diatribes against ideas weren't enough to convince Atherton that Reid does not posit ideas in his philosophy of mind, our earlier presentation of his arguments against Humean theories of cognition should be.

Arising out of this discussion is an important point for understanding Reid's dialectical position with respect to the Ideal Theorists. Atherton *assimilates the perceptual with the conceptual* in a way paradigmatic of the Ideal Theory itself. She comments that "Reid's objections to Locke's representationalism, therefore, hinge on his claim that Locke has confused operations of mind with objects of mind" (Atherton 1984, 151). But I submit that this is a misdiagnosis. Perceptual representationalism, a distinct thesis, states that mind-independent objects of perception are mediated by the prior

perception of internal states like ideas and images. Reid has separate arguments against representationalism in perception, several of which are epistemic in nature (about which see chapter 7). Reid clearly thought that Locke often treated ideas as mental objects. But his arguments against perceptual representationalism neither uniformly assume (nor need they assume) an act/object confusion in Locke, nor has Atherton attempted to show that Reid makes such a sweeping assumption.

Atherton arrives at her conclusion by arguing, first, that Reid's theory of visual perception is representational in nature; second, that Reid's theory of visual perception corresponds in structure to his theory of perception as a whole; and third, that, like his predecessors, Reid's theory of perception corresponds in structure to his theory of cognition. I've given brief arguments to show that each of these transitions do not accurately represent Reid. In addition, Atherton fails to take into account the pair of powerfully anti-representational arguments we have developed above. Her case allegedly showing that Reid endorses central tenets of the Lockean version of the Ideal Theory is, so far as I can see, without merit.

## 5. WHY REID DOES NOT POSIT INNATE IDEAS

A second volley against Reid's analysis of cognition is made by David Hume, and John Wright (1987) after him. They argue (i) that Reid's analysis of cognition marks a return to innate ideas. Rather than take it upon themselves to show that this

is detrimental, they assume (ii) that the success of pinning this objection on Reid will suffice to show that Reid actually endorses an erroneous theory of cognition.

I can address (ii) briefly. Wright suggests that being forced to accept innate ideas would make Reid's objections against Hume inconsistent with Reid's own philosophical system (Wright 1987, 392-3). The allegation is that Reid can't reject the theory of ideas and affirm a theory of *innate* ideas. However, it isn't obvious that, were Reid to endorse a theory of innate ideas, he is thereby inconsistent. This is because Reid's series of objections to ideas are objections to ideas *qua perceptual or cognitive intermediaries*, whereas innate ideas are not posited to serve that function. Innate ideas are thought to constitute a storehouse of mental contents to explain features of our mental lives, like language acquisition, that cannot be adequately explained on other grounds. One may affirm a theory of innate ideas and repudiate a representational theory of perception on which ideas are perceived intermediaries. To make this objection stick one must also show that the sort of theory of innate ideas Reid accepts is inconsistent with Reid's rejection of perceptual ideas. This probably cannot be done and, in any case, these authors haven't attempted to do this.

Nonetheless Hume and Wright are quite correct to question the role of innateness in Reid's philosophy of mind. The problem of innate ideas for Reid is troubling and it serves to further obfuscate an account of cognition that is murky to begin with. For this reason it is well worth figuring out whether or not Hume and Wright are correct in thinking that Reid posits innate ideas. I will argue that Reid's

system does not imply, implicitly or explicitly, that there are innate ideas in the sense of that term used by Hume.

Through a mutual friend Reid sent a copy of part of his *Inquiry* to Hume. As a result of this reading, Hume comes to the conclusion that Reid must be advocating a theory of innate ideas. Hume says,

If I comprehend the Author's Doctrine, which, I own, I can hitherto do but imperfectly, it leads us back to innate Ideas. This I do not advance as an Objection: For nothing ought ever to be supposed finally decided in Philosophy, so as not to admit of a new Scrutiny; but only that, I think, the Author affirms I had been hasty, & not supported any Colour of Argument when I affirm, that all our Ideas are copyd from Impressions. I have endeavored to build that Principle on two Arguments. The first is desiring anyone to make a particular Detail of all his Ideas, where he would always find that every Idea had a correspondent & preceding Impression. If no Exception can ever be found, the Principle must remain incontestable. The second is, that if you exclude any particular Impression, as Colours to the blind, Sound to the Deaf, you also exclude the Ideas. (Wood 1986, 416)

In this brief letter Hume isn't able to adduce much evidence in support of this interpretation of Reid, but Wright seeks to vindicate Hume's exegesis by picking up where Hume leaves off.

Wright's evidence in support of Hume's interpretation of Reid is drawn from Reid's discussion of how we acquire our notions of the primary qualities. In Reid's *experimentum crucis* he insists that sensations, i.e. phenomenal mental states, are an insufficient basis from which to explain how the contents of our notions of extension, shape, and external bodies arise (I 112a-114b/40-43). This is to say that appeal to sensations and causal relations amongst sets of sensations will not account for contents. Wright, however, makes a different claim about the explanatory relation between sensations and contents. He says,

Reid spoke of a 'connection which nature has established betwixt our sensations and the conception and belief of external objects'... . It is central to Reid's theory, as developed in the *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, that we have a non-sensory awareness of external objects. (Wright 1987, 393)

We will examine the vexing notion of "non-sensory awareness" below and its purported relevance to innateness—for it is not clear just what the relationship between 'non-sensory awareness' and innate ideas is. But first let's look at some Reidian texts. Wright could cite any number of passages from the *Inquiry* that point to some such "connection," including:

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. At the same time, it is a fact that such sensations

are invariably connected with the conception and belief of external existences. Hence, by all rules of just reasoning, we must conclude, that this connection is the effect of our constitution, and ought to be considered as an original principle of human nature, till we find some more general principle into which it may be resolved. (I 122b/61)

Reid adds that we cannot use sensations alone to “collect the existence of bodies at all” (I 122b/61). What Wright cites is the following, from the same general vicinity of the *Inquiry*: “that we have clear and distinct conceptions of extension, figure, motion, and other attributes of body, which are neither sensations, nor like any sensation, is a fact of which we may be as certain as that we have sensations” (I 132b/76). Wright says, immediately after this quotation, “Such passages clearly suggest a doctrine of innate ideas, one which, as Hume clearly recognized in his letter to Blair, is directly opposed to his own view that every idea is derived from a corresponding impression” (Wright 1987, 394).

Reid thinks that our thoughts about external objects arise in a “non-sensory” manner, according to Wright. Let’s make a distinction between two things this could mean. This could mean (a) that sensations have no causal role in bringing about our thoughts of external objects, or (b) that sensations are insufficient to explain our thoughts of objects. It is unclear which Wright means.

What is certain, however, is that Wright is attempting to infer from his claim about Reid invoking a “non-sensory awareness” to the claim that Reid endorses or is

compelled to endorse a theory of innate ideas. By my lights, only (a) makes a commitment to innate ideas likely. In contrast, the logical relation between (b) and a theory of innate ideas is (if there is any such relation) not obvious. At the least, were Wright interested in inferring that Reid is committed to innate ideas from the claim that sensations are explanatorily insufficient to account for concepts, the burden is upon him to justify this inference. I will briefly show why (a) does not describe Reid's position. Then, via Wright's comments, I will attempt to explain the type of innateness to which Reid subscribes.

Wright's criticism holds only if Reid assents to (a). But he doesn't, or so I'll argue now. Reid allows that mental contents are in part *caused by* sensory experiences. This is consistent with denying that contents can be *explained by* exclusive appeal to sensations (or other states that are themselves not contentful). Reid says,

Hardness of bodies is a thing that we conceive as distinctly, and believe as firmly, as anything in nature. We have no *way of coming at* this conception and belief, but *by means of* a certain sensation of touch, to which hardness hath not the least similitude; nor can we, by any rules of reasoning, infer the one from the other. (I 121a/57-58, my emphasis)

Reid gives voice to a physically necessary, counterfactual relation between sensations and contents when remarking that, "If we had never had such a feeling, we should never have had any notion of hardness" (I 122b/61). Reid's language points to the fact that sensations are vehicles for our awareness of concepts. Consider the terms he

uses to capture this relation, which include: ‘way of coming at’, ‘by means of’, ‘originate’, ‘no way...but by means of’, ‘invariably connected’, ‘constant conjunction’, ‘disposition’, ‘produce’, and, most commonly, ‘suggest’. (Reid reserves the term ‘cause’ to refer only to agent causes, which explains its absence in this list.) Sensations bear rich causal or quasi-causal relationships to concepts and propositions, according to Reid. If by “non-sensory awareness” Wright means that sensations play no causal role in the production of our mental contents, as in (a), then the balance of Reid’s texts confutes him.

If Wright adopts (b), he may accurately represent Reid. Reid says,  
Upon the whole, it appears, that our philosophers have imposed upon themselves, and upon us, in pretending to deduce from sensation the first origin of our notions of external existences, of space, motion, and extension, and all the primary qualities of body, that is, the qualities whereof we have the most clear and distinct conception. (I 126b/67)

This and other passages adduced earlier support attributing (b) to Reid. In fact, (b) seems equivalent (or nearly so) to nothing other than a *denial* of Hume’s thesis that mental content reduces to non-contentful sensory impressions. We know already that Reid did indeed deny this Humean thesis. So Wright seems to be claiming that the denial of a reductive account of content and endorsing (b) commits one to a theory of innate ideas.



This inference is not obviously warranted, not least because Wright has not provided us with an analysis of innate ideas. There are broadly two models of innate ideas often discussed in these contexts. The more philosophically offensive of the two is the storehouse model on which discrete, individuatable contents exist in the mind prior to bodily experience. The other model describes innate “ideas” as actually being dispositions that we possess as a result of our neural structure, or because God put them there. Such dispositions serve as cognitive input/output devices, which are activated—but not created—by bodily experience.

Reid seems to endorse a dispositional model of innate capacities for he speaks of a disposition that is not the product of experience. He says,

Nature hath established a constant conjunction between [natural signs] and the things called their effects; and hath given to mankind a disposition to observe those connections, to confide in their continuance, and to make use of them for the improvement of our knowledge, and increase of our power. (I 122a/59)

This sense of “innate” indicated by Reid’s use of “disposition” is similar to the type of innateness that Descartes predicated of diseases:

I did...observe that there were certain thoughts within me which neither came to me from external objects nor were determined by my will, but which came solely from the power of thinking within me; so I applied the term ‘innate’ to the ideas or notions which are the forms of these thoughts in order to

distinguish them from others, which I called ‘adventitious’ or ‘made up.’ This is the same sense as that in which we say that generosity is ‘innate’ in certain families, or that certain diseases such as gout or stones are innate in others: it is not so much that babies of such families suffer from these diseases in their mother’s womb, but simply that they are born with a certain ‘faculty’ or tendency to contract them. (Descartes 1985, 303-4)

Descartes follows this up by saying, “if we bear well in mind the scope of our senses and what it is exactly that reaches our faculty of thinking by way of them, we must admit that in no case are the ideas of things presented to us by the senses just as we form them in our thinking” (304). At least, this form of innateness in Descartes (however much philosophers have erred in interpreting him on this point) is best given a counterfactual analysis, as is Reid’s: were I to experience certain sensations *S*, my mind would respond by entertaining contents *C*, *ceteris paribus*.

This dispositional model of innate ideas contrasts sharply with the storehouse model on which we have a panoply of discrete, inborn mental contents with us since birth, of which we eventually become aware. Though it is difficult to find an historical philosopher who adopts this view, that did not prevent the storehouse model from serving as Locke’s key dialectical foil. Locke begins the *Essay* saying: “It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain innate principles; some primary notions, *koinai ennoiai*, characters, as it were

stamped upon the mind of man; which the soul receives in its very first being, and brings into the world with it” (Locke 1975, 48).

Reid does not endorse the storehouse model, and it is no surprise that Wright brings no evidence for such an attribution to Reid. By attacking a straw man, Locke seems to mischaracterize the issue with a false dilemma. According to Reid, Locke argues from the falsity of the storehouse model to the truth of his mechanistic analysis of mental content. Reid says Locke makes a “mistake, which is carried through the whole of Mr Locke’s *Essay*... . It is, that our simplest ideas or conceptions are got immediately by the senses, or by consciousness, and the complex afterwards formed by compounding them. I apprehend it is far otherwise (E 376a/327).<sup>14</sup> Hume and Locke claim that contents and “conceptions” arise

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<sup>14</sup> Reid states his opposition to (what he took to be) Locke’s reduction of the mind more fully in some other passages. Consider these:

Locke opposed the doctrine of innate ideas with much zeal, and employs the whole first book of his *Essay* against it. But he admits two different sources of ideas, the operations of our external senses, which he calls sensation, by which we get all our ideas of body, and its attributes; and reflection upon the operations of our minds, by which we get the ideas of everything belonging to the mind. The main design of the second book of Locke’s “*Essay*,” is to shew, that all our simple ideas, without exception, are derived from the one or the other, or both of these sources. In doing this, the author is led into some paradoxes, although, in general, he is not fond of paradoxes: And had he foreseen all the consequences that may be drawn from his account of the origin of our ideas, he would probably have examined it more carefully. (E 294a-b/164)

I might mention several paradoxes, which Mr Locke, though by no means fond of paradoxes, was led into by this theory of ideas. Such as, that the secondary qualities of body are no qualities of body at all, but sensations of the mind: That the primary qualities of body are resemblances of our

unproblematically from the “compounding” of sensations.<sup>15</sup> The innate ideas theorist who serves as the object of their attack claims, to the contrary, that the mind is unproblematically furnished with a storehouse of ideas from the outset. Reid,

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sensations: That we have no notion of duration, but from the succession of ideas in our minds: That personal identity consists in consciousness; so that the same individual thinking being may make two or three different persons, and several different thinking beings make one person: That judgment is nothing but a perception or the agreement or disagreement of our ideas. (E 306b/186)

<sup>15</sup> Hume is aware that the question needs to be raised, “For what is meant by *innate*?” Hume himself seems to endorse a dispositional thesis of a sort. He does so, though, mainly because he does not think it is philosophically significant. He continues,

If innate be equivalent to natural, then all the perceptions and ideas of the mind must be allowed to be innate or natural, in whatever sense we take the latter word, whether in opposition to what is uncommon, artificial, or miraculous. If by innate be meant, contemporary to our birth, the dispute seems to be frivolous; nor is it worth while to enquire at what time thinking begins, whether before, at, or after our birth. (Hume 1998, 22)

Here Hume recognizes the overwhelming implausibility or the sheer triviality of the “innateness” aspect of the storehouse model Locke states and attacks. He continues by indicting Locke for a lack of clarity about the other half of the term, i.e. “idea”:

Again, the word idea, seems to be commonly taken in a very loose sense, by Locke and others; as standing for any of our perceptions, our sensations and passions, as well as thoughts. Now in this sense, I should desire to know, what can be meant by asserting, that self-love, or resentment of injuries, or the passion between the sexes is not innate?

There may be a construal of the term “innate” that is philosophically useful in explaining certain features of the mind, but Hume doesn’t think finding it is worth the trouble. He says, “But admitting these terms, *impressions* and *ideas*, in the sense above explained, and understanding by *innate*, what is original or copied from no precedent perception, then may we assert that all our impressions are innate, and our ideas not innate.”

I bring up Hume here in order to show that he was aware—even if his defenders are not—just how slippery allegations about innate ideas can be. Not surprisingly, Hume would not be comfortable positing the sorts of dispositions of the

however, thinks that both ‘explanations’ of content are inadequate and misguided. Instead, Reid does not offer any theory of content at all, remaining a quietist about the matter.

In this section I have responded to the charge made by Hume and Wright that Reid must accept a strong thesis of innate ideas. I’ve shown that he need not and does not do this by (i) showing the lack of merit in Wright’s case and by (ii) explaining several texts in which Reid describes the relation between sensations and conceptions without positing innate ideas as they are construed on the storehouse model.

## 6. CONCLUSION

We have examined Reid’s description of cognition by first contrasting it with Hume’s analysis. Reid denies that brute phenomenological states can be related in such a way as to produce conceptual states. He gives some a priori considerations on behalf of that intuition, but he also provides an argument that such cannot be the case. In the course of our exposition of this argument, we found some interesting contemporary parallels with work of Bonjour and Searle. However, Reid offers nothing to put in its place other than the claim that mental content is somehow primitive and produced by an original principle. I thus described him as a ‘quietist’ about mental content: he does not know how we get it. This position is importantly

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mind to form contents that Reid was. Indeed, according to Reid, Hume isn’t

different than a skeptical one according to which we do not even know that we have mental contents. Lastly, we stated and criticized two alternative approaches to Reid's theory of cognition, one on which he advocates a representationalist theory and another on which he posits innate ideas. I argued that both criticisms miss their mark.

While it is frustrating to come to Reid's analysis of the mind with high hopes only to learn that he has no 'theory' of mental content, we have seen Reid anticipate contemporary work skeptical of the linguistic theory of the thought. We can also take from Reid an acute, Wittgensteinian awareness of the limits of philosophy.

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comfortable positing a mind at all.

CHAPTER 4:  
REID ON FICTIONAL OBJECTS AND THE IDEAL THEORY

1. INTRODUCTION

Our criticisms of historical philosophers, when not of a constructive nature, typically fall into one of two classes. First, one might say of an historical theory that it is incoherent, which I take to indicate not mere inconsistency, but rather unmitigated inconsistency at the conceptual heart of a theory. On occasion this type of criticism is said to apply not merely to a theory but to an historical philosopher's entire system, an accusation Catherine Wilson (1999) brings against Leibniz, for example. Second, one might say that an historical theory is false, even though coherent. While we may have good reason to think that some of Reid's theories are false, one rarely sees criticisms alleging that they are, or that his philosophical system taken as a whole is, incoherent. In part this is because Reid thinks systematically and keeps himself apprised of the logical relations one position bears to others that he adopts. But if S.A. Grave is correct, then a large portion of Reid's work will be incoherent. Grave rhetorically asks,

What does Reid mean when he says that a centaur is the direct object of the conception of a centaur and that there are no centaurs, that the

circle does not exist and is the direct object of the conception of it?

One would like to be quite sure that Reid himself knew even vaguely.

He goes on to speak of our conception of objects that do not exist as if he had said something perfectly straightforward, as though there was no appearance of self-contradiction in it which needed to be explained away. (Grave 1960, 36)

Grave thinks either that Reid fails to understand his own account of cognition, or, less provocatively, that Reid's account of cognition as applied to fictional objects is incoherent.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that Reid's analysis of the mind's ability to conceive of fictional objects coheres with his other philosophical commitments, specifically with the account of cognition I have attributed to him in the previous chapters. This necessitates (a) showing that, to be anachronistic, Reid is a Meinongian. Reid believes that we can conceive of and predicate of non-existent objects—objects that are not names, general concepts, properties or mental *ficta*. Part of the interest in this thesis lies in the reaction that I expect many will have to it: 'Reid, standard-bearer of the commonsense tradition, champion of empirical methods in philosophy, a Meinongian? Surely not'. This is why I will (b) show that endorsing Meinongianism accords with Reid's philosophical goals once we fully appreciate the nature of his rejection of the Ideal Theory. In addition to illuminating what Reid himself regarded as a keystone of his response to the Ideal Theory and



showing that he is not the prosaic commonsense philosopher we often think he is, a further motivation of this project arises from a desire to defend Reid against Grave's allegation.

## 2. DEFLATIONISM, INFLATIONISM AND MEINONGIANISM

Richard Cartwright (1960) has presented a clever argument that we can use to elucidate negative existential claims. Where 'S' refers to a person's belief *that unicorns do not exist*, the following paradoxical argument results:

- (1) S is about unicorns.
- (2) Unicorns must exist in some sense in order for S to be about them.
- (3) If unicorns exist in any sense, S is false.
- (4) Therefore, S is false.

Cartwright identifies possible responses to the argument on the basis of which premise we deny. There are inflationist, deflationist and Meinongian responses to this argument. Each position must choose between conflicting intuitions. On the one hand, we seem to have the ability to predicate of fictional creatures ('Pegasus is white') and individuate them (Pegasus from his offspring). On the other hand, unicorns and winged horses do not exist, and to predicate of them seems to require maintaining that they have some type of intentional or mental existence.

*Inflationists* claim that to predicate anything at all—even negative existential claims—of unicorns, unicorns must have some measure of existence, thus affirming (2). They also claim that S is about unicorns. They thus deny (3) and argue that unicorns subsist or have some other mode of existence. What is lost by the inflationist in increasing his ontological commitments is gained by being able to explain our linguistic ability to individuate and predicate of unicorns. But spelling out what these different modes of existence are has always been an intractable problem.

*Deflationists* instead argue that there is, properly speaking, no type of existence we can attribute to unicorns. They might argue that the inflationist equivocates on ‘exist’ by believing that unicorns do not exist, and by denying (3). Deflationists hold that S is not about unicorns, but about something else entirely. Most commonly S is thought to be about a mental representation, e.g. one’s idea of a unicorn.

Alternatively one might say that S is about a property of the speaker affirming S. In either case the deflationist seeks to keep his ontology parsimonious at the expense of premise (1) and at the expense of the kind of privileged access to our mental states that Reid associates with a commonsensical semantics for S. For Reid would argue that the deflationist position implies that people who think that they are talking about unicorns when uttering propositions about unicorns do not know what they are talking about. Deflationism necessitates an explanatory artifice to account for the common tendency to predicate in these ways of fictional objects.

While Cartwright does not identify the third option with Meinong, James Van Cleve (1996) does. On the third option, *Meinongianism*, one denies (2). (I concur with Van Cleve that contrary to popular belief this—not inflationism—is Meinong’s mature position.) This is perhaps the most surprising of the three options due to the prevalence of the intuition that, to predicate of any object, it must exist under some description—whether physically, mentally or in a third realm. This is why Meinong seems scarcely coherent when writing that “There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects.” (1960, 83) The Meinongian does not need equivocal senses of ‘exist’ like the inflationist does, and so can affirm (3). But unlike the deflationist, the Meinongian does not forsake privileged access to our mental states by denying (1).

Inflationism allegedly sacrifices ontology for epistemology, while deflationism allegedly sacrifices epistemology for ontology. It is not clear just how the advocate of the third position understands the stakes of the debate. As a result, one might well deem the Meinongian position implausible. I will defend the plausibility neither of Meinongianism nor of the controversial assumption that denying (1) impugns a notable variety of privileged access. Instead I will argue that this Meinongian position is actually Reid’s position and I will explain why Reid adopts it. With this taxonomy, we can look at how Reid describes our apprehension of fictional objects.

### 3. WHY REID IS A MEINONGIAN

When we “barely conceive,” says Reid, “the ingredients of that conception must either be things with which we were before acquainted by some other original power of the mind, or they must be parts of attributes of such things” (E 367a/308). Reid is aware that this doctrine is not new. He explains his accord with Locke on the matter then argues that Hume’s missing shade of blue is a red herring (E 367a-b/309). The key difference between Reid and Locke is that, for Locke, sensations (and for Hume, impressions) provide us with all our ingredients for conceptions. Reid holds that we can be acquainted with objects directly, not through sensations, in virtue of the ability of objects to cause concepts in us formally. Strictly speaking, sensations, though physically necessary, are not sufficient for the production of our concepts of bodies. That Reid endorses a direct, non-representational theory of cognition serves as an assumption for the present study. I’ll say something more about this at the conclusion of this paper.

Let’s first consider Reid’s affirmation of (1) and (3). Reid’s affirmation of (3), *that if unicorns exist in any sense, S is false*, is not nearly as explicit as his affirmation of (1), but it does not have to be. There are difficulties in showing that Reid affirms (3). First, there are difficulties of interpretation. Second, it does not seem as though Reid has a conceptual repertoire imbued with various concepts of existence, which is needed to articulate (3). The only distinction with which he seems familiar in this context is the crude formal/objective distinction as presented by Descartes; Reid shows no awareness of Avicenna or Aquinas on this topic. Rather than take this as a

difficulty in showing that Reid affirms (3), it is actually a telling difficulty in showing he denies (3). For I doubt Reid ever seriously considered reasons for which one would deny (3). His plain-spoken philosophical vocabulary, which lays atop his commonsensical methodology, militates against any attempt to find distinctions between his uses of 'existence'. But doing just that would be required to show that Reid denies (3). The only option within Reid's purview is to claim that our thoughts of unicorns are thoughts of other thoughts, i.e. of unicorns objectively in thought. It will become apparent presently, in our consideration of Reid's affirmation of (1), that Reid rejects this option.

Reid's affirmation of (1)—*that S is about unicorns*—is more detailed because (1) is of considerably more philosophical importance than (3). Reid affirms that our thoughts of fictional objects are of non-existent objects and not of something else. He says, "I conceive a centaur. This conception is an operation of the mind, of which I am conscious, and to which I can attend. The sole object of it is a centaur, an animal which, I believe, never existed. I see no contradiction in this" (E 373a/321). The object of the act of conception is a non-existent fiction, an imaginary creature with the head and torso of a human and the body of a horse.

He continues by saying, "The philosopher says, I cannot conceive a centaur without having an idea of it in my mind. ... Perhaps he will say, that the idea is an image of the animal, and is the immediate object of my conception, and that the animal is the mediate or remote object." To this Reid first responds by arguing that

upon inspection of the content of his thought, there appears to be only one object of conception, not two. Second, the single object of conception “is not the image of an animal—it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other without any danger or mistake” (E 373a-b/321). This marks a gratuitously simplistic semantics for fictional object terms, one that I hesitate to attribute to any advocate of the Ideal Theory. Leaving Reid’s abilities as an historian of philosophy to one side, this comment marks an unequivocal affirmation of premise (1), that an agent’s belief *that unicorns do not exist* is about unicorns, and a corresponding denial of the deflationist position.

Of course, Reid might affirm (1) and (3) without denying (2) if he had some other means to escape the conclusion of the argument but, as I will now show, Reid explicitly denies (2). Reid remarks squarely that “conception is often employed about objects that neither do, nor did, nor will exist” (E 368a/311; cf. E 292a/160). In fact, Reid sees the deflationary way out of the paradox as one of the Ideal Theory’s most far-reaching philosophical errors. Reid claims the Ideal Theory falsely assumes that “in all the operations of understanding, there must be an object of thought, which really exists while we think of it; or, as some philosophers have expressed it, that which is not cannot be intelligible” (E 368b/312). These assertions imply the falsity of (2), and its truth is inconsistent with deflationism. The deflationist claims that my thought of a unicorn is about something else that does exist. But Reid is quite clear

that such conceptions are not about anything that exists. So the deflationist move that switches the object of thought from something that does not exist, a unicorn, to something that does exist, an idea, is not open to Reid. In fact, Reid makes the further claim, of his belief that we can think of items that do not exist in any way at all, that he knows “no truth more evident to the common sense and to the experience of mankind” (E 368a-b/311).

Deflationism is committed to an ontology with mental representations, like ideas. Reid has given many reasons to think that ideas are not the direct objects of our other faculties. Perceptions do not take ideas as intentional objects, but rather take physical bodies and physical qualities as their intentional objects. He says the same about memory beliefs and about conceptions. To think that there is a mental entity lurking within an act of imagination, i.e. “to infer from this that there is really an image in the mind, ... is to be misled by an analogical expression; as if, from the phrases of deliberating and balancing things in the mind, we should infer that there is really a balance existing in the mind...” (E 373b/322). Reid’s rejection of this kind of deflationism is of a piece with his desire to ferret out the Ideal Theory’s philosophical corruptions.

We can directly conceive of creatures that have never existed just as we can directly conceive of structures that no longer exist, or events that have passed. Indeed, Reid claims that we can conceive of an object that will never exist, a circle:

What is the idea of a circle? I answer, it is the conception of a circle. What is the immediate object of this conception? The immediate and the only object of it is a circle. But where is this circle? It is nowhere. If it was an individual, and had real existence, it must have a place; but, being an universal, it has no existence, and therefore no place. (E 374a/323)

Reid gives no indication that he is attempting to be subtle here by employing finely-grained senses of ‘existence’.

As a result of Reid’s affirmation of (1) and (3) and his denial of (2), I infer that Reid adopts what I have described as the ‘Meinongian’ position. We can predicate of non-existent objects, which implies that existence is a property in roughly the same sense that this phrase is given in ontological arguments.<sup>16</sup> I want to proceed by examining possible interpretations that do not attribute this Meinongian position to Reid.

#### 4. TWO ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

There are two noteworthy interpretations that might be put forward as better representing Reid’s views on the non-existent than the one I favor. Naturally, a host

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<sup>16</sup> For the sake of completeness I have attempted to determine whether, in a philosophy of religion context, Reid commits himself to a view about existence sympathetic to the present interpretation. Unfortunately Reid does not discuss ontological arguments. He does say that necessary existence is “an attribute belonging to the deity” (Reid 1981, 63), but that is equivocal, as are his other statements in his discussion of God’s nature.



of contemporary ways of analyzing negative existential claims may be used to salvage Reid's theory, but I am restricting my attention to interpretive options open to Reid. Both of these options are deflationist. The first is inspired by Reid's adverbial construal of sensations, while the second draws from Reid's analysis of universals. Crucial to both attempts is showing that Reid links his analysis of fictional objects to his analysis of sensations or general concepts. I will argue that Reid does not do so.

First, Reid's theory of sensation may be used here to ground an interpretation on which our conception of non-existent objects is adverbial in nature. An adverbial theory of *sensation* is a theory according to which sensory states are best analyzed not as relations to sense-data (as on the Ideal Theory) or as representational states, but as purely qualitative states, i.e. as ways in which we are aware. Paradigmatically, the sensory experience of seeing a red chair is more accurately redescribed as seeing the chair by sensing redly. Avoiding problems associated with representational theories of sensation principally motivates the adoption of an adverbial analysis.

There is abundant textual evidence for such a construal of Reid's theory of sensations in both major works. Reid claims that a sensation "can have no existence but when it is perceived, and can only be in a sentient being or mind" (I 114a/43). Furthermore, sensation does not have an intentional object—though the perceptual event, of which the sensation is a part, is directed at an object. He says that "in sensation, there is no object distinct from that act of mind by which it is felt..." (E 310a/194) and, in his correspondence with Hume (published in the Brookes *Inquiry*),

he says, “I can attend to what I feel, and the sensation is nothing else, nor has any other qualities than what I feel it to have. Its *esse* is *sentiri*, and nothing can be in it that is not felt” (I 258).<sup>17</sup> Sensations do not exist independently of being apprehended or felt.

If we believe that Reid adopts an adverbial theory of sensation, then the way seems open to extend this interpretation to non-existent objects. According to this analysis, one’s apprehension of a unicorn would become, not a matter of taking a fictional object as the intentional object of a thought, but rather a manner of thinking. The primary advantage of an adverbial theory of the conception of non-existent objects lies in the way in which it moves such ‘objects’ into the mental realm. This move largely nullifies the perplexity of their ontological status. Reid no longer needs to deny (2). In order to escape the conclusion of our argument, the adverbial interpretation has Reid deny (1).

Despite the *prima facie* circumstantial case for such an interpretation, this is not Reid’s analysis. While Reid recognizes that the act of conceiving is a mental activity, for this interpretation to succeed it must be shown that conceiving of non-existent objects is not an intentional state that takes an object. However, first, there are no explicit textual sources for believing that Reid applies his doctrine of adverbial sensation to the objects of conception in general, nor any evidence that he applies

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<sup>17</sup> This is drawn from an undated abstract of the *Inquiry* prepared by Reid for Hume’s review. It is addressed to Reid’s intermediary, ‘The Revd Doctor Blair’.

this doctrine to non-existent objects of conception in particular. Since he is clear that pain is a state of the mind that does not take an object, we are warranted in expecting a similar measure of forthrightness about any application of an adverbial analysis to the conception of non-existent objects.

There are further reasons against endorsing this interpretation in addition to this textual point. The adverbial theory of conception must hold that conceptions, like sensations, will not have intentional objects. By taking this route, the adverbialist claims that S is not *about* anything, therefore S is not about unicorns. Two points show this is implausible.

First, consider Reid's distinction between sensations and conceptions. According to Reid's adverbial analysis of sensation, sensory states are nothing over and above their qualitative properties. But according to Reid, what distinguishes conceptions from sensations is that once we remove all the phenomenal properties associated with a conception, something remains, viz. the conceptual mental content. Reid's discussion of conception is not often lucid, but one point about which he is clear is that conceptual states take objects and are not merely phenomenal states, as we have already seen. Given his distinction between conception and sensation, this interpretation of fictional objects is implausible.

The second reason against the adverbialist's attempt to replace the propositional content in conceptions with phenomenological content is straightforwardly philosophical. The notion that conceptual states are purely

phenomenal is not obviously coherent, which is to say that Reid's distinction between sensory and conceptual states is a good one. We tend to give Chisholm and other advocates of adverbial theories of sensation some latitude in their creative descriptions of sensory states. Certain facets of a philosophical account of sensation will be elusive, which we may attribute to the ineffable qualities of phenomenological experience. But in the case of accounting for propositional contents, we are entitled to heighten our expectations. The adverbialist fails to meet these expectations because it is difficult to understand what it means to say that I conceive that-faith-is-the-lost-virtue-ly, or that-Iain-Banks'-science-fiction-novels-are-exquisitely-crafted-works-pregnant-with-frightening-alien-possibility-ly. Such states do not seem comprehensible. Thus, to deny that conceptions are about anything at all fails as a strategy to show that Reid does not endorse a Meinongian position.

The second alternative interpretation draws upon Reid's description of what he refers to as 'general conceptions'. This strategy would also require two steps. The first would be to show that Reid endorses a non-Meinongian account of general concepts (which Reid also calls 'universals'). This could be either a form of inflationism—that universals exist in a third realm, or a form of deflationism—that there is no sense in which they exist or can be predicated of real particulars. The second step would involve showing that Reid applies what he says about general concepts to fictional individuals. I will present some reasons for thinking that what Reid says about universals tends to sound very much like what we have already

observed him to say about fictional objects, and thus that this strategy cannot progress beyond the first step just described. Reid's considered view on universals, though, is unclear.

Reid explains that we form the bulk of our general conceptions in three steps: first we analyze an object's attributes and name them; then we observe one attribute's presence in many objects; and third, we combine "into one whole a certain number of those attributes of which we have formed abstract notions, and [give] a name to that combination" (E 394b/365). Reid repeatedly denies that these names designate anything that exists. He says that if a universal were to exist, "then it would be an individual; but it is a thing that is conceived without regard to existence" (E 398a/373). More forthrightly, Reid says "universals have no real existence" (E 407a/393). Or, if one would like to talk of them as 'existing', one must know that "Their existence is nothing but predicability, or the capacity of being attributed to a subject. The name of predicables, which was given them in ancient philosophy, is that which most properly expresses their nature" (E 407a-b/393). This is because we do not attribute to universals "an existence in time or place, but existence in some individual subject; and this existence means no more but that they are truly attributes of such a subject" (E 407a/393).

It seems that these passages allow us to conclude that Reid is not an inflationist (or a realist) about universals. While he is struggling to find a way to articulate his view in common language, we know that, in whatever curious form

universals do ‘exist’ for Reid, they do not exist independently of real particulars.

In fact, these passages seem to point indecisively toward a Meinongian interpretation of Reid on universals, for it seems as though Reid claims that they do not exist, even though we can talk about them. Keith Lehrer and Vann McGee see Reid as endorsing some type of view in this neighborhood, even though they are not primarily concerned with making a textual case for this attribution. They say, “Reid himself was unequivocal. *Universals do not exist*. We conceive of universals—that is, according to Reid, we know the meanings of general terms—but when we conceive of universals, as when we conceive of centaurs, we are conceiving of something that does not exist” (Lehrer 1992, 41; my italics). For Reid the claim that ‘universals do not exist’ seems to mean that universals do not exist on any of the following three options: as ideas or mental entities, as Platonic entities in a third realm, or as exemplifications in particular things. Thus, when Reid does discuss universals, he takes them to be something like Meinongian objects: items of which we can predicate, though they do not exist.

Nicholas Wolterstorff has also addressed this issue. However, he says just the opposite: “it’s clear that Reid, in spite of linguistic appearances, was not a nominalist: *there are universals*” (2001, 73; my italics).<sup>18</sup> He claims that because Reid thinks that

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<sup>18</sup> Wolterstorff claims explicitly that Reid was not a Meinongian. However, his account of Meinongianism resembles a form of what we have been calling ‘inflationism’. Wolterstorff says, “Reid was not a Meinongian; I see no evidence that he even so much as entertained the thought that the substances that exist might constitute a subset of those that have being” (2001, 74). That is true, for Reid clearly

there are universals that can be objects of conception, Reid must not be a nominalist. Thus, perhaps he could alight upon Reid saying that “universals have no real existence” and argue that, since Reid modifies ‘existence’ with ‘real’, there must be a sense of ‘existence’ appropriately predicated of universals. This, however, is not sufficient to think that Reid is not a nominalist. Reid might adopt a form of nominalism and contend that universals exist only in the sense that there are particulars that share attributes. Evidently, though, Wolterstorff believes Reid does not endorse such a form of nominalism since he says flatly that Reid “was not a nominalist.” Hence, given the persuasive evidence that Reid does not think universals exist in any Platonic sense, the most charitable way to understand Wolterstorff is by reading him as claiming that universals exist in a mental realm of ideas. But if so, the texts do not significantly support his interpretation.

The principal barrier in understanding Reid’s position—and the interpretations of his commentators on this topic—is that these uses of ‘exist’ and ‘are’ are equivocal. When two of Reid’s foremost commentators come to diametrically opposed interpretations, as we have just shown that they do, it is likely

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does not utilize concepts of *existence*, *being* and *subsistence* to explain fictional objects. But I have shown that Reid commits himself to another form of Meinongianism, no less worthy of the appellation. For the sake of clarity, I should observe that at different points in his career Meinong endorsed both the ‘subsistence’ theory Wolterstorff identifies as ‘Meinongianism’ and the ‘non-existence, non-subsistence’ theory I have identified with that term. Though this point may be important for determining priority issues with respect to the development of theories of fictional objects, settling the matter is wholly irrelevant to my interpretation of Reid.

(i) that there is some serious discrepancy in the way they are using key terms, or (ii) that there is no clear truth about the matter, in this case, of what Reid's analysis of universals is (or both (i) and (ii), as I suspect). We've seen evidence to think that some fundamental ambiguities run through Reid's discussion of universals, but in addition there is the further fact (which the disputants do not mention) that Reid himself indicates that he does not know what universals are. Reid remarks, for example, "As to the manner of how we conceive universals, I confess my ignorance" (E 407b/394). We need to recognize the strong possibility that Reid has no determinate view on universals. In fact, in a much more thorough study of Reid on universals than either of the two discussed thus far, Susan Castagnetto gets us no further. After her analysis she concludes, "But there is still something odd about maintaining that there are universals even though universals don't really exist" (1992, 46). This, of course, sounds just like what Reid says about fictional objects, which brings us full circle.

We have more evidence for interpreting Reidian universals as Meinongian non-existents than we do to interpret them as mental entities, Platonic entities or sets of real particulars. However, I remain skeptical about finding out just what is Reid's position. Whatever view about universals it is that we conclude Reid adopts, it is sure to be significantly underdetermined. Such being the case, what Reid says about universals cannot be successfully used to decide what he says about fictional objects.

Earlier I mentioned that if one seeks to use Reid's discussion of universals to refute my interpretation of Reid as a Meinongian about fictional objects, then one



would show first that he endorses a non-Meinongian theory of universals, then that, for Reid, fictional objects have the same ontological status as universals. Even if we were to assume that Reid endorses an inflationist or deflationist view about universals, that would still only bring my interlocutor to the end of the first stage of the process. In order to vindicate this interpretation, one must then show that Reid believes that fictional particulars like Pegasus have the same status as universals. Reid, though, does not explicitly support such a move.

There are philosophical reasons against this position. Suppose Reid endorses a deflationist, nominalist interpretation. Then ‘centaur’ and ‘horse’ might refer to classes of instantiated properties in roughly the same way. However, it is not clear this makes any sense. ‘Horse’ refers to the set of instances of the property called ‘horse’. But the property of being a centaur has no instances, so we cannot interpret Reid’s use of fictional object kind terms as being relevantly similar to his use of general concept terms.

More important, though, is that any non-Meinongian construal of universals will fail to preserve Reid’s commonsense epistemic intuitions. He says that, when thinking of a centaur, the object of that act “is a centaur, an animal which, I believe, never existed.” The Ideal Theory implies this commonsense commitment is incorrect, and that I am instead thinking of an *idea* of a centaur, to which Reid asks, “What then is this idea? Is it an animal, half horse and half man? No. Then I am certain it is not the thing I conceive” (E 373a/321). This commonsense semantics would produce the

very same result were we to suppose that fictional object terms like ‘centaur’ refer either to mental representations of centaurs or to a set of property instances. For I know that an animal that is half horse and half man is not merely a set of property instantiations, just as I know that a horse or a man is not merely a set of property instantiations. They are rather subjects of predication.

I wish to explore Reid’s allegiance to these commonsense epistemic intuitions presently in order to uncover the deeper reasons for which Reid adopts Meinongianism. Why, after all, is Reid drawn to such naïve commonsense intuitions in the first place?

## 5. REJECTING THE IDEAL THEORY

Whether or not Meinongianism correctly captures the nature of fictional objects, we can see that Reid exercises good judgment and attends to the internal consistency of his system in arriving at this surprising conclusion. I will explain Reid’s central, epistemological motivation for adopting Meinongianism and I will analyze how it arises from Reid’s rejection of the Ideal Theory.

Reid writes to James Gregory, “The merit of what you are pleased to call my philosophy, lies, I think, chiefly in having called in question the common theory of ideas.”<sup>19</sup> Reid is not merely being self-effacing; he’s being honest, and his dictum is especially apropos to the present discussion. Reid’s arrival at Meinongianism follows

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<sup>19</sup> Reprinted in Reid 1994, 88b. The date of writing is not supplied.

from his examination of what he takes to be the two key commitments of the Ideal Theory. He writes,

There are two prejudices which seem to me to have given rise to the theory of ideas in all the various forms in which it has appeared in the course of above two thousand years... . The first is—That, in all the operations of the understanding, there must be some immediate intercourse between the mind and its object, so that the one may act upon the other. The second, That, in all the operations of the understanding, there must be an object of thought, which really exists while we think of it; or, as some philosophers have expressed it, that which is not cannot be intelligible. (E 368b/312; cf. E 274a/125)

To clarify Reid's attributions, we can say that the Ideal Theory is committed to (R) and (E). (R) is already familiar:

(R) Contentful mental states, i.e. ideas, represent non-contentful states, i.e. impressions.

This is a principle of cognitive contact. Secondly,

(E) That which does not exist cannot be the object of intentional states of the mind.

In (R) Reid attributes to the Ideal Theory the thesis that our mental states do not take mind-independent objects as their immediate intentional objects, but rather take

mind-dependent states like Humean impressions as their immediate objects. I understand Reid's (E) to be equivalent to the statement that, since we are immediately aware of mental intermediaries, they must exist under some description. (Strictly speaking it does not matter for Reid's purposes whether these representations allegedly exist in mental form (as ideas) or physical form (as brain states), for we have seen that Reid explicitly rejects both construals.)

By insufficiently appreciating the force of these two commitments S.A. Grave insinuates, in the *bon mot* above, that Reid does not know the contours of his own account of fictional objects. It will help us avoid Grave's error to understand Reid's analysis in light of (R) and (E).

Reid believes that, amongst the advocates of the Ideal Theory, Hume and Locke in particular are committed to (R) and (E). Furthermore, Reid thinks that any such commitments will render one's theory of cognition implausible. Consider Hume, for example. Hume's assent to (E) is obvious (see, e.g., T 67/49). Ideas and impressions must exist because, by conceiving them, we call them into existence. Thesis (R) may be broken down into two parts, one that affirms the immediacy of representations, and another that affirms the representative features of mental intermediaries. Hume affirms both portions of (R). As to the immediacy of representations, he says that the

only existences, of which we are certain, are perceptions, which being immediately present to us by consciousness, command our strongest assent,

and are the first foundation of all our conclusions... . [A]s no beings are ever present to the mind but perceptions; it follows that we may observe a conjunction or a relation of cause and effect between different perceptions, but can never observe it between perceptions and objects. (T 212/140-41; cf. T 193/129)

He also affirms that ideas are representational. Hume explains that “all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent” (T 4/9). Ideas are representational, though they can only represent impressions (T 241/; cf. 67/48-9, 188/126), not external objects.

By this admittedly brief case on behalf of Reid's attribution of (R) and (E) to Hume I only intend to show that Reid does have some reason to think that his predecessors fit the mold he casts for them. (A sound case can be made for Locke's adoption of (R) and (E), although with Berkeley the situation is, for obvious reasons, not so obvious.)

Let us now turn to showing how Reid's Meinongianism stems from his repudiation of (R) and (E). Reid's empirical method in his analysis of the operation of our mental faculties leads him to conclude that (R) and (E) imply that we generally do not know what we are thinking about. This marks the failure of the Ideal Theory to account for what Reid takes to be an epistemological datum. Assume (R) and we can coax out of Reid the following argument:

(5) ‘Centaur’ refers to non-existent beasts that are half-man, half-horse.

(premise)

(6) Since nothing that does not exist can be the object of thought, person P cannot think of centaurs. (from (R) and (5))

(7) P believes that he can and does think of centaurs. (premise)

Reid believes he speaks in the name of commonsense when saying, “I conceive a centaur. This conception is an operation of the mind, of which I am conscious, and to which I can attend. The sole object of it is a centaur, an animal which, I believe, never existed” (E 373a/321). This and like-minded passages clearly warrant attributing (7) to Reid. It follows that:

(8) When P tokens a thought P believes is about centaurs, P is mistaken in his identification of the content of his thought. (from (6) and (7))<sup>20</sup>

Now Reid seeks to generalize the result achieved in (8). P fails to have privileged access to his mental contents not only in cases in which P tokens thoughts about centaurs and other fictional objects, but in most other cases as well. Since (R) is a universal generalization,

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<sup>20</sup> Reid claims that, when thinking of centaurs, he is certain that he is thinking of horse-men (E 373a/321). It may seem that Reid has chosen an unfortunate example. ‘Centaur’ closely resembles ‘minotaur,’ which refers to the combination of a bull—*taurus*—and a man. Of course, Reid is correct about the meaning of ‘centaur,’ though why it has the meaning it does is mysterious. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* says its etymology is ‘of unsettled origin’. It is likely, though, that its origins lie with Centaurus, the offspring of an incongruous union between Ixion, a king of Thessaly, and a cloud that Ixion mistook for Hera. Ignominious Ixion thus ‘pricked’ (*kenteo*) the ‘air’ (*aura*). (I owe this point to Gillian McIntosh.)

(9) P is mistaken in identifying the content of his thought T whenever P believes that T's content is about anything other than a mental representation. (from (8) and (R))

Reid draws the line here: commonsense epistemic principles must hold sway over implications of the Ideal Theory.

(10) It is obvious that P is not systematically mistaken about the contents of thoughts about things other than P's mental states. (premise)

(11) Therefore, (R) is false. (by reductio from (9) and (10))

The contemporary flair of the argument is obvious, for related concerns have been raised about externalist theories of content by a number of philosophers. Like Reid, current defenders of privileged access also take an epistemic principle roughly similar to (10) as philosophically non-negotiable.

The key step in this argument is the inference from (8) and (R) to (9). We are justified in attributing this step to Reid in part on the basis of a passage (which I have already quoted in part) in which Reid describes what he takes to be the deleterious epistemic consequences of a commitment to (R). In chapter 2, in the course of explaining what I called Reid's "epistemic objection," I alluded to (what Reid took to be) the epistemic consequence of affirming the Ideal Theory. Through this argument we see how Reid traces a specific form of epistemic failure back to the Ideal Theory. When thinking about a centaur, the object of thought, Reid says,

is not the image of an animal—it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other without any danger or mistake. The thing I conceive is a body of a certain figure and colour, having life and spontaneous motion. The philosopher says, that the idea is an image of the animal; but that it has neither body, nor colour, nor life, nor spontaneous motion. This I am not able to comprehend. (E 373a-b/321-2)

Reid also emphasizes epistemic considerations earlier in the *Intellectual Powers*.

Speaking of a commitment to a representational theory of cognition, Reid says that the necessary consequence of this seems to be, that there are two objects of this thought—the idea, which is in the mind, and the person represented by that idea; the first, the immediate object of the thought, the last, the object of the same thought, but not the immediate object. This is a hard saying; for it makes every thought of things external to have a double object. Every man is conscious of his thoughts, and yet, upon attentive reflection, he perceives no such duplicity in the object he thinks about. (E 278b/134; cf. E 369a-b/313)

I take this passage as a repudiation of (9). Together these passages show that Reid presumes a heady view about the transparency of first-person access.

Let us now consider some possible responses from Hume in order to improve our understanding of Reid's *modus operandi*. Hume would argue that instead of conceiving of something that is half-horse, half-man, humans are actually conceiving



of a mental representation of such a thing. He would affirm (5) but deny (7). He might do this by arguing for a semantics of fictional object terms such that our dealings with centaurs come under two concepts—‘centaur’, the use denoted in (5), and ‘centaur<sub>2</sub>’, which refers to representations of centaurs. Indeed, Reid himself could be seen as engendering such a semantics when he says, “What is meant by conceiving a thing? we should very naturally answer, that it is having an image of it in the mind—and perhaps we could not explain the word better. This shews that conception, and the image of a thing in the mind, are synonymous expressions” (E 363a/300). However, despite the fact that Reid allows imagination a role in conceiving, he is quick to observe that talk of images in the mind is strictly analogical. Common usage puts images into the mind, but, in truth, “We know nothing that is properly in the mind but thought; and, when anything else is said to be in the mind, the expression must be figurative and signify some kind of thought” (E 363a/301).

Furthermore, one might think that this response amounts to the factual claim that humans have two concepts for all terms for items that are thought not to exist. Reid would argue that this does not let Hume off the hook. For (R) and (E) impel Hume to posit equivocal concepts not just for non-existent objects like centaurs, but for all sorts of other non-existent objects, like formerly existent people, and for existent tables and chairs as well. Of course, Hume does something quite like this in the *Treatise* (at I, ii) when he distinguishes between vulgar and philosophical views

about the objects of perception. But Reid's commonsense commitments prevent him from taking this option—of affirming (5) and denying (7)—seriously.

Secondly, Hume may simply deny outright that we do know what we are thinking about in cases in which the objects of our thoughts are allegedly things other than mental states, i.e. deny (10). We can motivate this response by considering that often one perceives some object and believes that it is one thing but discovers, on closer observation, that the object is something else. This is not merely true of perceptions. Fregean cases of referential opacity indicate that this can be true of what Reid calls 'conceptions' as well.

Reid would respond by arguing that, were Hume to say this, he would conflate two different mental operations. Reid holds that conception is crucially related to other mental faculties, but is not absorbed by them. This leads Reid to make a distinction between 'bare' and 'coordinated' conceptions ('coordinated' is my term). Reid calls some acts of conception 'bare' because that which is conceived need not be the object of any other mental faculty (E 361a/296). A "bare conception of a thing" is a conception that occurs "without any judgment or belief about it" (E 360a/295). He adds, "We may distinctly conceive a proposition, without judging it at all" (E 375a/325). It is thus possible that one merely conceives of something, whether a proposition, image, event, physical object or state of affairs. In contrast, coordinated conceptions are conceptions occurring in tandem with the use of other mental faculties. When (since conception is a component of perception for Reid) I perceive

Durham Cathedral, for example, the event of conceiving of the cathedral is coordinated with the perceptual event of seeing the cathedral.

Reid grants that in coordinated conceptions I will erroneously identify their objects on occasion. However, the fact that my coordinated conception is generated by the interaction of my senses with physical objects explains the error in perceptual cases and even in Hesperus/Phosphorus cases (since our conceptions in that case too are dependent on coordination with perceptual experiences). On the other hand, to suppose that I may incorrectly identify the objects of my own bare conceptual acts is a much stronger thesis. This is to say that I might be imagining my wife reading Cicero's *De Domo Sua* and be wrong about the content of my state of imagination. Reid's interlocutor here is claiming not simply that it is possible I erroneously omit from my imagistic conception of my wife that she was reading a certain edition of Cicero. Reid can allow that my bare conceptions may well be incomplete in various respects. In order to deny (10) Hume must make the significantly stronger claim that I may be in error that I am conceiving of my wife at all, i.e. that it is possible that I am conceiving of my *neighbor's* wife instead. In contrast, Reid thinks that contents of propositional attitudes in bare conceptions are transparent. By describing bare conceptions as opaque, this response to Reid's argument repudiates one's ability to know the content of one's mental states even when those states are tokened by only using the faculties of bare conception.

My aim in this discussion of two possible objections to Reid's argument has been to give the argument some Reidian texture. The success of Reid's argument relies upon an intrepid, though tacit, presumption of first-person privileged access. Reid supposes that I can think of centaurs while knowing that they do not exist. Given Reid's understanding of this presumption, he tacitly affirms the following crude disjunction: either I am mistaken that my thoughts about centaurs are about centaurs (and thus I must deny a robust thesis of privileged access), or I am thinking and predicating of something that does not exist (and thus I must affirm a form of Meinongianism).

#### 6. THE METAPHILOSOPHY BEHIND REID'S MEINONGIANISM

This is the dilemma Reid faced. The theories in each disjunct represent extreme positions. Those who wish to reject the Ideal Theory's commitment to a representational theory of thought have many other options. On the one hand, many would deny Reid's naïve thesis of privileged access. Merely claiming that some, but not all, content is internal would mark a step toward a middle ground. On the other hand, we could use any number of familiar tools in the philosophy of language to attempt to skirt the problems about predication Reid takes so seriously. These tools include Fregean distinctions between levels of predicates, two-sense theories that distinguish between 'exists' as applied to individuals and to kinds, Wittgensteinian appeals to 'formal concepts', or intensional logics

purporting to account for the truth-value and logical form of propositions about fictional objects (or perhaps combinations of these proposals). Motivating Meinongian commitments about negative existential claims can itself be accomplished in a considerably more straightforward manner than via Reid's circuitous epistemological route.

A related option has been developed in this context by Marian David. He uses work of Brentano and Chisholm to make some distinctions between senses of 'exists', then argues that if Reid's theory is to be made plausible, Reid must be "committed to a restricted sense of 'to exist' in which it expresses a property like being-red, i.e. a property in virtue of which objects are distinguished from each other" (David 1985-6, 595). Unfortunately, Reid's uses of 'exists', 'real' and 'object' do not permit an interpretation on which those terms function in the way David (and others of us) wish they did. For David's recommendation comes at the expense of Reid's denial of (2) above—that unicorns must exist in some sense in order for S to be about them. David thus concludes by saying, "Reid *should have* said 'name' or 'singular term' when he said 'object'..." (599). For an unprejudiced ruling on Reid we would need to appraise certain advantages of Meinongianism more fully than is possible here, but perhaps David is correct.

Nonetheless, Reid's adoption of Meinongianism is understandable and rational *given his philosophical goals*, as I hope to have shown. Reid is willing to accept the views about the semantics of fictional object terms that I have described, views that are

philosophically controversial, on the condition that doing so is necessary to preserve his staunch allegiance to non-negotiable epistemic principles. This underscores the epistemological portions of Reid's rejection of the Ideal Theory. In fact, Reid adopts a direct theory of cognition for similar epistemological reasons.

Despite pervasive problems with Meinongianism, Reid nonetheless becomes a more interesting and better philosopher when read as endorsing this theory. Reid's Meinongianism may reap dividends elsewhere in his philosophical system, e.g. it may be capable of servicing some problems about perceptual error that plague direct theories of perception like Reid's. In the philosophical context of this paper, we've seen that the only other textually plausible alternative reconstruction of Reid's analysis of fictional objects is Grave's, on which Reid's view is incoherent. In contrast, I have argued that Reid's theory of fictional objects falls straightforwardly from his rejection of the Ideal Theory. While I share some of Grave's consternation, my misgivings about Reid's views arise not from the belief that Reid does not understand the contours of his own theory of non-existent objects, but from worries about what positions Reid was willing to accept in the name of a commonsense epistemology.

CHAPTER 5:  
THE STATUS AND NATURE OF VISIBLE FIGURE

Up to this point, we have developed and explained Reid's direct account of cognition. This has been done by highlighting Reid's criticisms of his predecessors because he does not explicitly offer a theory of cognition *per se*. Rather, he argued that certain epistemic propositions are non-negotiable, and that the Ideal Theory violates some of those propositions. He then sketches an alternative account of cognition that is consistent with those propositions. We have examined Reid's theory of the conception of fictional objects as a way to apply, and thus better understand, the scope and depth of Reid's allegiance to epistemic propositions about self-knowledge.

Reid's theory of cognition forms important background to his theory of perception, into which we are now headed. I will begin our discussion of perception with an extended analysis of Reid's theory of visual perception. I will develop Reid's theory using his own terms as frequently as possible. I start with vision because he develops his theory of *visual* perception in considerably more detail than he does any other. As such, we can get a keen look at Reid's commitments in perception and his methods to preserve them by studying what he says about vision.

## 1. INCONSISTENCY IN REID

We can make a good *prima facie* case for the inconsistency of Reid's theory of perception with his rejection of the Ideal Theory. Most scholars believe Reid adopts a theory on which the immediate object of perception is a physical body. In other words, he is thought to endorse a 'direct' theory of perception. Reid is thought to do this in order to avoid problems generated by the veil of perception in the Ideal Theory. Reid explains that the Ideal Theory "leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis. . . [t]hat nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it" (I 96a/4). Reid attributes to the Ideal Theory thesis (A):

(A) No immediate objects of perception are mind-independent.

Let's leave this thesis at this level of generality for the time being and show how Reid's rejection of the Ideal Theory conflicts with his theory of perception.

Reid's attempt to banish perceptual intermediaries in his analysis of *visual* perception does not obviously succeed. This is because he recognizes that what he dubs "visible figures" are the immediate objects of our visual systems. With sight, "we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only" and not, for instance, their extension (I 185a/171). It seems that visible figures are perceptual intermediaries. At least, they clearly don't share the ontological status of middle-sized dry goods. This indicates that the objects of acts of visual perception are actually visible figures. So, reading 'immediately' for 'originally,' Reid affirms that



(B) The immediate objects of visual perception are only ever visible figures.

Reid's repudiation of the Ideal Theory in (A) and the nature of his account of visual perception in (B) seem to be in conflict. Specifically, they are inconsistent with the following description of visible figure:

(C) Visible figures are not mind-independent objects.

The secondary literature on Reid's theory of perception that takes Reid to endorse a type of direct perception—the thesis that the objects of immediate perception are mind-independent—also takes Reid's direct perception to apply to all sense modalities. But if Reid is taken to endorse a direct theory of perception for all our sense modalities, then Reid cannot deny (A) and affirm both (B) and (C). Were he to do so his theory of visual perception must be structured in a radically different way. In addition to differing sharply with received wisdom, such a hybrid theory—on which touch is direct and vision indirect—is at least counterintuitive, and may be philosophically problematic.

Reid did not fully appreciate this conflict, though he notices that vision presents unique difficulties for his overall theory of perception. He does analyze the nature of the representational relations between visible figures, which he occasionally calls “perspectival appearances,” and what he calls “real” and “tangible” figures, i.e. the surface properties of physical objects.<sup>21</sup> The result of this analysis, Reid's

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<sup>21</sup> I treat “visible” and “apparent” figure, and “visible” and “apparent” magnitude as synonymous, as are “real” and “tangible” figure and magnitude. These terminological confusions are present at I 133a-b/79, I 135-136/82-84, I 142-144/95-

‘geometry of visibles,’ is used to show that the faculty of visual perception can give us reliable information about three-dimensional objects.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the implications of Reid’s geometry of visibles and his implementation of the notion of visible figure have not been examined in the context of Reid’s theory of perception. They have instead remained a curiosity in the history of geometry.

This state of affairs isn’t surprising because Reid’s analysis of visual figure and his theory of visual perception are a royal mess. The key question for resolving this conflict is: What is visible figure? In other words, what properties does visible figure possess? Only if an answer to this question enables Reid to differentiate visible figures from the Ideal Theory’s ideas will he evade the puzzle I’ve articulated. However, it is not enough that Reid describes something that is sufficiently different from impressions and ideas to avoid the puzzle, but which fails to exist or fails to

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99 and at E 302a-b/178 and E 325ff/223ff. He uses the term “perspective appearance” synonymously with “visible figure” at I 135a/81. Norman Daniels believes that *in the actual world* visible and apparent figure and visible and apparent magnitude are synonymous due to contingent facts about us and our environments. Reid believes it is possible that other creatures apprehend real figure through seeing, hence the need for the distinction. (See Daniels 1974, 15-16, and, in Reid, I 150-52/108-112.)

<sup>22</sup> This relationship has been explored in Daniels 1974, Weldon 1982, Angell 1974, Gideon Yaffe 2002, and Van Cleve forthcoming. These authors discuss Reid’s geometry for visible space, but, with the exception of Van Cleve, stop short of addressing its impact on Reid’s theory of perception. Van Cleve’s central concern is whether Reid’s geometry of visibles constitutes a non-Euclidean geometry, but at the end of the paper he does address the implications of his interpretation on the direct character of visual perception. Though our interests and approaches differ, we seem to agree on the status of visible figure in the process of perception.

explain the requisite visual phenomena. We must also have some independent, non-*ad hoc* reasons for thinking that the thing (or property or entity) to which Reid's term 'visible figure' allegedly refers actually exists.

One might ask at this point, 'Does Reid leave the matter of visible figure this wide open? Surely he is aware of the problem, isn't he?' In answer: Yes, and, strangely, Yes. Reid's awareness of the problem doesn't prevent him from leaving the ontological and perceptual status of visible figure utterly opaque. He passes the buck by asking, "To what category of beings does visible figure then belong? I can only, in answer, give some tokens, by which those who are better acquainted with the categories, may chance to find its place" (I 144b/98).

In answer to the question 'What is visible figure?' I will set out several constraints that Reid implicitly places on visible figure, both textual and philosophical. Then I will make a tripartite distinction between types of visible figure. I will argue that the most plausible reconstruction of Reid's theory is that visible figure is a relational or relativized property of our eyes and mind-independent objects. In the course of explaining this type of visible figure, which I will call 'seen figure' to differentiate it from its counterparts, I hope to show that Reid's analysis is not *ad hoc*. I'll contend that we have independent reasons drawn from perceptual and phenomenological data to posit some such relational or relativized properties.

## 2. “PERCEPTION”

In order to proceed effectively we need a grasp of what’s involved in the process of perception according to Reid. A complete account of perception explains the physical, qualitative and cognitive states that attend perceptual events, but Reid’s use of the term ‘perception’ is equivocal. When speaking strictly Reid often defines it thus:

[W]e shall find in [perception] these three things: First, Some *conception* or notion of the object perceived; Secondly, a strong and irresistible conviction and *belief* of its present existence; and, Thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (E 258a/96; cf. E 326b/226 and I 183a/168)

Let’s call this narrowly construed form of perception, on which to perceive X is to *conceive of* and *believe in* X, ‘perceive<sub>C&B</sub>’. I single out this definition of ‘perception’ because there are other uses of the term (discussed below) with which we do not want to confuse this one—his primary, though eccentric, definition.

I need only say a word about the components of perception<sub>C&B</sub> here. Reid distinguishes “bare” conceptions and typical conceptions. Bare conceptions “can neither be truth nor falsehood” whereas, evidently, non-bare conceptions are normative in some sense—they can be correct or incorrect. Beliefs are distinct from both forms of conception since beliefs must have propositional content and must be true or false. Reid says that, while granting that “belief” doesn’t “admit of a logical

definition,” nonetheless, “Belief is always expressed in language by a proposition, wherein something is affirmed or denied” (E 327b/228).

Reid is aware that perceiving<sub>C&B</sub> isn’t the full story. There are also qualitative states within perceptual events, sensations, which are produced by the interaction of a physical object, one’s sensory systems and one’s mind. To use Reid’s term, sensations “suggest” conceptions and beliefs about external objects, even though there is no resemblance between the object and our mental states (I 121b-22a/59-60). Several Reid scholars, including George Pappas and William Alston, argue that Reid must conjoin sensations and their suggestion relations to perceptual<sub>C&B</sub> states in order for Reid to tender a complete theory of perception. In Alston’s words, “Perception essentially involves sensory awareness.”<sup>23</sup> I happen to believe that imposing this demand upon a theory of perception is mistaken. But I won’t enter into the general reasons for this now (see chapter 9, on sensations) because Reid himself clearly indicates that the role of sensations in visual perception—our sole concern here—differs markedly from the role of sensations in other sense modalities.

In addition to the cognitive and qualitative aspects of perception, Reid discusses the physical process. In this context he raises the curious role of visible figure. Describing the physical aspects of perception, Reid says that “there are certain means and instruments, which, by the appointment of nature, must intervene

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<sup>23</sup> Alston 1989, 38. See Pappas 1989 and Daniels 1974, who senses this tension in Reid when remarking that he is “on the verge of plunging sensations into an insignificant role in our theories of mind and knowledge” (73).

between the object and our perception of it” (I 186a/174). The nervous system transmits a physical impression from the organ to the brain. For most senses the impression then causes a sensation in the mind through an unknown process. But he adds, “The perceptions we have, might have been immediately connected with the impressions upon our organs, without any intervention of sensations. This last seems really to be the case in one instance—to wit, in our perception of the visible figure of bodies...” (I 187b/176, my emphasis). Visible figure is “immediately connected with the impressions upon our organs” because the material, retinal impression directly causes in us “perception of visible figure.” In this way vision is unique because sensations are unnecessary for *visual* perception.

### 3. CONSTRAINTS ON AN ACCOUNT OF VISIBLE FIGURE

In this section we’ll identify and describe the following six constraints Reid places on an account of visible figure. Visible figure must:

- (a) be capable of being represented by figures cast upon the inner surface of a sphere;
- (b) be interderivable with tangible figure;
- (c) be mind-independent;
- (d) be regularly suggested by material impressions on the retina;
- (e) regularly suggest our perceptions<sub>SC&B</sub> of bodies; and

(f) be something of which we can be perceptually aware.

We need to employ a method such as this because Reid is largely silent on the precise metaphysical and perceptual status of visible figure.

What little Reid says directly about visible figure occurs in his geometry of visibles, where he proposes a thought experiment. Imagine an eye placed at the center point of a sphere, able to rotate  $360^\circ$  in any plane containing the center. The most salient feature of this experiment is that this eye, “perceiving only the position of objects with regard to itself, and not their distance, will see those points in the same visible place which have the same position with regard to the eye, how different soever their distances from it may be” (I 147b/103). This eye is not habituated by the sorts of experiences that habituate our association of visible figures with the distance, depth and three-dimensionality of tangible figures. Reid explains the nature of the visible figures seen by this hypothetical eye:

[E]very visible figure will be represented by that part of the surface of the sphere on which it might be projected, the eye being in the centre. And every such visible figure will bear the same ratio to the whole of visible space, as the part of the spherical surface which represents it, bears to the whole spherical surface (I 148a/104-5).

Discrete patches on the inner surface of the sphere represent visible figures. This marks our first constraint: visible figure (a) must be capable of being represented by figures cast upon the inner surface of a sphere.

Reid argues, against Berkeley, that with knowledge of the tangible figure and of the position of one's eyes relative to the object, one can deduce the shape of the visible figure.<sup>24</sup> Reid explains that "the visible figure of a body may, by mathematical reasoning, be inferred from its real figure, distance, and position, with regard to the eye." Visible figure contrasts with what Reid calls "tangible" or "real figures," i.e. the facing surfaces of physical objects (E 303b-304a/181). Given facts about the dimensions of a real figure and information about its angle and distance from an eye, Reid's geometry of visibles allows the derivation of the dimensions of its visible figure. (For the record, Reid believes the derivation can work in the other direction as well, saying, "in like manner, we may, by mathematical reasoning, from the visible figure, together with the distance of the several parts of it from the eye, infer the real figure and position" (I 193b/188).) Visible figure must have geometrically describable properties in order to permit the interderivability central to Reid's discussion of visible figure. I will refer to this constraint as (b) interderivability, specifically the interderivability of visible figure from real figure coupled with facts about its distance from the eye. Interderivability between visible figure and real figure provides evidence

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<sup>24</sup> Berkeley argues for a contrary position in the *Essay Towards A New Theory of Vision*, §149-159, in WGB I, 232. He claims that geometrical objects are not visual but tangible, and that visible figure functions merely to suggest tangible shape and size. According to Reid, Berkeley's description of this relation is too weak and falls short of explaining the interderivability between visible and tangible figure. Atherton (1990) identifies Berkeley's central purpose in the *New Theory* as "making a case against those who think what we see represents bodies existing in external space" (14). In contrast, this is precisely what Reid attempts to show with his geometry of visibles.



that an object whose visible figure we see and an object whose surfaces we touch are in fact unified—a single object is perceivable by both senses (I 144b; B 98-99).

Reid proceeds to argue that visible figure is external and independent of minds by noting what would follow if it weren't: "[I]f visible objects were not external, but existed only in the mind, they could have no figure, or position, or extension" (I 155b/119). Of course, Berkeley would counter that visible figure cannot be figured unless it is external, which is to say that Reid's theory of perception stands in contrast to Berkeleyan idealism. Reid also writes,

When I use the names of tangible and visible space, I do not mean to adopt Bishop Berkeley's opinion, so far as to think that they are really different things, and altogether unlike. I take them to be different conceptions of the same thing; the one very partial, and the other more complete; but both distinct and just, as far as they reach. (E 325a/222)

If visible figure is nothing other than a physical object conceived of in a certain way, then visible figure is (c) mind-independent.

Concerning "suggestion," a technical term Reid adopts from Berkeley, Reid explains that an awareness of a visible figure is suggested by a material impression on the retina (I 147a/102). So our awareness of visible figure is (d) suggested by retinal impression, and not by sensation. Furthermore, when I see a visible figure, my mind is drawn to a conception and belief of an external object or quality (I 135a-b/81).

Says Reid, “Visible figure, therefore, being intended by nature to be a sign, we pass on immediately to the things signified” (I 147a/102). Experience has taught us that we are warranted in correlating visual figures with real figures “every hour and almost every minute of our lives” (E 304a182). Hence, visible figure (e) suggests perceptions<sub>C&B</sub> of physical objects.

Passages quoted thus far should make clear the fact that visible figure is something of which we can be aware. Reid refers to “the perception of visible figure” (I 187b/176), he says, “we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only” (I 185a/171), and so on. Thus (f)—that it is something of which we can be perceptually aware—is a constraint on an account.

(a)-(f) imply that visible figures are quite different than the ideas of the Ideal Theory. For example, (c) states that visible figures are mind-independent, and (b) implies that visible figures bear a much closer relationship to physical bodies than do ideas. Now we need to find something—anything—that can bear the weight of these constraints. To be sure, whatever property or entity that will possess (a)-(f) will be metaphysically odd.

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF COMPETING ALTERNATIVES

In order to motivate and make way for my account of visible figure I will first evaluate competing alternatives on the basis of their textual merit and their ability to comply with the constraints.

4.1. *Visible figures as non-existent objects.* This is suggested in passing by Lorne Falkenstein, according to whom Reid is, or rather, “would appear to be,” he says, “forced to admit that our beliefs in visible figures are beliefs in something that does not actually exist in the external world, though they serve as signs for the things that do so exist” (Falkenstein 2000, 318). Since he seems to contrast things that “exist in the external world” with visible figure as he takes it, I infer that Falkenstein is suggesting that visible figure has status as a non-existent, fictional object. One hurdle in attributing this to Reid concerns whether or not Reid has any place for fictional objects such as this in his ontology. Though Falkenstein does not delve into the matter, as we have shown in chapter 4, Reid surprisingly does endorse a form of Meinongianism according to which we can coherently predicate of truly non-existent objects.

Despite the removal of this obstacle, though, we have scant reason to think that Reid endorses such an account *of visible figures*. We have no textual evidence to think that his Meinongianism about fictional objects informs his discussion of visible figure. And clearly most of the constraints Reid puts upon visible figure cannot be secured if visible figures are fictional objects for they would thus have no geometrically describable features, no causal powers and we would not be capable of being perceptually aware of them.

Falkenstein obliquely claims that Reid is “forced” into this position, not that Reid explicitly endorses it. While I understand his difficulty in finding other ways to

describe visible figure, marshaled as sufficient evidence for a Meinongian construal of visible figures I find this unpersuasive. Falkenstein presents no philosophical reasoning on behalf of his admittedly brief suggestion other than an anemic argument from elimination. Thus, we should only adopt this proposal as a last resort, and there are many options yet to consider.

4.2. *Visible figures as retinal impressions.* We know Reid believes visible figure is external to immaterial minds. Impressions on a retina conform to this requirement. Second, retinal impressions can suggest the perception<sub>C&B</sub> of mind-independent objects. Third, about the geometrically necessary connection between visible and tangible figure, Reid comments,

I require no more knowledge in a blind man, in order to his being able to determine the visible figure of bodies, than that he can project the outline of a given body, upon the surface of a hollow sphere, whose centre is in the eye.

This projection is the visible figure he wants: for it is the same figure with that which is projected upon the *tunica retina* in vision. (I 143a/95)

It might seem from this that visible figures are retinal impressions.

But there are several problems with such a view. First, because Reid admits that we are in some sense perceptually aware of visible figure, this interpretation falters. It is true we can be made aware of retinal images with ophthalmological equipment, but Reid indicates that we can attend to visible figure when we wish. In addition, Reid more directly repudiates this characterization of visible figure when

saying, “If our powers of perception be not altogether fallacious, the objects we perceive are not in our brain, but without us. We are so far from perceiving images in the brain, that we do not perceive our brain at all” (E 257a/95).

Thus, visible figures cannot be retinal impressions. What of the inset passage supporting this interpretation? The visible figure and the retinal impression share all relevant *geometrical* (not perceptual or sensory) properties with the material impression. “Same” in the above quotation refers to the sameness of these properties only.

4.3. *Visible figures as Humean impressions.* Perhaps against Reid’s wishes the functional role of visible figure is best filled by something with the ontological makeup of a Humean impression. Reid’s grasp of the nature of Humean impressions is, however, weak. In differentiating visible figures from Humean impressions he assumes that Humean impressions are not physical (I 144b/98). On the contrary Hume unambiguously describes certain impressions of touch *and sight* as extended, physical and as bearing parts (T 235/154). Due to Reid’s misunderstanding, Hume’s spatial visual impressions could be used to derive the dimensions of tangible figure and meet the interderivability condition.

However, Reid’s interpretive mistake has no harmful repercussions. Since Humean visual impressions are physical states, this suggestion succumbs to the problems of the previous proposal.

4.4. *Visible figures as sensations.* Suppose, though, that in addition to material impressions there are *mental* impressions. Might visible figure reduce to such

impressions? Anthony Pitson (1989) believes so. He hints that Reid's use of "appearance" refers to the color an object seems to have. He favorably quotes Reid's comment that "It is impossible to know whether a scarlet colour has the same appearance to me which it hath to another man" (I 134a/80). Here the notion of appearance is used "by Reid to refer to a feature of the perceiver's state of mind" (Pitson 1989, 84). This state may be purely qualitative or it may have propositional content. Given Pitson's mention of sensations of color in this context, let's first consider visible figure as a qualitative state, i.e. as a sensation.

There is some textual evidence favoring a view in this neighborhood because Reid thinks visible figures and sensations of color are closely related. He says that, *ceteris paribus*, sensations of color are constantly conjoined with seeing visible figure. Furthermore Reid endows experiences of visible figure and sensations of color with the power of suggesting bodies, even though he does not reduce the perception of visible figure to the perception of discrete color patches in our visual field (I 144a-b/97).

However, it was often a similar Berkeleyan view that serves as Reid's main target.<sup>25</sup> One crippling problem is that sensory experiences cannot bear informational content of the sort required to meet the interderivability constraint. Sensations are mere qualia. "In sensation, there is no object distinct from that act of the mind by

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<sup>25</sup> For a representation of this view, consult §41-45 of the *New Theory* (WGB I, 185-188) and Cummins' helpful exegesis of these passages at Cummins 1987, 168.

which it is felt,” says Reid (E 310a/194). Sensory feelings, qualia, do not have geometrical properties, but visible figures must. Thus the suggestion that visible figure might be resolved into some type of adverbial state fails to meet Reid’s constraints. Considerations about the independence of sensations of color and visible figure are also sufficient to show that construing visible figures as sensations cannot succeed.

However, one might object here that the color experiences Pitson urges us to take as explicating visible figure are not sensations in Reid’s sense (i.e., phenomenal mental states) but rather are a special type of contentful mental state, or “conception.”

4.5. *Visible figures as conceptions.* It happens that Phillip Cummins (1974) tacitly considers such a view when he identifies visible figure with conception. It is not apparent whether Cummins means to identify visible figure with the *products* or the *process* of conception in his admittedly brief reflection on the matter, so I will consider both options.

In a discussion of variation in the objects of visual perception Cummins indicates that Reid’s direct realism can avoid absurdity in perceptual relativity cases because Reid “can admit that in such cases our conceptions vary, such that first a coin is perceived as round and, subsequently, is perceived as elliptical. Conceptions, not actual objects, determine the objects intended in perception and the objects of conception need not exist.” (Cummins 1974, 332) It is true that Reid seeks to explain

variation in the objects of sight by appeal to visible figure (I 135a-b/81, and E 303-4/180-82). In addition this proposal has unforeseen textual support. Reid says,

what is commonly called the image of a thing in the mind, is no more than the act or operation of the mind in conceiving... . The image in the mind, therefore, is not the object of conception, nor is it any effect produced by conception as a cause. It is conception itself. ...[T]he common language of those who have not imbibed any philosophical opinion upon this subject, authorizes us to understand *the conception of a thing, and an image of it in the mind*, not as two different things, but as two different expressions, to signify one and the same thing... . (E 363a-b/301)

Though these considerations make Cummins' suggestion initially plausible, I do not believe visible figures are products or processes of conception.

A textual criticism applies to either option. Reid does not identify either sort of conception with visible figure *in contexts in which he analyzes visible figure*. One would think that if Reid did believe visible figures are conceptions he would have made the connection clear to his readers, particularly since conception is a notion of great currency in his corpus. But, given Reid's own confusion about the status of visible figure, he didn't seem to make this alleged connection clear even to himself.

Furthermore conceptions construed as mental processes are neither publicly observable nor objective. They thus lack mind-independence. Clearly an *act* of conceiving is not external or extended. Visible figure is two-dimensional—a property



an act of mind cannot have on Reid's dualist views, nor will this interpretation facilitate the interderivability with tangible figure.

Cummins (and Pitson) may mean to suggest that visible figures are *objects* of conception rather than acts of apprehension. In this case they may be on track, though at this level of generality the view is little more than a placeholder.

## 5. Taxonomy of visible figures

Now that we have shown that previous interpretations of visible figure cannot conform to these constraints, I make my own attempt to answer our question in a way most consistent with what Reid says. Part of the problem with the other attempts is that they do not account for the implications of Reid's geometry of visibles on his account of visible figure. For when he uses "visible figure" in that context, I submit that he's using it in a very different way than in other contexts. I'll distinguish between three types of—or three ways to analyze—visible figure. They are geometrical, seen and perceived figure.

*5.1. Three types of visible figure.* Imagine a vase suspended in the middle of a room. In the geometrical sense of the term, the vase possesses a visible figure for each set of coordinates in the room from which it can be viewed. As we've seen (from the inset quotation above), Reid chooses to represent visible space using a model in which the eye is a point in the middle of a sphere and visible figures are

represented as patches on the inside surface of a sphere. Let's briefly explore this model.<sup>26</sup>

Reid argues that theorems about figures projected onto the inner surfaces of spheres are proof-theoretically equivalent to theorems about visible figures and lines. This is more intuitive than might appear, but I don't propose to state or defend Reid's proof of this thesis since Gideon Yaffe has already and ably done so.<sup>27</sup> The result of Reid's proof is that the figure that the vase would project to any set of

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<sup>26</sup> There may be some confusion about the claim that, because visible figures are patches on a sphere, they can represent 3-D objects. If such figures are two-dimensional, one might argue, their representational abilities are inadequate to the task. Reid says that visible figures are 2-D (e.g., at E 349b/273), but they are unlike surfaces in plane geometry. Consider the surface of the state of Colorado. Pick a point on Colorado's flat and low eastern plain. Pick another point high in Rocky Mountain National Park. If the surface of Colorado possessed only length and width, then we could shift one point to the other by traversing only two dimensions—by moving only latitudinally and longitudinally. However, these two points are separated not only by distances along those two axes, but also by height. By moving latitudinally and longitudinally I can move the point formerly at the Kansas border near the point high in the Rockies but the two points will still be separated by a distance of two miles or so. While the inner surface of a sphere is not as topographically interesting as the surface of Colorado, it too—in virtue of not being a plane—exists in three-space, as would any patch on its surface. While such a surface isn't robustly 3-D, we might say of such surfaces that they are richly 2-D. But I don't believe that the argument on which only 3-D (and not richly 2-D) objects can represent other 3-D objects (in the sense of visual representation relevant here) can be made out anyway.

<sup>27</sup> Some visible phenomena cannot be captured in a planar geometry. Lie on your back in the center of a square room with a flat ceiling. Look up at the four corners of the room. The angles you'll see are obtuse, i.e. the square contains angles which add to more than 360°. Reid's geometry of visibles explains this phenomenon. While this visible square cannot be drawn on a plane it can be drawn on a sphere. See Yaffe 2002 for the formal proof.

coordinates can be deduced with information about the vase's dimensions and its distance from those coordinates. Let's call this sense of visible figure *geometrical figure*.

Any physical, mind-independent object will thus possess an infinite number of geometrical figures. Geometrical figure need not be identified with any particular projection of points on any particular sphere. In fact, Reid's geometry of visibles is not even wedded to a spherical model. We might say that the geometrical figures of an object are the collections of points modeled from all hypothetical lines of sight toward the object, where said collections of points mathematically represent the dimensions of the object's real figure.

The second type of visible figure is produced when a single geometrical figure is instantiated in the world and represented to the eyes, or to be precise, to an eye. (Reid's geometry of visibles is designed for monocular vision. We can continue to speak of 'eyes' but as we do so let's resist the urge to impute stereoscopic assumptions to his theory.) I propose to call this *seen figure*. There is no harm in using this term so long as we're clear that seen figure only refers to the representation of physical objects *to the eyes*. So in this sense of the word 'see,' *I* do not see; my *eyes* do.

Reid's geometry of visibles allows us to deduce the dimensions of a seen figure from data about surface dimensions of a physical object and its distance from the hypothetical eye. This is possible because a seen figure inherits the relevant geometrical features of geometrical figure. (If we were interested in working this out in detail, we would need to take a theoretical position on the relation of models to

reality, but doing that goes beyond the scope of this essay.) So seen figure too will mathematically represent real figure, *ceteris paribus*.

The third and final type of visible figure is *perceived<sub>C&B</sub> figure*. Perceived<sub>C&B</sub> figure is simply seen figure that is also conceived of and believed in. When I typically perceive a vase I form a conception and belief of the vase itself, and *not* of its visible figure. Yet as those who have attempted to sketch or paint would attest, there are circumstances in which one perceives<sub>C&B</sub> the visible figures of objects.

5.2. *Seen figure*. Geometrical figure aids in shoring up claims of immediate perceptual knowledge from vision, but that isn't strictly part of Reid's theory of perception. And since we so rarely conceive of and believe in visible figure, perceived<sub>C&B</sub> figure is unimportant for our purposes. Seen figure, on the other hand, is an essential component of all visual perception and it deserves our scrutiny. Its status is as unclear in Reid as it is important. Let's find out a bit more about the nature of this beast and whether it can meet our constraints by answering some questions.

In what sense, precisely, is seen figure a relational property? First of all, geometrical figure will constitute a relational or relativized property holding between a set of coordinates and the facing surfaces of a figure. When a geometrical figure is instantiated in the world, the product, a seen figure, inherits the geometrical properties of its predecessor. The ontological status of relations differs from the ontological status of relational properties, or so it is generally thought. The class of

dyadic *relations* includes items such as *is smaller than* whereas the class of *relational properties* includes properties referred to by predicates like *a is smaller than b*, or  $F(a,b)$ . We should be clear (i) that seen figure is a relational property, not merely a relation, and (ii) that Reid is a realist about relational properties, i.e. he holds that relational properties are not eliminated by a reduction to their constituent relata.

In addition, it is often thought that relational properties are ontologically distinct from *relativized* properties. Whereas a relational property is signaled by additional terms in a formula, a relativized property is sometimes construed as a modifier that operates over an entire formula. In order to relativize the predication of a property to a time, for example, the suggestion is that we modify the entire formula  $Fa$  by  $t$  as  $(Fa)_t$ . This contrasts with giving the time a term  $t$  and claiming  $F(a,t)$ , as we do to describe a (temporal) relational property. But there are two reasons why I will not attempt to refine my account further by discussing whether seen figure is a relational or a relativized property. For one, I agree with James Van Cleve that there is no “philosophical significance” to the distinction (1999, 247-8). For two, my primary goal is to provide a cogent explanation of Reid’s position. Since Reid nowhere describes what visible figure is in any significant way—let alone describes visible figure in such a way as to enable us to take a stand on the current, subtle point—deciding that Reid’s seen figure is relational or relativized is beyond the purview of this book. Thus I’ll rest content with showing that the best explanation of Reid’s analysis of seen figure is that it is a garden variety relational property.

We can now ask: Is Reid a realist about relational properties? If my proposal does not cohere with Reid's views about relations, then it would face a significant hurdle. It seems we are on safe ground here though, despite the fact that Reid does not offer any theory of relations. First, one may think (as I do), that with an ontology like Reid's, even if he does not explicitly describe relations as irreducible, we are warranted in assuming that they are. But we needn't rest our answer to this question on such a plea. For, while Reid developed no theory of relations, he does claim that relational properties can be immediately perceived. Reid describes two ways we arrive at concepts of relational properties, the first of which is by perceptually comparing relata: "By this comparison, *we perceive the relation*, either immediately, or by a process of reasoning. That my foot is longer than my finger, I perceive immediately; and that three is the half of six. This immediate perception is immediate and intuitive judgment" (E 420b/422; my emphasis). Despite the propositional form Reid gives to these examples—perception *that*—this passage implicitly assumes that we do in fact see relational properties like the comparative length of my finger and foot.

Is seen figure actually mind-independent? One might wonder how something seen couldn't but be dependent on a mind. About this, first, seen figures are independent of immaterial minds because they are relational properties between *eyes* and objects. Second, seen figures are also mind-independent in the sense that they are independent of any particular visual system. The seen figure projected from a vase to the coordinates my eyes currently inhabit is the same seen figure that would be

projected from the vase to another's eyes, were hers to occupy the same coordinates. This secures the objectivity of seen figure across perceivers.

Does Reid allow that visible figures can be seen in the way my interpretation suggests they are? That an eye takes visible figures as objects is more often assumed than argued for in Reid, in part because he does not want to violate established linguistic practice according to which we 'see' bodies. Nonetheless, when he needs to be clear on the matter he is. For example, at I 193b/188 Reid remarks that, "when I look at a globe which stands before me, by the original powers of sight I perceive only something of a circular form, variously coloured." He adds, "we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only, and their visible place," and not, for instance, their extension (I 185a/171). Visible figure is the only type of object represented to our eyes. As the phenomenon of perceptual relativity (discussed in the following chapter) makes clear, Reid is quite right about this. Note, though, the ambiguity in Reid's terms. We've seen that he often uses "perceive" to refer to *perceive<sub>C&B</sub>*, but here he is not using it in that way, for we do not form conceptions and beliefs of visible figure. Elsewhere he says as much, e.g. "the visible appearance of objects is hardly ever regarded by us. It is not at all made an object of thought or reflection, but serves only as a sign to introduce to the mind something else..." (I 134b-135a/81).

Can seen figure possess geometrical properties like dimensions? Just as a single geometrical figure is a relational property between a specific collection of

points and a geometrical object, seen figure is a relational property between an eye and a physical object. Relational properties can and do possess geometrical features. A golf ball might possess the property of being 1/48th the volume of a basketball. My delete key possesses the property of being 17 inches south and 6 inches west of my cup of tea. The geometrical properties of seen visible figures will typically be substantially more complicated than these traits given the accuracy of Reid's model of visual space. Given the current position of my eyes, the seen figure of my computer monitor will not be a simple rectangle because in my visual field it is as though it were projected onto the surface of a sphere. But still, these complicated dimensions are features of the relational property we're calling the seen figure.

Reid most clearly describes seen figure as meeting constraint (a), being capable of being represented by figures cast on the inner surface of a sphere, and constraint (b), interderivability with tangible figure, when he says that "A projection of the sphere or a perspective view of a palace is a representative in the very same sense as visible figure is," adding that "wherever they have their lodging in the categories, they will be found to dwell next door to them" (I 144b/99). Reid intends that the "perspective view," i.e. the seen figure, possesses the same representational properties as does the geometrical figure.

Is seen figure reducible to the experience of color? To show this is not so, let's describe the relation between seen figure and color. The only qualitative mental states present in the experience of visible figure are color sensations. Says Reid, "When I



see an object, the appearance which the colour of it makes, may be called the sensation, which suggests to me some external thing as its cause; . . . At the same time, I am not conscious of anything that can be called sensation, but the sensation of colour” (I 145a/99). So to determine whether and how seen figure is associated with sensations, we can answer this question: Is seen figure colored, or necessarily colored?

There is evidence that seen figure is not necessarily colored and, in fact, that it is necessarily *not* colored, according to Reid. But Reid’s views about the nature of color and the semantics of color terms are perplexing, so I’m hereby treading softly on this point.<sup>28</sup> First, one reason to think that seen figure is not colored is that, for Reid, colors are only unknown causes of known sensory effects. Reid uses “color” and other secondary quality terms to refer to the physical base properties causing effects in our sensory systems, effects which most other philosophers label with the same terms, e.g. ‘red’. While physical objects possess the power to cause color sensations, they are not themselves colored. For these reasons seen figures are also not colored. Second, Reid performs a thought experiment:

Let us suppose, therefore, since it plainly appears to be possible, that our eyes had been so framed, as to suggest to us the position of the object, without

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<sup>28</sup> Both Falkenstein (2000) and Pitson (2002) have convincingly shown this. Falkenstein argues that Reid’s analysis of color and color terms is fraught with insurmountable conceptual confusion (see 317-324), whereas Pitson is more sympathetic to Reid’s position.

suggesting colour, or any other quality: What is the consequence of this supposition? It is evidently this, that the person endued with such an eye, would perceive the visible figure of bodies, without having any sensation or impression made upon his mind.

Hence, he adds, there “seems to be no sensation that is appropriated to visible figure, or whose office it is to suggest it” (I 146a-b/101). (This confirms that Reid endorses the claim, codified as constraint (d) above, that visible figure is suggested by material impressions on retinas, not by sensations.) Since seen figures can exist apart from experiences of color, visible figure is not necessarily conjoined with or reducible to experiences of color.<sup>29</sup> But this is not to deny that seen figure and the experience of color are closely related in the actual world. They are constantly conjoined in our normal experience. Reid associates the presentation of color to the mind with the position of the object relative to the perceiver: “[T]he position of the coloured thing is by the laws of my constitution presented to the mind along with the colour” (I 145a/99). He adds, “Visible figure is never presented to the eye but in conjunction

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<sup>29</sup> We might turn this around to ask whether the sensation of color necessarily depends on seeing visible figure. Reid imagines another type of perceptual difficulty with which he denies this direction of dependence. Suppose the eye were so constituted that the rays coming from any one point of the object were not, as they are in our eyes, collected in one point of the retina, but diffused over the whole: it is evident that such an eye as we have supposed would shew the colour of a body as our eyes do, but that it would neither shew figure nor position. (I 145a/99)

This person senses color, but his visual system cannot detect visible figure. Since sensing color can in principle occur without seeing visible figure, color sensations do not reduce to seen figures.

with colour: and, although there be no connection between them from the natures of things, yet, having so invariably kept company together, we are hardly able to disjoin them even in our imagination” (I 143b/97).<sup>30</sup>

We began this section by wanting to know whether there is some thing or property or entity that can meet the constraints on visible figure that we assembled from Reid. By way of my tripartite distinction between types of visible figure, I’ve attempted to present a case for concluding that seen figure, a relational property holding between eyes and (the facing surfaces of) physical objects, is such a property. Furthermore, I do not see the pathway to any other substantially different ‘thing’ that can comport with Reid’s constraints better than seen figure as I have construed it. This seems to me to be the best that Reid can do.

For the sake of argument let’s allow Reid a theory of properties that does the job and examine where he can go from there. Assuming that such a theory can be made coherent, the account of seen figure developed thus far will be sufficient to extricate Reid from the inconsistent set of three propositions stated above. For seen figure is a mind-independent property, unlike the Ideal Theory’s ideas. In this way (C) is falsified and Reid’s rejection of the Ideal Theory is not inconsistent with his theory

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<sup>30</sup> Compare Berkeley’s comments in the *New Theory*, §43 (WGB I, 186-7). Though color and figure are, *ceteris paribus*, constantly conjoined in our experience, this doesn’t imply that the same color experiences attend all seen visible figures. Since Reid was attuned to phenomena like colorblindness and cataracts, he would allow, wisely, that subjects may not experience the *same* color even though their eyes will detect the same visible figure.

of visual perception. And as we will see below, it seems that Reid has good non-*ad hoc* reasons for positing seen figure in order to account for the phenomenon of perceptual relativity.

## 6. AWARENESS OF SEEN FIGURE

Before turning to an appraisal of his theory of visible figure and to his account of perceptual relativity, I want to say a brief word about our conceptual awareness of visible figure. I've mentioned above that Reid does not claim that we regularly perceive<sub>C&B</sub> seen figure and I've cited some texts in support of this. But I haven't yet characterized the way in which we are aware of seen figure. Showing *that* we are aware of seen figure is much easier than showing in what that awareness consists. I suggest that our awareness of visible figure is constituted by a *de re* mental state of apprehension, which falls far short of any doxastic or propositional mental state.

First, consider Reid's distinction between original and acquired perception. Roughly, an acquired perception is a conception and belief produced by the performance of inductive inferences on a large body of original perceptions. An original perception is one in which our minds come into contact with qualities of external objects via our sense faculties. Touch puts us into immediate contact with non-relational, primary qualities of external objects, whereas through vision we are only immediately aware of relational properties of external objects, like visible figure.

We've seen Reid say, in the passage about globes, that "we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only, and their visible place." Picking up this distinction in the *Intellectual Powers* we read that, by sight, "we perceive visible objects to have extension in two dimensions, to have visible figure and magnitude, and a certain angular distance from one another" (E 331b/236).

If we interpret 'perceive' in such passages as perceive<sub>C&B</sub> then Reid contradicts himself. Besides, in these passages and others about original perception, Reid does not invoke any sort of *conceive that* or *perceive that* locution, as we might expect him to do were he using the notion of perceive<sub>C&B</sub>. The most charitable course is to suppose that Reid implicitly invokes some form of non-propositional *de re* visual apprehension with the term "perception" in these and other cases (e.g., at E 313b/200-1 and E 322a/217).

Reid also describes the eye itself as perceiving: "For the eye, perceiving only the position of objects with regard to itself, and not their distance, will see those points in the same visible place which have the same position with regard to the eye, how different soever their distances from it may be" (I 147b/103). With this non-literal use of "perceive" Reid wants to capture the fact that seeing is not merely a purely physical relation, while stopping short of implying that we perceive<sub>C&B</sub> visible figures. Reid makes other comments indicating that we do not perceive<sub>C&B</sub> the visible figures of objects. For example, Reid says, as noted above, "[T]he visible appearance of objects is hardly ever regarded by us. It is not at all made an object of thought or

reflection...” (I 134b-135a/81). While those who have reconstructed Reid’s geometry of visibles have not explicitly addressed the nature of our awareness of seen figure, they seem to have taken it for granted that there is some type of *de re* mental state involved in visual perception (see, e.g., Weldon 1982, 364 and 365).

The preponderance of texts strongly suggests that there is a non-doxastic, non-propositional mode of awareness—a form of Russellian acquaintance—through which we are aware of visible figure. (We can now see why it is that we require a cumbersome term like “perceive<sub>C&B</sub>” given the other quite different senses of “perceive” used throughout Reid’s corpus.) I propose to use the term *visually aware* to refer to this state of awareness in events of visual perception. This form of acquaintance with the mind-independent relational properties of objects is the type of mental state undergirding Reid’s case on behalf of non-inferential perceptual knowledge from vision. It seems to be what Reid is alluding to with the term “apprehension,” which is a type of (‘non-bare’) conception (see, e.g., E 360a/295)

We come full circle here when we realize that the direct apprehension Reid invokes in the context of his theory of perception is the same form of direct apprehension that Reid adopts when criticizing his predecessors’ theory of content. According to our discussion in chapters 1 and 2, Reid claims that we possess *de re* mental states whose intentional content is directly about features of the mind-independent world, and is not about representations of the world. When Reid defines

perception, as he does, to include a conceptual component, it is this rather difficult type of *de re* apprehension that he has in mind.

CHAPTER 6:  
PERCEPTUAL RELATIVITY, DIRECT REALISM  
AND REID'S EMPLOYMENT OF VISIBLE FIGURE

At this point someone may argue that even if Reid's theory of visual perception is not inconsistent with his rejection of the Ideal Theory—and thus in some sense succeeds in being direct—it follows neither (i) that Reid's theory of visual perception is direct in any philosophically important sense of the term, nor (ii) that it will be compatible with an account of non-inferential perceptual *knowledge*. Thankfully Reid employs his account of visible figure in responding to a perceptual relativity argument presented by Hume. By examining that argument we will be able to appreciate the ways in which, entirely on its own terms, Reid's theory of visual perception is and is not direct, and is and is not compatible with accounts of non-inferential perceptual knowledge.

1. HUME'S PERCEPTUAL RELATIVITY ARGUMENT

Let's reconstruct a version of Hume's perceptual relativity argument concerning vision, since this is the version Reid addresses. Our analysis of Reid's



objections to this argument will bring his theory of visual perception into clearer focus.

Contrary to the “universal and primary opinion of all men,” philosophy teaches us, argues Hume in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: it was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason. (E 152/114)<sup>31</sup>

Notice that this is a highly circumscribed argument. Hume purports to show that the object of sight from perspective P is not identical with the object of sight from perspective Q, even though common sense dictates that an agent sees the same object from both points. By Reid’s lights the argument can be put in this way:

- (1) The shape and dimensions of the immediate object of awareness vary relative to the position of my eyes with respect to the object.

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<sup>31</sup> The seeds of this argument occur in the *Treatise*, at 187/125ff. Both Hume’s versions of the argument were available to Reid as of his *Inquiry*, which was originally published in 1764.

For example, the immediate object of my awareness when looking at a table from one hundred yards away has different dimensions than does the immediate object of my awareness when the table is four feet away.

(2) The mind-independent table *ex hypothesi* does not possess shape and dimensions that vary relative to the position of my eyes.

(3) So, the mind-independent table is not an immediate object of awareness.

(4) So, at most we immediately perceive ideas or images.

In the quoted passage above, Hume does not address the epistemological implications of the argument, but we will add a further conclusion on his behalf since Reid takes the epistemic consequences as being of crucial importance.

(5) So, we do not have non-inferential knowledge of mind-independent objects.<sup>32</sup>

Hume uses the terms “present to the mind” and “see” to describe modes of awareness in this argument. Using these terms equivocally may be a source of confusion, particularly from Reid’s point of view. Reid distinguishes between higher-order modes of perceptual awareness—involving conception and belief—from

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<sup>32</sup> Reid focuses on Hume’s argument, but at §44-§49 of the *Essay Towards A New Theory of Vision* (WGB I, 187-189) Berkeley presents a similar argument. As Kenneth Winkler has brought to my attention, though, Berkeley’s conclusion usually differs from the conclusion Reid draws from Hume’s text. At *Principles* §15 Berkeley says that “it must be confessed this method of arguing doth not so much prove that there is no extension or colour in an outward object, as that we do not know by sense which is the true extension or colour of the object” (WGB II, 47).

lower-level *de re* intentional states of mind—involving demonstrative acquaintance.

As it stands, I have formulated (4) so as to contrast sharply with standard theories of Reidian direct perception (which is as Reid took the argument). This contrast is preserved by Pappas' interpretation of Reid.

Pappas renders the perceptual component of what he dubs “Reidian direct realism” as follows: “Typically we immediately perceive objects and their qualities, i.e., we perceive them without perceiving intermediaries” (Pappas 1989, 156). The term “immediately” here (and in Alston's (1989) work on this issue) has a fairly specific meaning that Pappas unearths by contrasting Reid's direct theory with an indirect one: “Indirect perception of external physical objects requires not merely that there be perceived intermediaries, but also that the perception of the physical object should be dependent upon the perception of the intermediary” (Pappas 1989, 159). This constitutes two admirably clear necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for *indirect* perception, which also begin to get at what's philosophically important about the view. These conditions are: (i) in order to perceive the external physical object O, subject S must perceive an intermediary R, “where  $R \neq O$ , and where R is not a part of O nor is O of R” (Pappas 1989, 156-57); and (ii) S's perception of O must be dependent upon S's perception of R. Hume's argument through (4) reputedly shows that the (visual) perception of mind-independent physical bodies must be indirect. Ideas and images clearly are not parts of objects.

Hume doesn't remark on the move from (4) to (5), but perhaps this is only because he thought it obvious, or because he thought that he'd established (5) through other means. In either case, Reid treats this inference with care, thus our interest in it here.

## 2. HYBRID THEORIES OF PERCEPTION

First of all I want to identify an assumption underlying (1) through (3) that I think the advocate of direct perception should roundly reject. Hume assumes that the competing views he considers are purchased wholesale; he assumes that if the table is not the immediate object of sight then it is not immediately sensed whatsoever. Reid rightly thinks this is erroneous. *Even if* my visual awareness of the table is mediated by an idea of the table, it does not follow that I cannot directly sense the table *with my hands*. Simply because the object of sight is not the mind-independent table, it does not follow that the table cannot be an immediate object of some other sense, touch being the best candidate to serve as understudy.

This point reveals a shortcoming in Hume's argument and in analyses of Reid's theory of perception. Reid insists that the process of vision is structured differently than the process of our other sense modalities (even though, under definitions I favor, he offers "direct" theories of perception for both sense modalities). To my knowledge, previous analyses do not take heed of this point, though Wolterstorff's (2001) discussion marks a recent exception. Suppose we clarify

Pappas' perceptual thesis. Where 'perceptually aware,' a companion term to 'visually aware,' refers to *de re* intentional states tokened in vision *and other senses*, Pappas' thesis might read:

(P) Typically we are immediately perceptually aware of objects and their qualities, i.e. we are perceptually aware of objects without being perceptually aware of intermediating objects.

The scope of (P) is unresolved. We have two options, (P') and (P''):

(P') Through *every* sense modality we are typically perceptually aware of mind-independent objects and their qualities directly.

But to hold a substantive direct theory of perception Reid need only affirm:

(P'') Through *at least one* sense modality we are typically perceptually aware of mind-independent objects and their qualities directly.

Hume, on Reid's interpretation, takes himself to have shown

(Q) Through *no* sense modality do we typically perceive mind-independent bodies and their qualities directly.

However, Reid believes Hume does not argue for (Q), but rather only for the negation of (P'). This leaves it open for Reid to affirm (P''), whether or not he actually concedes the falsity of (P').

When setting out the case against Reid at the outset of the paper, I suggested that philosophers may look askance at hybrid theories, and well they might. But I want briefly to dispel the worry that, by arguing that the structure of one sense

modality differs from the structure of the others, Reid's theory of perception becomes implausible. Despite the way in which such an insight complicates one's theory of perception, drawing this distinction is the only way to make theoretical room for phenomenological facts about our senses. These facts are not lost on other philosophers who favor introspective analysis, like Brian O'Shaughnessy. O'Shaughnessy also argues that the sense of vision possesses some important structural differences from the sense of touch:

What must be emphasized about touch is that it involves the use of no mediating field of sensation. There is in touch no analogue of the visual field of visual sensations which mediates the perception of the environment... . The role of bodily sensation in tactile perception is wholly disanalogous to the representational role of visual sensation in visual perception... . [I]n tactile perception no intervening third sensuous entity gets between one and the object. (O'Shaughnessy 1989, 38, 45, 49)

What O'Shaughnessy dubs "visual sensation" Reid calls "visible figure." Finer points of comparison aside, complicating the theory of perception in this way renders one's theory more plausible, not less, since only by doing so can one account for the ways in which the phenomenology of touch and sight differ.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Reid's maneuver, though, is incomplete. He does not establish here that we *do* sense objects directly via touch, but merely that Hume has not shown that we do not. At this juncture Hume could tailor a new perceptual relativity argument to show that we do not sense objects directly via touch. In fact, we can take Hume as voicing such an argument at T 1.4.4 and Reid should be called to task for not explicitly

Note I am not claiming Reid actually endorses a hybrid theory of perception on which one sense is and another is not “direct,” but rather that even if Hume’s argument were entirely successful, one could still endorse a hybrid direct theory of perception. This is the sort of weapon the would-be advocate of direct perception should keep, not in his conceptual toolbox, but in his shoulder holster, for use in desperate philosophical situations.

### 3. THE STRUCTURE OF VISION IS NOT THE STRUCTURE OF TOUCH

Reid attempts to refute Hume’s argument at several stages, first with the distinction between visible and tangible figure occurring at I 135a-b/81-2. When I see a table at ten yards and then at a hundred, its “visible appearance, in its length, breadth, and all its linear proportions, is ten times less in the last case than it is in the first.” Reid has much to say about the placeholder “immediate object of awareness” in (1)—or “table” in Hume’s statement of the argument. It can either refer to the seen figure of the table or to the table itself. The first premise is true if we take “immediate object of awareness” to refer to the seen figure of the table.

Reid invokes his distinction between visible/apparent figure/magnitude from real/tangible figure/magnitude. (About Reid’s terminology see the earlier note.) “The

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dealing with that important argument. Reid, however, *does* believe that our sense of touch puts us in some form of immediate contact with external bodies. He argues that primary qualities like hardness and shape immediately convey to us that the object we sense is extended (I 123a-b/61-2). Hence, Reid would attempt to contest any parallel relativity arguments that Hume would muster.

real magnitude of a line is measured by some known measure of length—as inches, feet or miles” (E 303b/180-1). In contrast, seen figure is a property dependent upon the position of the eyes of the perceiver relative to the external object. In Reid’s terms, this “is measured by the angle which an object subtends at the eye. Supposing two right lines drawn from the eye to the extremities of the object making an angle, of which the object is the subtense, the apparent magnitude is measured by this angle” (E 303b/181). The real figure of the table is measured by different means, sensed by a different faculty and is extended.

With this distinction—and the notion of seen figure it presupposes—Reid charges Hume with equivocation. “This ingenious author has imposed upon himself by confounding real magnitude with apparent magnitude” because, in Hume’s syllogism, “apparent magnitude is the middle term in the first premise; real magnitude in the second” (E 304b/182). Assuming there are mind-independent objects, this point seems sufficiently obvious so as not to merit further discussion. Indeed, to this extent Reid *concurs* with Hume: our eyes do not immediately see the real magnitude of objects, but, Reid adds, we shouldn’t expect them to. “This [real] magnitude is an object of touch only and not of sight; nor could we even have had any conception of it, without the sense of touch” (E 303b/181). Neither a body’s “real magnitude, nor its distance from the eye, are properly objects of sight, any more than the form of a drum or the size of a bell, are properly objects of hearing” (E 304a/182). Seen figures



are the only objects of our visual systems. Once we have separated the wheat from chaff, Reid argues, Hume has only shown that vision is suited to perceive things in a way that touch is not. This is not equivalent to (3), so Reid grants both (1) and (2), but denies (3).

#### 4. "IMMEDIATE OBJECT"

It doesn't follow from this point about equivocation in (1) and (2) that the way in which I am visually aware of things is direct. This, in addition to my comment about hybrid theories, may give the false impression that Reid holds that we directly (or immediately) perceive the objects of touch, but that we do not directly perceive the objects of vision. Instead of this, I claim that Reid's theories of both touch and vision are direct and allow for direct perception *even though* the structure of those two senses differs. (I will not be addressing the structure of the other senses here; suffice it to say that Reid thinks they are more similar to touch than vision.) No doubt there are some definitions of 'immediate' and 'direct' that would render Reid's theory of perception a hybrid theory in accord with the false impression around which I'm steering. Of course, *some* definitions of these terms would have it that *none* of the sense modalities are immediate on Reid's analysis. The many uses of these terms threaten to make the process of showing that Reid endorses a direct theory of perception like leading an elephant through circus tricks: with careful training Reid's views can do amazing things. But I'm no ringmaster. We need to know what is

philosophically important about directness in, for present purposes, the context of visual perception.

Reid imposes the constraints upon visible figure that he does primarily in order to show that visible figure is radically unlike the Ideal Theory's ideas and impressions. Suppose the foregoing analysis of visual perception is correct and that through visual perception I am immediately aware of seen figure and not tangible figure. Reid resolutely argues that it does not follow from this point that we are visually aware of *ideas* or *images* or *sense-data* of objects, as in (4). For seen figure is *not* merely a representational intermediary; it is a relational property between objects and eyes of perceivers. This gives visible figure its mind-independence, public observability and objectivity. Ideas, images and sense-data lack these philosophically important traits. Seen figure is constituted by real (not ideal, not mental) relational properties. The philosophical importance of mind-independence, public-observability and objectivity should be obvious: only because ideas lack them can Hume move from (3), viz. the mind-independent table is not an immediate object of awareness, to (4), viz. at most we immediately perceive ideas or images of mind-independent objects. In other words, since seen visible figure has them, Hume is not entitled to infer (4), even if (3) were true. Reid rightly thinks that securing these traits for the immediate objects of perception constitutes the philosophically important task of a direct theory of visual perception, for only with them does visual awareness bring us into contact with the world.

One lesson to take from Reid's analysis of this part of Hume's argument is that we must be especially careful when using terms like 'immediate object' since they are prone to ambiguity. The way philosophers have defined accounts of direct perception—including definitions attributed to Reid—has forced Reid's actual view out of consideration in much the same way that Hume's argument does. Return to Pappas' discussion, for example. He uses the term "part" in his formal statement of his necessary conditions to imply that if the object of perception is not the mind-independent object or a part of the object, then perception is not direct. This way of putting the point calls for drawing an important distinction on Reid's behalf. While relational properties are not mereological parts of objects, there seems to be a philosophically important sense of "part" at work here on which relational properties would meet the necessary condition. The importance of the term "part" lies in recognizing that if we perceive a property of the object directly, then we can be said to perceive the object directly. This non-mereological sense of "part" must be specified so as to recognize the philosophical importance of our seeing an objective, publicly observable, mind-independent property of objects.

It is well worth observing that Reid takes his response to what I've identified as premise (3) one step further by arguing that the law-like variation in the seen figure of an external object is best explained by an appeal to the objective, mind-independent relation a given seen figure bears to its correspondent tangible figure. In

other words, he thinks that the specific way the immediate objects of visual awareness vary, far from disconfirming his theory, lends it considerable support. He says,

[T]he real table may be placed successively at a thousand different distances, and, in every distance, in a thousand different positions; and it can be determined demonstratively, by the rules of geometry and perspective, what must be its apparent magnitude and apparent figure, in each of those distances and positions. ... [O]pen your eyes and you shall see a table precisely of that apparent magnitude, and that apparent figure, which the real table must have in that distance and in that position. (E 304b/183)

Hume seems wrongly to assume that the relationship between a seen figure and external object is subjective and mind-dependent. But to what could they appeal to account for this amazing regularity? Reid counters by arguing that the systematic variation of the visible figure is evidence *for* the objectivity of this relationship.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This way of clarifying Reid's point focuses on the nature of the "immediate *object*." One might also be concerned (though less so) with the use of "immediate" in describing Reid's account of perception. Despite the tendency in contemporary interpretations of Reid's theory of perception to emphasize the concept of immediacy, Reid rarely uses the term. When he does use it, he often uses it in different ways than do his commentators, in whose hands "immediate perception" implies that there are no mental objects that (necessarily?) come between an agent's state of awareness and a physical body. It is difficult to show that Reid uses "immediately" in this manner. Sometimes Reid refers to evidence that is "discerned immediately" and to the "immediate belief" produced in perception (E 258a-b/96-7). In other words, when modifying "belief" with "immediate" Reid often means that (a) beliefs are produced quickly and irresistibly. He says, for example, that in perception we have "an irresistible conviction and belief of its cause" (E 258a/96). Failing that, Reid frequently means to convey by "immediate belief" that (b) perceptual beliefs are not brought about by "a train of reasoning and argumentation" (E 259b/99).

## 5. NON-INFERENTIAL PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Having shown that (3) does not follow from (1) and (2), and that (4) would not follow from (3), were (3) established, Hume cannot get to (5), viz. that we do not have non-inferential knowledge of mind-independent objects. At least, if Hume wants to claim (5) is true, he must argue for (5) on the basis of premises other than those having to do with perceptual relativity. And he might well attempt to do this by arguing that we have so attenuated Reid's theory that he cannot secure the epistemological benefits of a direct theory of visual perception. Let's call the first and failed route to (5) the 'perceptual relativity' route and this new alternative the 'epistemological' route.

One way to understand the epistemological route is as follows. Even if visible figure is external and publicly observable, it does not follow that visible figure will necessarily represent the tangible figure accurately. It may seem, for example, that there is no logically necessary connection between my awareness of the seen figure of

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Definition (a) is *temporal* and (b) is *epistemological*. Yet most commentators have something different in mind, namely (c) that external bodies are perceived without mediation by other perceived objects. If our driving concern is to clarify Reid's theory of perception, then we must undertake further work to show that there is such a sense of immediacy (even if it doesn't go by that name) at work in Reid's corpus. I think this can be done. We began, for example, with a passage that is at least in the ball park; I quoted Reid saying that the Ideal Theory "leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis. . . [t]hat nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it" (I 96a/4). But finding textual entitlement to this use of "immediate" requires argument.

St. Paul's Cathedral and the present existence of the Cathedral. Since there is no necessary connection, Hume might argue, it follows that by being aware of a seen figure of St. Paul's Cathedral I am not justified in believing in the existence of the Cathedral. Since reaping epistemological dividends is arguably Reid's central purpose in adopting a direct theory of perception, this line of reasoning concludes, the foregoing account of visible figure must be rejected, or at least recognized as dissonant with Reid's central philosophical motivations.

Let me begin by saying a few things about non-inferential perceptual knowledge generally, after which I'll address non-inferential perceptual knowledge from vision in particular. First of all, the epistemological route to (5) requires some assumptions about knowledge that must be explicitly stated. First, one might think that Hume claims (i) that there must be necessary connections between a mind-independent object and the representational content of a belief in order to have non-inferential knowledge of that object. Reid also associates a type of internalism about knowledge with Hume. This might come in two crude forms: (ii) that each perceiver must show that there are such connections, or (iii) that someone or other must show that there are such connections. Theses like (ii) would only be affirmed by card-carrying internalists about knowledge, and Reid isn't in that club. The majority of interpreters is correct to take Reid as endorsing—probably founding—a form of externalism about perceptual knowledge that denies requirements like (ii). According to most forms of externalism, we can acquire non-inferential knowledge of our

perceptual environment. It is not clear whether Reid takes Hume to endorse both (ii) and (iii) or merely (iii). But Reid explicitly refuses to oblige Hume on (iii) by arguing that our faculties cannot be non-circularly proven reliable.<sup>35</sup>

As for (i), Reid would no doubt deny that the connection between object and belief state must be unfailing and necessary in order to have non-inferential knowledge of such an object. But Reid seems to claim that his account meets such a condition anyway. For on the basis of the success of Reid's geometry of visibles and the correlation between visible figure and tangible figure, seen figures model the real figures of physical objects necessarily. They inherit this trait from the geometrical figures from which they are built. This correspondence between visible figure and tangible figure, in Reid's terms, "results *necessarily* from the nature of the two senses" (E 326a; my emphasis). In this way sight and touch reliably converge epistemically, contrary to the views of Reid's predecessors.

Reid does—at least to some small degree—characterize the non-inferential nature of perceptual knowledge positively. He argues that the mind typically becomes habituated to this necessary correspondence. Since the relations between visible and tangible figure are geometrically necessary and confirmed by daily experience, our mind instantiates a rule (I 121-2/59-61). This results in what Reid calls "suggestion"—a relation that obviates the need to perform inferences in order to

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<sup>35</sup> See I 129-30/70-71 and E 183b/169. See Alston 1993 for a fine Reidian response to this demand.

have knowledge of perceptual beliefs. This is true of all our sense modalities, including vision. He says,

[T]he visible appearance of things in my room varies almost every hour... . A book or a chair has a different appearance to the eye, in every different distance and position: yet we conceive it to be still the same; and, overlooking the appearance, we immediately conceive the real figure, distance, and position of the body, of which its visible or perspective appearance is a sign and indication. (I 135a/81)

Reid's general reticence to prognosticate about knowledge will not obscure the fact that in passages like this he presumes that we are warranted in believing that the objects, of which we are visually aware, are as we think they are. We are warranted in this on the basis of the suggestion relations between seen figure and beliefs about tangible figure that our minds instantiate through habituation. (In other words, visible figure conforms to our constraint (e), that seen figure regularly suggests our perceptions<sub>SC&B</sub> of bodies.) Interderivability underwrites the reliability of immediately suggested, non-inferential beliefs about tangible figures. Contrary to (5), Reid is warranted in concluding that we typically arrive at non-inferential knowledge of physical objects by being aware of visible figures.

Naturally, defending a robust account of non-inferential perceptual knowledge is not this easy. First of all, one might argue that if we are aware of seen figure, then knowledge of visual perceptual beliefs depends upon defending the *de re* acquaintance



thesis I have earlier attributed to Reid, and I won't embark on such a defense here. Second, though, is a host of more familiar objections, about which I can say a few things in partial defense of Reid. For example, we can see the visible figure of celestial bodies at great distances even if those bodies have vanished long ago. This causes *prima facie* trouble not only for his theory of non-inferential perceptual knowledge, but also for his interderivability thesis. We saw Reid claim that "necessarily" seen figure accurately represents tangible figure, but this is strictly speaking false, as such cases show. Furthermore, hallucination cases seek to show that the figures of items of which we take ourselves to be visually aware do not isomorphically represent the facing surfaces of tangible figures, which would also seem to undercut Reid's thesis of non-inferential perceptual knowledge through vision.

Several responses to these lines of criticism come to mind. First, that visible figures of objects are sometimes misleadingly projected by dead stars should not move Reid. Yes, Reid was unaware of the effects of the speed of light on visual perception, but we should not tailor a theory of visible figure to exceptional phenomena at the expense of adequately explaining typical phenomena. The same may hold true of hallucinations. In each case Reid would invoke the environmental condition of his *ceteris paribus* clause. These cases are not cases in which my faculties are functioning properly in a truth-conducive environment, thus they fail to meet Reid's necessary condition for knowledge, or, to be exact, for the "evidence of sense." He says that he "shall take it for granted that the evidence of sense, *when the*

*proper circumstances concur*, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief' (E 328b/229; my emphasis). Second, about the perception of stellar objects (or rather, the light they have emitted or reflected), Reid might add that the visible figures projected from these bodies are the merest points of light, lacking the rich geometrical figures possessed by other seen figures. Even if we could know that a certain distant star presently exists as we see its light, we could derive nothing from its seen figure as presented to bare eyes.

This sketch of his response will seem unsatisfactory to those who do not share Reid's epistemic intuitions, of course. While I will not attempt a large scale defense of externalism about perceptual knowledge in this book, I will say more about Reid's account of perceptual knowledge in chapter 8.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Given Reid's circuitous descriptions of visible figure codified through our constraints, and given the dialectical uses to which Reid puts visible figure, the preceding account marks a plausible way to interpret Reid and explain the texts at issue. Though Reid does not to his satisfaction determine its Aristotelian category of being (I 144b/98), I have argued that we must discriminate between three types of visible figure: objects of geometrical analysis, objects of which we are visually aware, and objects of perception<sub>C&B</sub>. Seen figure—the immediate object of visual awareness—is the most important of the three. I showed that this distinction and my

analysis of seen figure help to improve upon previous explanations. I then argued that, despite appearances, our account of visual perception is able to preserve the relevant philosophical difference between Reid's theory and the Ideal Theory. This is because being immediately aware of seen figure is not relevantly similar to being immediately aware of the Ideal Theory's ideas since seen figures are mind-independent and objective. Reid can maintain his commitment to the psychological and epistemic immediacy of the objects of visual perception while avoiding pitfalls of the Ideal Theory.

CHAPTER 7:  
CAUSES, CONCEPTS AND QUALITIES:  
REID'S INHERITANCE FROM LOCKE, AND HOW HE OVERCOMES IT

Reid's views on qualities are confusing because he read Locke before putting pen to paper. If we attend to the vagaries of Locke's distinction we'll illuminate Reid's, and we'll be able to understand why it is that Reid's approach to metaphysics makes his distinction so intriguing.

Reid believes an adherence to the Theory of Ideas is the major cause of confusion in Locke's analysis of secondary qualities. In §1 I describe this confusion in Locke by characterizing three very different, though textually plausible, interpretations of Locke on secondary qualities. This will enable us, in §2, to understand how Reid structures the debate about qualities and our perception of them. In §3 and §4 I describe Reid's inchoate analysis of primary and secondary qualities. I devote special attention to whether Reidian secondary qualities are dispositions in §5. I argue that because of problems with Locke's metaphysical distinctions, Reid adopts an epistemic approach. I express this more formally in §6.

I develop this analysis by examining some potential problems with it. Others have criticized what they have taken to be Reid's distinction. One expert suggests

Reid's distinction collapses, and another claims that it implies a wrongheaded phenomenology of visual experience. In §7 and §8 I show that the present interpretation Reid's analysis of qualities substantially avoids those charges. However, there is a more weighty criticism that I will raise in §9. Reid's primary/secondary quality distinction implies that we cannot directly perceive secondary qualities (on Reid's analysis of directness), a result which threatens the coherence of his direct theory of perception.

### 1. THREE VERSIONS OF LOCKE

Idealists, representative realists and direct realists can in principle agree that apprehension of a secondary quality is a causal process. They differ, though, with respect to the cause (an idea in God's mind, an idea of an object, or an object) and the effect (an idea, a sensation or a concept)—and about whether there is any cognitive intermediary. Just as important is their disagreement concerning what, in this mix of causes and effects, is to be dubbed 'the secondary quality.' This is the inheritance of Locke for he is easily interpreted as using the term 'secondary quality' to refer to the *cause* of the process, its *effect* and, on the most common interpretation, *the process itself*—i.e., the relation between cause and effect. To ground our examination of Reid I will state these interpretations of Locke (without evaluation).

First, Peter Alexander argues secondary qualities are the physical causes, or bases, of sensations for Locke. There are two routes that lead him to this conclusion.

The first concerns Locke's use of language, the second Locke's relation to Boyle. 'Red' and 'sweet' and other such terms, for Locke, typically refer to our ideas of secondary qualities rather than secondary qualities themselves (Locke 1975, 405-6). Alexander says, "colours, tastes, odours and sounds are not, for Locke, secondary qualities, but sensations; secondary qualities are colourless, tasteless, odourless and soundless textures of objects" (1977, 212) Careful attention to the preceding six chapters of Book II reveal that Locke is engaged in a sustained attempt to clarify prior thinking about qualities and our ideas of qualities, argues Alexander. The central factor contributing to misrepresentations of Locke's view is the often overlooked fact that through §7 Locke is engaged in a "developing argument" in which he has adopted, for better or worse, the terms of his interlocutors (1977, 214-5). This compels Alexander to distinguish two uses of 'idea.' Ideas "can be thought of as mental entities, when they must be in perceivers, or they can be thought of as contents, when they can qualify either perceivers or objects" (1977, 215). In addition, Alexander must also distinguish two senses of 'secondary quality.' Some of Locke's uses of the term refer to sensations of secondary qualities, but typically the term refers to insensible, corpuscularian textures of physical bodies.

By drawing upon Locke's debt to Boyle, Alexander finds a second source for this interpretation. Locke's frequent appeal to 'texture'—originally Boyle's term—favors his interpretation because texture for Boyle is an insensible physical property of corpuscles. Texture fails the inseparability test that Locke thinks that primary

qualities pass. (Recall Locke's thought experiment at II.viii.9 about infinitely dividing a kernel of wheat.) On corpuscularianism a single corpuscle will not have texture, so texture is not a primary quality. This aids Alexander because it seems to indicate that his analysis of secondary qualities will not imply the dissolution of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Alexander has marshaled an interpretation of Locke according to which secondary qualities are physical properties of objects that seem to cause sensations, an interpretation with some textual plausibility. According to Alexander, however, Locke sometimes uses terms we associate with secondary qualities to refer to our *concepts* of secondary qualities. This point may be used to usurp Alexander's interpretation in favor of a second. Namely, one might think that secondary qualities are either conceptual or sensorial in nature. In other words, they are not physical bases of sensation events, nor are they the processes or dispositions by which those ideas are caused.

Georges Dicker (1977) and Jonathan Bennett (1971) see the textual reasons for such an interpretation, despite the fact that they both reject it in the interests of charity. Consider Locke's description of manna at II.viii.18. Manna "has a power to produce the sensations of sickness, and sometimes of acute pains, or gripings in us. That these *ideas of sickness and pain are not in the manna*, but effects of its operations on us, and are no where when we feel them not: this also every one readily agrees to." The upshot of this passage is that "these *ideas*," presumably the ideas of sweetness

and whiteness, and of sickness and pain, are “all effects of the operations of manna, on the several parts of our bodies” by the primary qualities (Locke 1975, 138). The ostensive reason Locke denies the vulgar view that the quality of pain is in the manna rests on the point that the idea (i.e., the sensation or concept) of pain is not in the manna.

Dicker remarks, “Locke is arguing that sweetness and whiteness are not really in manna, on the grounds that these qualities, *like other ideas* such as pain and sickness, are merely effects in a perceiver of the primary qualities of manna’s atomic parts....” (1977, 465). If this is correct, Dicker continues, Locke “assumes that secondary-quality ideas are identical with secondary qualities themselves....” (Ibid.). Bennett comes to the same conclusion for much the same reason (1971, 115). Irrespective of the truth of this interpretation, it is one that makes good sense of a few critical sections of Locke’s discussion of secondary qualities to a degree that alternatives do not.

The third interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities has received the most adherence, so I need to say less about it. This dispositional interpretation trades upon Locke’s remark that, “2ndly, such qualities, are nothing in the objects themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities... . These I call secondary qualities” (1975, 135). Locke’s description of secondary qualities as “powers” throughout this chapter of the *Essay* lends credence to this interpretation.



The concept of a power or disposition has received thorough analysis because contemporary metaphysicians attempt to carry Locke's banner. One recent example of such a thesis about secondary qualities comes from Janet Levin. She says, "Lockean dispositionalism about color, as I will understand it, is the view that the colors of objects are dispositions of their surfaces to produce perceptions of certain sorts, under standard conditions, in normal perceivers" (Levin 2000, 151). This is distinct from the second interpretation of secondary qualities—as sensations—according to which secondary qualities are the effects of physical properties of objects. It also differs from the first construal, on which secondary qualities are physical or microphysical properties of objects. According to a dispositional reading of Locke, secondary qualities are a special type of property describable as a state of affairs, namely: were an object O to produce sensation S in conditions C for person P, O would possess a secondary quality Q.

Locke's promiscuously interpretable discussion of secondary qualities forms the backdrop for Reid's entrance into the debate.

## 2. TWO PROBLEMS FOR REID FROM LOCKE

There are two axes on which these interpretations differ about how we apprehend qualities, and about the nature of secondary qualities themselves. This leaves two corresponding problems for Reid.

The first substantive problem concerns the distinction between sensation and perception. On the traditional, dispositional interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities, secondary qualities are dispositions to cause ideas in us. But these ideas are underdescribed since secondary qualities frequently cause two different mental states in perceivers—a qualitative state and a propositional attitude. About this Reid says that Locke “thought it necessary to introduce the Theory of Ideas, to explain the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and by that means, as I think, perplexed and darkened it” (E 317a/207).

Reid illustrates this confusion with an example. When I smell a rose, there are psychological phenomena meriting explanation. The perceiver possesses a mental state that has intentional and propositional content, which for Reid is a *perception*. Yet there is also a qualitative mental event the perceiver experiences, a *sensation*. This complex event of smelling the rose—an event that includes perceptual and sensory components—is caused by certain physical qualities of the rose:

The object of my perception, in this case, is that quality in the rose which I discern by the sense of smell. Observing that the agreeable sensation is raised when the rose is near, and ceases when it is removed, I am led, by my nature, to conclude some quality to be in the rose, which is the cause of this sensation. This quality in the rose is the object perceived; and that act of my mind by which I have the conviction and belief of this quality, is what in this case I call perception... . (E 310a-b/194)

Our relation to the rose and its qualities is two-fold: we can perceive the rose (or a quality of the rose), and we can sense (have a sensation of) the rose or its qualities. Locke spoke of ideas and did not explicitly employ a distinction between sensation and perception. Where Locke did not clarify the two-fold effect of sensing a rose, Reid did.

From Reid's point of view, the second deficiency with Locke's distinction concerns the nature of dispositional relations. A dispositional view of secondary qualities will identify them with our sensory (not perceptual) relation to qualities of objects. Reid is aware of some oblique motivations for this view. He recognizes a syntactic relationship between sensation terms and secondary quality terms. To complete the previous quotation about the rose, he adds, "...But it is here to be observed, that the sensation I feel, and the quality in the rose which I perceive, are both called by the same name" (E 310b/194). Nonetheless, Reid believes there is both a specific and a principled problem with Locke's view (on the dispositional interpretation).

Though there is a systematic relation between certain properties of physical objects and certain properties of our mental lives, Reid does not believe this *explains* secondary qualities. Reid criticizes Hume's parallel appeal to associative relations on these grounds, saying:

If a philosopher should undertake to account for the force of gunpowder in the discharge of a musket, and then tell us gravely that the cause of this

phaenomenon is the drawing of the trigger, we should not be much wiser by this account. As little are we instructed in the cause of memory, by being told that it is caused by a certain impression on the brain. For, supposing that impression on the brain were as necessary to memory as the drawing of the trigger is to the discharge of the musket, we are still as ignorant as we were how memory is produced; so that, if the cause of memory, assigned by this theory, did really exist, it does not in any degree account for memory. (E 354a/281)

Observing that certain qualities in objects regularly cause certain mental events is platitudinous, and neither illuminates the nature of those qualities nor explains how to bridge the chasm between the mental and physical worlds. Likewise, to stipulate that secondary qualities are relations between certain physical qualities and mental events is to avoid giving a philosophical explanation of secondary qualities. Reid knew that a dispositional account was one legitimate interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities, but he thinks this marks a return to medieval explanatory practices. (This is not to say that Reid thinks there are no dispositional properties; rather, discovering that certain properties are dispositional does not illuminate our understanding of them.)

This point requires Reid to shift the nature of the debate from metaphysics to epistemology, which marks a thoroughly contemporary meta-philosophical tendency in Reid's work. In the context of criticizing Locke Reid says, "The account I have

given of this distinction is founded upon no hypothesis. Whether our notions of primary qualities are direct and distinct, those of the secondary relative and obscure, is a matter of fact, of which every man may have certain knowledge by attentive reflection upon them” (E 314b/B 202-3). (By “hypothesis,” Reid is at least referring to Locke’s adoption of the Theory of Ideas, if not also to his corpuscularianism.) Instead of focusing on *what* qualities are, Reid attends to our *notions* of what qualities are.

### 3. NOTIONS OF PRIMARY QUALITIES

Reid sees two philosophically important ways to distinguish our notions of secondary and primary qualities. Our notions of qualities differ (i) in the means by which they are formed, and (ii) in their content. Let’s first examine how Reid believes our notions of qualities can be distinguished by their formation.

The following passage marks Reid’s most explicit statement about the distinction between primary and secondary qualities:

I answer, That there appears to be a real foundation for the distinction; and it is this—that our senses give us a direct and a distinct notion of the primary qualities, and inform us what they are in themselves. But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a relative and obscure notion. They inform us only, that they are qualities that affect us in a certain manner—that is, produce

in us a certain sensation; but as to what they are in themselves, our senses leave us in the dark. (E 313b/B 201)

Using this passage we can move from the ground up by investigating the ways our notions of primary and secondary qualities differ.

Our notions of *both* primary and secondary qualities are cued by sensations. Reid describes the process of the movement from inputs to the nervous system to certain sensations and onward to contentful mental states. He follows Berkeley by dubbing this the process of *suggestion*. Suggestion relations are non-inferential, quasi-causal relations for Berkeley, who says, “To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. So likewise, to be suggested is one thing, and to be inferred another. Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding” (WGB §42, 265). He adds in the *New Theory* that because of the relations between sensations and perceptual beliefs, “there has grown an habitual or customary connexion between those two sorts of ideas...” (WGB §17, 174). As an idealist, the cause and effect that are bound together by suggestion are different for Berkeley than for Reid, but there are obvious and important similarities.<sup>36</sup>

Reid says, of the transfer from sensations to judgments, that this is occasioned either by inferences or by what he calls “judgments of nature.” With Locke’s

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<sup>36</sup> To simplify, we can consider the suggestion relation causal in nature, where the cause is an input into our sensory systems and the effect is a sensation. For Reid’s most explicit discussion of suggestion, see I 110-111/36-38. For further treatment of Reid’s theory of suggestion and its similarity with Berkeley’s, see Beanblossom 1975, and Ben Zeev 1989.

definition of knowledge in Book IV clearly in mind, Reid describes these as “judgments not got by comparing ideas, and perceiving agreements and disagreements, but immediately inspired by our constitution” (I 110b/37). This makes it seem as though suggestion serves some type of epistemic function. But elsewhere in this same passage Reid indicates that his use of the suggestion relation is intended to account for the origins of our perceptual concepts, not our perceptual knowledge. Reid puts suggestion to this use because (i) he repudiates resemblance as serving any explanatory role in a theory of perception, and (ii) he concurs with Berkeley that the process whereby we move from sensation to perception is not cognitive. According to Descartes, the impoverished qualitative content of sensations is only capable of generating the rich content of perceptual states in virtue of a highly cognitive step between them, a step which he posits. But Berkeley, and Reid after him, believe that the process is not cognitive in this way, but is instead much more natural and automatic.

Thus they claim that a suggestion relation, not a process of reasoning, bridges the gap between our perceptual experience and our perceptual contents. Reid says that “we owe many of our simple notions which are neither impressions nor ideas, as well as many original principles of belief” to suggestion. When we hear a certain sound we immediately call to mind the notion of a coach passing by, but there isn’t

“the least similitude between the sound we hear and the coach we imagine and believe to be passing” (I 111a/38).

Reid emphasizes that it is only in the case of primary qualities that sensations suggest qualities without themselves being objects of conscious apprehension. “When a primary quality is perceived,” says Reid, “the sensation immediately leads our thought to the quality signified by it, and is itself forgot” (E 315b/204). Sensations do not impugn the directness of our perception of primary qualities. Our sensations “immediately” lead our minds onward to notions of primary qualities, which contrasts with the formation of our notions of secondary qualities. More formally, P’s notion of quality Q is a notion of a primary quality only if P apprehends Q, and no intermediary is necessarily apprehended in the process.

Unlike the formation of the notion of sphericity, the formation of the notion of the smell of a bowling ball, for example, proceeds through an intermediating step. In order to form the notion of a ball’s smell, *ceteris paribus*, we must attend to the sensation—the sensory experience—that properties of the ball suggest to my mind through my olfactory system. There is a correlation between our notions of secondary qualities and our experiences of certain sensations. I needn’t feel the bowling ball in my hands in order to possess the notion of sphericity. In contrast, in the actual world (a qualification to which we will return), the causal sequence resulting in notions of secondary qualities like smells must have, at some point, proceeded



through a conscious awareness or perception of a sensation. Notions of secondary qualities are indirect in that sense.

The foregoing marks how notions of primary qualities are direct, by Reid's lights. While directness concerns the *formation* of our concepts of qualities, Reid also argues that the *contents* of our conceptions of primary and secondary qualities differ in crucial respects, which marks the second means by which Reid draws his distinction. (For present purposes I am taking the notions of *forming concepts* and *acquiring contents* through perception as primitive, though I have analyzed these notions as they appear in Reid in chapter 8.) The contents of notions of primary qualities bear two traits that notions of secondary qualities lack: clarity and distinctness.

Reid says that notions of primary qualities are distinct, but he does not explain distinctness in the context of his discussion of qualities. Furthermore, studying Reid's discussion of simple apprehension, where distinctness also plays an important role, does not shed much light on this notion (E 366-67/306-9). He may have a Cartesian notion of distinctness in mind according to which it refers to the way one apprehends a quality by distinguishing it from its surroundings and isolating it in one's mind.<sup>37</sup> In any case, Reid says that the distinctness of our

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<sup>37</sup> In the *Principles*, Descartes says, "I call a perception 'distinct' if, as well as being clear, the perception is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear" (1984 §45, 207-8). The *cogito* conforms to this requirement, but the statement 'I have a pain in my foot' does not. Reid concurs with Descartes when Descartes says that the sensation of pain is clear and not distinct because "people commonly confuse this perception with an obscure judgement they

notions of primary qualities “enables us to reason demonstratively about them to a great extent” (E 315a/203).

Clarity, not distinctness, is the more important means by which the contents of our notions of qualities differ. Reid explains that when a notion of some quality is clear, then “the thing itself we understand perfectly” (E 314a/201). He continues, “It is evident, therefore, that of the primary qualities we have a clear and distinct notion; we know what they are, though we may be ignorant of their causes” (E 314a/201). (I won’t speculate on the strength of this epistemic relation other than to say that it seems to imply incorrigibility.)

Though Reid focuses on the content of our notions, he does not create a framework for capturing the different degrees of clarity with precision. I’ll refer to our notions of primary qualities as notions of the *essential natures* of the qualities, though by that I only mean what Reid does by saying that those notions are of qualities as they are “in themselves.” Essential natures contrast with what I will refer to as the *scientific natures*, i.e. microphysical structures, of qualities.

Importantly, both essential and scientific natures are physical in character, though operate at different levels of description. Reid says hardness is the cohesion of the parts of a body, specifying its essential nature, but to specify its scientific nature we must say something about the density of molecules in the body. We shall see

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make concerning the nature of something which they think exists in the painful spot and which they suppose to resemble the sensation of pain” (1984 §46, 208).

that, with respect to secondary qualities, our concepts capture neither their essential natures nor their scientific natures.

One way to develop this notion of clarity is by examining Reid's description of what he calls 'manifest' qualities in the *Intellectual Powers* against the backdrop of what I am dubbing 'essential natures.' At the highest order of classification, Reid distinguishes qualities as being either *manifest* (apparent to the senses) or *occult* (occluded from the senses). Primary qualities are a species of manifest qualities, while secondary qualities are a species of occult qualities. One defining characteristic of this distinction, a characteristic that also differentiates secondary from primary qualities, is that the "nature of [primary qualities] is manifest even to sense..." (E 322a/217). According to Reid, hardness, a primary quality, is a high degree of cohesion of the parts of a body. While that describes the essential nature of hardness, it leaves the scientific nature of the physical bonds between parts of bodies open to discovery by science. He says, "the business of the philosopher with regard to [manifest qualities], is not to find out their nature, which is well known, but to discover the effects produced by their various combinations" (E 322a/217). In other words, the realm of further research on primary qualities lies in their empirical, scientific analysis. In contrast, an occult quality is one whose existence is, but whose nature is not, apparent to us through sense perception. Neither the essential nor the scientific nature of occult qualities

is apparent to us via unaided sense perception. By Reid's use of "nature" in these passages, he does not refer to the physical or microphysical constitution of the quality, but rather to the essential nature of the quality.

In contrast to primary qualities, the essential nature of color is occluded from us; by forming notions of colors from experience we do not thereby know of what their essential natures consist. The fact that we have clear notions of primary qualities indicates that the essential natures of those qualities are manifest and obvious to us through our senses. "Every man capable of reflection may easily satisfy himself that he has a perfectly clear and distinct notion of extension, divisibility, figure, and motion" (E 314a/B 201).

For the record, in the *Inquiry* Reid enumerates extension, figure, motion, hardness and softness, and roughness and smoothness as primary qualities (I 123a-b/62).

In the *Intellectual Powers* he describes Locke's primary qualities as including "extension, divisibility, figure, motion, solidity, hardness, softness and fluidity" (E 313b/201). Locke would not endorse this list for it substitutes motion for mobility and divisibility for number, not to mention that it includes some qualities Locke does not (namely hardness, softness and fluidity). Reid proceeds to discuss this latter list as though it marked his own distinction, but its differences with the *Inquiry* are obvious, if unimportant.

Thus we come to a second necessary condition on the conception of primary qualities: P's notion of Q at t is clear only if, of Q's essential nature E, P knows

that E is the essential nature of Q.<sup>38</sup> Reid does not perfectly understand the essential nature of blue, for example, so his notion of blue is not clear. Thus, blue is not a primary quality for Reid.

#### 4. NOTIONS OF SECONDARY QUALITIES

Since our notions of primary qualities are more direct and clear than our notions of secondary qualities, it is no surprise that Reid largely defines secondary qualities in contrasting terms. As in §3, I will examine first the formation then the content of, in this case, notions of secondary qualities.

Our notions of secondary qualities are “relative” and “occult.” He explains, “To call a thing occult, if we attend to the meaning of the word, is rather modestly to confess ignorance, than to cloak it” (E 321b/216). With that in the open, I’ll nonetheless attempt to explain Reid’s analysis of our notions of secondary qualities.

Sensations of secondary qualities are distracting and forceful in ways that sensations of primary qualities typically are not. When I smell an apple pie in the oven, I mentally attend to the olfactory sensation. This is not to deny that the

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<sup>38</sup> This entails neither that all clear notions are direct nor the converse, though it is at least probable that clear notions will be direct. Direct notions will not be clear since I may form a direct notion of some Q (without apprehending Q by means of its effects) and not understand the essential nature of Q ‘perfectly.’ This applies to my notion of things like imaginary numbers, transmissions and the ontological argument: they are direct (so I would argue), but are not clear.

sensation signifies something. It does (an apple pie) and Reid knows that; rather, the smell itself is an object of immediate attention in the way that the sensations of pressure on the keys of a computer are not. So the formation of our notions of secondary qualities is mediated by apprehension of sensations, i.e. such notions are not formed directly.

Reid alights on the linguistic behavior of secondary quality terms to describe another difference with primary qualities. This close relationship between sensation and secondary quality obviously coheres with our ordinary, ambiguous use of terms like ‘smell’ and ‘taste’. Terms like ‘smell’ are ambiguous since they can refer to sensations and to properties of physical objects. However, Reid treats terms for colors as exceptional, though there is some disagreement on this point.<sup>39</sup> He says, for example, “That idea which we have called *the appearance of colour*, suggests the conception and belief of some unknown quality in the body, which occasions the idea; and it is to this quality, and not to the idea, that we give the name of *colour*” (I 137b-138a/86; cf. 137a/85 and I 142b/95).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Smith does not think that there is a difference; he thinks that color terms are also ambiguous in Reid (1990, 141). Anthony Pitson agrees that they are “ambiguous” (2001, 18; but at 20-21 Pitson also says that, for Reid, “the term “colour” *never* refers to the perceptual experience associated with our awareness of the quality itself”). In contrast, Lorne Falkenstein claims, rightly by my lights, that Reidian color terms refer only to the physical causes of qualitative experiences (2000, 322; cf. 319).

<sup>40</sup> However, Falkenstein believes that this feature of Reid’s theory necessitates a misleading semantics. This “sits uncomfortably with natural assumptions about the origin and use of words.” “Reid is wrong,” he says, “about what people mean when

Because of the ties between sensations and secondary qualities, the contents of our notions of secondary qualities are only of unknown causes of sensations, and not of essential natures of qualities. Echoing Berkeley, Reid gives voice to this stark contrast between our concepts of secondary and primary qualities:

The sensations of heat and cold are perfectly known; for they neither are, nor can be, anything else than what we feel them to be; but the qualities in bodies which we call *heat* and *cold*, are unknown. They are only conceived by us, as

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they use colour terms...” (2000 314, 325). Falkenstein is correct to think that something is amiss in Reid’s semantics for color terms, but it can be accounted for by identifying two of Reid’s motivations.

We can understand Reid’s penchant for wanting to put secondary qualities back into the world in light of the Theory of Ideas, which was prone to locate qualities exclusively in the mind. Reid says,

Des Cartes, Malebranche, and Locke...made the secondary qualities mere sensations, and the primary ones resemblances of our sensations. They maintained, that colour, sound, and heat, are not any thing in bodies, but sensations of the mind: at the same time, they acknowledged some particular texture or modification of the body, to be the cause or occasion of those sensations; but to this modification they gave no name. (I 131a/73)

Ideal theorists were convinced that we only directly perceived ideas when, according to Reid, we directly perceive mind-independent objects and qualities. Hence, Reid has principled reason to reject any heavy-handed demand to accommodate ordinary language in this particular dialectic.

Reid is also motivated to adopt his semantics for color terms by philosophical concerns. There is something normative about our use of color terms, and this cannot be accounted for by appeal to their ordinary language usage. We say things like “roses are red.” This implicitly presupposes that we are not talking about our visual experiences themselves. This statement is not falsified, Reid argues, when I see a red rose (i.e., a rose whose color is red in standard conditions) through green glasses and it appears a different color to me. (I 137a-b/85) The fact that our experience of color varies so systematically with lighting conditions is evidence not that colors are nothing more than mind-dependent sense-data, but that there are important features of color that are mind-independent and that elude our simple visual experience. For these two reasons Reid is at least partially exonerated from Falkenstein’s criticism.

unknown causes or occasions of the sensations to which we give the same names. (I 119b/54)

According to Reid, the “very essence of [a sensation] consists in its being felt” (E 289b/156). In his correspondence with Hume, published in the Brooks edition of the *Inquiry*, Reid is yet more explicit: “I can attend to what I feel, and the sensation is nothing else, nor has any other qualities than what I feel it to have. Its *esse* is *sentiri*, and nothing can be in it that is not felt” (258). We have no knowledge of the scientific nature of secondary qualities because we only conceive of them “as unknown causes.”<sup>41</sup>

Now we see what Reid means by dubbing notions of secondary qualities “relative.” Our notions of secondary qualities are relational only, and are not wholly constituted by intrinsic qualitative mental states. Because secondary qualities are not sense-data, for Reid, we can have a notion of the smell of a rose without being privy to the essential nature of the smell of the rose, let alone its scientific nature. (Note that our *notions*, not the qualities themselves, are relational in this sense.) He says,

The quality in the rose is something which occasions the sensation in me; but what that something is, I know not. My senses give me no information upon this

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<sup>41</sup> That said, Reid is optimistic about acquiring knowledge of their scientific natures: “No man can pretend to set limits to the discoveries that may be made by human genius and industry, of such connections between the latent and the sensible qualities of bodies. A wide field here opens to our view, whose boundaries no man can ascertain, of improvements that may hereafter be made in the information conveyed to us by our senses” (E 334a/241).



point. 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. The relation which this unknown quality bears to the sensation with which nature hath connected it, is all I learn from the sense of smelling; but this is evidently a relative notion. The same reasoning will apply to every secondary quality. (E 314b/202)

From my sense of smelling I only learn *that* physical qualities in objects bear a causal relation to olfactory sensations, and nothing about the particular physical qualities involved.

The relationship between secondary qualities and sensations is contingent. God has conjoined certain sensations with certain physical qualities in objects (or in our bodies) for the benefit of our survival (E 311b-312a/196-8). God could have matched different sensations with these qualities than he actually has. Reid is diffident about ruling upon the contingency of relations between secondary qualities and sensations, saying that the fact that “these two ingredients are necessarily connected, is, perhaps, difficult for us to determine, there being many necessary connections which we do not perceive to be necessary; but we can disjoin them in thought” (E 311b/196). In contrast to the relationship between sensations and primary qualities, there are no physically necessary connections between any secondary quality and its corresponding sensation. In abnormal environments or when perceivers are

malfunctioning, says Reid, the connection lapses, as in phantom limb pain (E 320b/214).<sup>42</sup> So the causal connection between secondary qualities and sensations is contingent.

In addition to the traditional secondary qualities Reid inherits from Locke, he adduces a few new examples that aid in spelling out his view. Reid places gravity, the quality in bodies that attracts one to another, amongst the secondary qualities (E 314a/201-2). We only directly observe gravity's effects on bodies so our notion of gravity depends upon notions produced by observing the attraction of bodies. Our notion of gravity, as opposed to the correlation between this unknown quality and certain effects, is not direct or clear. (Reid also discusses magnetism in this vein in the *Inquiry* to make largely the same points; see I 113-4/40-43.)

## 5. DISPOSITIONS AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

What I have said about our notions of secondary qualities is for the most part neutral with respect to the actual constitution of secondary qualities. In order to clarify this matter, we need to determine whether Reidian secondary qualities are dispositions or the physical bases of those dispositions. (We are already resolved on

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<sup>42</sup> In the case of phantom limb pain, if the subject "did not know that his leg was cut off, it would give him the same immediate conviction of some hurt or disorder in the toe." In this case there is a sensation (pain) and there is a secondary quality causing the sensation, but that cause it not the typical cause of pains. "This perception, which Nature had conjoined with the sensation, was, in this instance, fallacious" (E 320b/214).

the basis of the above texts that Reidian secondary qualities are not sensations.) A strong textual case can be mounted on behalf of the view that secondary qualities are physical properties of objects.

First of all, what is a dispositional quality? Paradigmatically, solubility in water is a dispositional quality such that, were an object that possesses (this form of) solubility submerged in water, it would dissolve. Dispositional qualities are generally specified by counterfactual conditionals. The reason so much confusion surrounds analysis of dispositional qualities is that their ontological status is left unresolved. For materialists, dispositional qualities will supervene on physical or micro-physical qualities of objects. The quality of being soluble in water may supervene on molecules capable of bonding with  $H_2O$ .

This slack between dispositional qualities and their physical base properties complicates my task of showing that Reid is not a dispositionalist about secondary qualities. Someone who thinks that there is some type of regular causal connection between physical qualities and sensations is not, on those grounds alone, a dispositionalist about secondary qualities. What is required for dispositionalism, we can call it, is the *identification* of a quality with a set of counterfactual conditions. Of course, Reid doesn't speak in those terms, so if we have evidence that secondary qualities are identical to something like a 'potentiality' in bodies, this will approximate a commitment to dispositionalism.

In support of such an interpretation, Nichols Wolterstorff says this of Reid: “In the *Inquiry* he says, for example, that color “is a certain power or virtue in bodies” [VI, iv [138a; B 87]; cf. II, ix [114a; B 43]], whereas in the *Essays* he says that “smell in the rose is an unknown quality or modification” in the rose (II, xvii [314b]; cf. *Inquiry* V, I [119b; B 54])” (2001, 112). Clearly the phrase “is a certain power” is bothersome for my interpretation of Reid according to which secondary qualities are physical properties of bodies.

However, there are three textual problems with using this passage to attribute dispositionalism to Reid.<sup>43</sup> First, Reid makes the same point in the *Inquiry* that Wolterstorff goes all the way to the *Intellectual Powers* to draw, namely that color is an unknown quality. In fact, Reid makes this point on the very page in the *Inquiry* from which Wolterstorff draws his evidence for dispositionalism:

The name of colour belongs indeed to the cause only, and not to the effect.

But, as the cause is unknown, we can form no distinct conception of it but by its relation to the known effect... . Hence the appearance [of the color scarlet] is, in the imagination, so closely united with the quality called *a scarlet-colour*,

that they are apt to be mistaken for one and the same thing, although they are

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<sup>43</sup> Notice that this passage (I 138a; B 87) is Wolterstorff’s only evidence in favor of dispositionalism. I do not believe there is any other evidence to be found in Reid’s corpus. Second, it may seem uncharitable to charge Reid with inconsistency merely on the grounds of a contrast between the two major works, given that there were 21 years between them in which to rethink the matter

in reality so different and so unlike, *that one is an idea in the mind, the other is a quality of body*. (I 138a/86-7, final emphasis mine)

This undermines Wolterstorff's contrast between Reid's works.

This troublesome passage Wolterstorff cites occurs in *Inquiry*, VI, 4, which Reid titles "That colour is a quality of bodies, not a sensation of the mind." This title, and the contrast it invokes, is evidence against a dispositional interpretation on its most straightforward reading, marking the second textual criticism. Less than a page later, in VI, 5, Reid says that what others regard as "one of the most remarkable paradoxes of modern philosophy," namely that color is not a quality of bodies, is "nothing else but an abuse of words." Color is "a permanent quality of body" (I 138b/87). He adds, "We have shewn, that there is really a permanent quality of body, to which the common use of this word exactly agrees" (I 138b-139a/88). Experiences of colors, tastes and smells are not, properly speaking, secondary qualities; those mark the exemplifications of relations between secondary qualities and our minds. The *Intellectual Powers* confirms this attribution. For example, there Reid says:

We have no reason to think that any of the secondary qualities resemble any sensation... . It is too evident to need proof, that the vibrations of a sounding body do not resemble the sensation of sound, nor the effluvia of an odorous body the sensation of smell. (E 314b/203)

In this case the secondary quality causing sensations of smell is explicitly identified with effluvia, i.e. minute, airborne, physical particles. These textual reasons favor identifying secondary qualities with brute physical qualities, not dispositions.

Third, when Reid does say in the *Inquiry* that colors are powers, we mustn't forget that colors are special amongst other secondary qualities because the terms we use to refer to them are ambiguous to a greater extent than are other terms for secondary qualities. This is in part attributable to the way Locke and his followers put the philosophical problem, whose "question was," according to Reid, "whether to give the name of *colour* to the cause or to the effect? By giving it, as they have done, to the effect, they set philosophy apparently in opposition to common sense..." (I 140a/90). Reid is not immune to occasional lapses into this same linguistic confusion. Perhaps that is the best means of accounting for the retrogression (that color "is a certain power") upon which Wolterstorff alights.

In addition, there are two philosophical reasons against dispositionalism. I presented the first above (in §2) when I argued that Reid has a principled objection to dispositional analyses like Locke's. Reid thinks such analyses are philosophically unilluminating, thus Reid wouldn't be likely to offer such an analysis of secondary qualities himself.

Reid's description of our epistemic relation to secondary qualities contrasts sharply with what we would expect on a dispositional view, which marks the second point. According to Reid, our notions of things like green are not clear. On that basis

Reid repudiates having knowledge of what the quality green is, other than repeating that it is the unknown cause of a known effect. Secondary qualities are conceived “only as the unknown causes or occasions of certain sensations” (E 314b/202). If secondary qualities were merely dispositions and not the physical bases of these dispositions, Reid’s frequent claims to the effect that he doesn’t know what secondary qualities are would be nonsensical.<sup>44</sup>

My argument here assumes that there is something about dispositional qualities that makes it likely that we *know* that a quality is dispositional when it is dispositional. Solubility, one might argue, provides a counterexample to this assumption. I may work with salt for an indefinite amount of time and fail to apprehend that it possesses solubility. If this is correct, then describing our epistemic relation to secondary qualities as transparent in the way I have just done is in error. Hence, Reidian secondary qualities might be dispositional qualities. (I thank George Pappas for bringing this objection to my attention.)

However, due to a disanalogy between solubility and secondary qualities like green and heat, this criticism fails. In the secondary quality case, Reid is acquainted with a physical object and the effects that certain qualities of that object produce. Those effects are on our minds, not on a physical substance. Physical qualities of

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<sup>44</sup> Wolterstorff himself recognizes the difficulty this point presents for his analysis. He highlights the fact that, if secondary qualities were dispositions, then they would be known in a fairly obvious way. “If green were a disposition in things,” he says, “we would know what it was.” He takes this as inconclusive evidence against his reading (2001, 112).

objects produce sensation experiences, qualitative mental states, in us. I alleged that Reid is not a dispositionalist because he claims ignorance about the nature of secondary qualities *of whose sensory effects he is regularly and constantly aware*. Unlike solubility, the content needed to fill the counterfactual conditional is right at hand. If secondary qualities are dispositional, then green is identical with the following state of affairs: were a green surface brought into my visual field, I would experience a sensation of green. To know what green is does not require knowledge of what its physical base is since to be green is to be specified by a counterfactual conditional like this.<sup>45</sup> If properly functioning (E 328b/229), a perceiver's knowledge of what green is will be implied by a dispositional account of colors. Hence we are warranted in adding the following necessary condition to our analysis of Reid's secondary qualities, viz. Q is a physical quality of objects.

## 6. AN ANALYSIS

Though Reid does not intend to give us a conceptual analysis of primary and secondary qualities, the conditions we've described in the preceding two sections bring us near necessary and sufficient conditions for our notions of qualities. In the

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<sup>45</sup> Here is another way to express this point. Imagine what a dispositional account of secondary qualities would be like according to which knowledge of secondary qualities was difficult to attain. It makes no sense for a perceiver to say, 'The color green is a dispositional quality, but just what it is disposed to do I have no idea.' This is what Wolterstorff implicitly portrays Reid as saying.



interest of prudence, however, I will stop short of claiming that these conditions are jointly sufficient. Collecting from what's come before we arrive at the following approximation for primary qualities:

Q is a primary quality for P at t only if (i) P acquires the notion of the essential nature of Q without any intermediary necessarily apprehended in the process; and (ii) of Q's essential nature E, P knows that the E is the essential nature of Q.

As for secondary qualities, we can state Reid's conditions in contrasting terms:

Q is a secondary quality only if (i) P's notion of Q is mediated by apprehension of sensations; (ii) P's notion of Q is only of unknown causes of sensations and not of essential or scientific natures; (iii) the causal connection between Q and sensations is contingent; and (iv) Q is a physical quality of bodies.

This analysis flows from the texts we've examined, though Reid might well deny that, with it, he has given a philosophical analysis of qualities. If this is correct, then prior characterizations of Reid's distinction—many of which have been drawn from his aesthetics<sup>46</sup>—must be revised.

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<sup>46</sup> Wildly opposed interpretations of his analysis of aesthetic qualities have arisen, which include: (i) that aesthetic qualities are secondary qualities, and that Reid mistakenly compares aesthetic qualities to primary qualities (Kivy 1970); (ii) that aesthetic qualities are primary qualities *and* secondary qualities, and that Reid's aesthetics is rendered incoherent as a result (Gracyk 1987); (iii) that aesthetic qualities are neither primary nor secondary qualities, though Reid mistakenly indicated otherwise (Nauckhoff 1994); and most recently, (iv) that aesthetic qualities bear

In the remaining sections I will clarify some aspects of this account. In so doing we will be able to respond to a number of objections to it.

## 7. THE RELATIVITY OF REIDIAN QUALITIES

There is an important sense in which, on Reid's distinction, primary and secondary qualities are relative to agents. Keith Lehrer does not think that this feature benefits the account. He says, "We may agree with Reid that we have a clear and distinct conception of primary qualities, but do we not also have a clear and distinct conception of some secondary qualities?" Clear and distinct notions of all qualities are caused by sensations. Hence, Lehrer says, "the distinction between primary and secondary qualities collapses because both are ultimately based on sensation" (Lehrer 1978, 186, 187).

Lehrer's remark that both notions of primary and secondary qualities are "ultimately" based on sensations is incorrect on its most obvious reading, for Reid believes we can form concepts of primary qualities without those primary qualities causing sensations in us. In contrast to our notions of secondary qualities, experiencing a sensation caused by a primary quality is *not* a necessary condition on

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features of both secondary and primary qualities (Benbaji 2000). On (iv), aesthetic qualities are like secondary qualities because both are dispositional, while they are like primary qualities because there is an incorrigibility about our judgments of them. But none of these positions begins from a considered account of Reid's views on the perceptual and epistemological status of qualities. In the most recent interpretation, Benbaji's view compels her to claim that Reid systematically "confuses the [secondary] quality with its ground" (2000, 41).

forming a notion of that quality. This has been argued forcefully by Keith DeRose (1989).

Of course, the critic might revise Lehrer's point to argue that, even if both sets of notions do not depend upon sensations, Reid's distinction may collapse in another way. Consider, for example, that Reid takes the inebriating quality of wine to be a secondary quality (E 315a/204). We now know the scientific nature of this quality—the molecular composition of alcohol—and how it destabilizes certain brain processes. The critic could argue that, on Reid's account, the inebriating quality of wine *is* a secondary quality, and is *not* a secondary quality since we know its scientific nature. The critic could conclude that the concept of a Reidian secondary quality is incoherent.

But this result—that qualities might be relative to agents—is part of Reid's theory, not a problem with his theory. We've seen above that Reid describes secondary qualities as "relative," but the relativity of qualities is not as radical as one might think. My notion of the microphysical, scientific nature of alcohol is not direct or clear since it is based on the testimony of chemists. So *for me* the quality in wine that causes inebriation is quite clearly a secondary quality. Is the chemist's notion of the same quality a notion of a primary quality? The chemist's notion of the inebriating quality is neither direct nor, on Reid's use of the term, clear. So it too is a notion of a secondary quality. In this way Reid's analysis of secondary qualities shows that for

chemist and connoisseur alike the notion of the inebriating quality of wine is a notion of a secondary quality. Reid's distinction does not make qualities relative to agents, at least it doesn't in the actual world.

On the basis of this point, though, we can build a more fanciful case that makes clear the way in which secondary qualities can in principle become primary qualities (and vice versa). Imagine a creature who forms a direct and clear notion of the scientific nature of the inebriating quality of wine (i.e., of the composition of alcohol) merely on the basis of the sensation of tasting wine. Perhaps his taste buds process high degrees of information about the scientific natures of substances he imbibes. This would resemble the manner in which our fingertips inform us of the essential nature of hardness (the strong cohesion of the parts of a body) upon touching a wall. For this creature the inebriating quality in wine is a primary quality because, on the basis of his sensory experiences (and not empirical, scientific investigation), he forms notions of the essential *and scientific* natures of alcohol. Reid's analysis allows that these states of affairs are possible, which is as it should be. A traditional distinction drawn on purely metaphysical lines would not be able to deal with such cases as smoothly.

To put this point generally, a body's having a certain primary or secondary quality is contingent and indexed to certain perceivers at certain times. Lehrer is correct to insinuate that the difference between a primary and secondary quality can "collapse," in some possible worlds. However, this does not imply that the distinction

is false or otiose in our world. Moreover, it seems that this sense of “collapse” would not sap Reid’s account from its explanatory power; further argument is needed for that conclusion. In fact, this versatility in Reid’s distinction captures the radically different means by which we relate to these two types of qualities without assuming either that all perceivers are properly functioning humans, that God had to design us as he has, or that the perceptual systems of humans couldn’t evolve.

#### 8. PHENOMENOLOGY OF REIDIAN SECONDARY QUALITIES

Falkenstein believes that Reidian secondary qualities—specifically, Reidian colors—fail to account for features of our experience. He says, “Once Reid’s peculiar use of the term “colour” is exposed, it is hard not to conclude that his position does not reflect what we think we see.” (This is distinct from his ordinary language objection to Reidian secondary qualities mentioned in note 15.) He adds,

the thesis that we do not experience our sensations of colour to be located on the visual field or compounded into extended and shaped aggregates is not even so much as uncertain or possible; it is false. Reid is wrong, both about what people mean when they use colour terms and about how they experience the sensations that coloured objects produce in their minds.

Falkenstein indicates that we “see visible figures to be filled out with the sensations of colour that objects cause in the mind.” The problem is that “Colours, understood as the hidden qualities in objects that cause our sensations of colour are *hidden*—not

actually seen, but only inferred.” But colors are in point of fact revealed to use through our sensations of them, urges Falkenstein. So Reid’s account of color fails to accommodate the phenomenology of color vision (2000, 322, 325, 324, 320)

Antony Pitson has already successfully addressed this objection as voiced against Reid (even though he does not address Falkenstein’s own presentation of it), and I do not propose to better his analysis and refutation of this objection here. Pitson identifies what he calls the Revelation Thesis (to which Reid is opposed) as the claim that the “intrinsic nature of colours is revealed by ordinary visual experience.” This thesis is best understood as an epistemic claim. It comes in two forms. The strong form of the Revelation Thesis states that “the nature of colour as a quality is revealed in ordinary visual experience,” while the weak version states that “merely looking at something is sufficient for determining its colour” (2001, 25, 26). If I understand Falkenstein’s discussion he seems to affirm both, and he surely affirms the weaker thesis.

Pitson argues that the strong version is false, and so Reid cannot be criticized on the grounds that his view is inconsistent with it. On the strong thesis colors are nothing more than sensations, qualitative mental episodes. But this doesn’t account for the objectivity of our experience of color. Pitson argues that “we have to distinguish between the fixed colour of the object as a quality of the object itself, and the various colours it may appear to be under different circumstances” (2001, 27) This alone seems conclusive against the strong thesis.

He then argues that the weaker thesis is false. Reid thinks that terms like “scarlet” refer to physical causes of qualitative events, but let us grant the objector that “scarlet” always refers to the qualitative experience caused by some physical property. Even if this were the case, it will not follow that I can identify the color of the object of vision by looking at it. This is the point of Reid’s example involving looking at a scarlet rose through green glasses, which makes the sensation of the *scarlet* rose like the sensation of a black rose. Pitson concludes that Reid’s idiosyncratic analysis of color can be defended against an objection based upon the Revelation Thesis.

I want to make one addition to Pitson’s case, which concerns a presupposition at work in appeals to the revealed knowledge of secondary qualities. Falkenstein says that people experience redness in the sense that, for example, a “triangle on their visual fields looks to be painted over its extension with... a mere sensation in the mind” (2000, 325). Locutions like “triangle on their visual fields” implicitly presume, contra Reid, that the *perceived* triangle is not the *actual* triangle. Suppose I’m seeing a triangular red road sign bearing the word “Yield.” Falkenstein takes for granted that there is a perceived intermediary between my visual awareness and the yield sign—the visible figure of the triangle.

But according to Reid’s direct theory of visual perception, the red, visual triangle is not a reified perceptual intermediary. As we have seen, it is instead a mind-independent visible figure. My point is that the weak thesis may well seem true when

we presuppose with the Theory of Ideas that the object I see is a sense-datum of some sort. This intuition gives Revelation Theses their forceful, intuitive plausibility (and also a measure of ambiguity). If I am right to think that the present objection to Reid's treatment of color is based upon the 'Theory of Ideas' indirect realist account of perception, then to properly adjudicate the point one must take into account Reid's many arguments *against* just such a theory of perception.

## 9. IMMEDIATE PERCEPTION OF SECONDARY QUALITIES

A final problem lies in determining what are our perceptual and epistemic relations to secondary qualities. When perceiving secondary qualities, the immediate object of mental awareness is a sensation, not its physical base, i.e. not the Reidian secondary quality. If the immediate object of awareness is a sensation, then it seems both that I cannot directly perceive the secondary quality and that I cannot have immediate (i.e. non-inferential) knowledge of what that sensation suggests. If this line of argument can be borne out, then Reid's unwittingly bifurcates his theory of immediate perceptual knowledge. Let's explain this argument, which first involves briefly specifying the nature of, and relation between, conceptual and epistemic immediacy.

On the basis of Reid's repeated comments that our concepts of primary qualities are 'directly' formed, I construed Reid's notion of directness in a conceptual sense: 'P's notion of primary quality Q at t is direct only if P apprehends Q, and no



intermediary is necessarily apprehended in the process.’ Let’s call this sense of immediacy *conceptual* immediacy. This condition means that the direct objects of conception, as they occur within acts of perception, are external objects or qualities, not mental representations. We have seen specific forms of this thesis applied to primary qualities in texts cited above. He attests to a general type of conceptual immediacy in passages such as this:

[W]e shall find in [perception] these three things: First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived; Secondly, a strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence; and, Thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (E 258a/B 96; cf. E 326b/226 and I 183/168)

In addition to being a formative part of his account of notions of primary qualities, this conceptual acquaintance thesis marks one crucial component in Reid’s direct theory of perception.

We might be tempted to distinguish from this a thesis of *perceptual* immediacy. It seems as though, for Reid, X’s being conceptually immediate is necessary for X’s being perceptually immediate. This is in part because perceptual immediacy seems to include both conceptual and doxastic components. Reid says, for example, that “immediate perception is immediate and intuitive judgment” (E 420b/422). Perception, then, at least contains a conceptual or cognitive component (and at most requires belief). Commentators have specified the nature of Reid’s perceptual

immediacy thesis by adding a further necessary condition. George Pappas explains the nature of perceptual immediacy by saying that, according to Reid, “Typically we immediately perceive objects and their qualities, i.e., we perceive them without perceiving intermediaries” (1989, 156). This is not the place to attempt to nail down Reid’s notion of perceptual immediacy since, for present purposes, I will rest satisfied knowing that perceptual immediacy incorporates conceptual immediacy, as seems clear from Reid’s definition of perception above.

Distinct from the conceptual and perceptual components lies an epistemic component. In fact, Reid’s central purpose in arguing that we have immediate conceptual and perceptual awareness of external objects is so that he can lay claim to their epistemic immediacy. Reid prizes the immediate, non-inferential perceptual knowledge which his direct theory of perception makes possible. Thus he endorses what we can call a thesis of *epistemic* immediacy: perceptual knowledge is non-inferentially formed, and is not (necessarily) based on beliefs about sensations or mental representations. Reid’s use of suggestion relations (see §3 above) foreshadows this thesis. He’s explicit about this epistemic sense of immediacy elsewhere though, saying for example that a perceptual belief “is immediate, that is, it is not [produced] by a train of reasoning and argumentation” (E 259b/99).

There are philosophical reasons for Reid to claim that epistemic immediacy also requires conceptual immediacy. If one claims that we can have non-inferential knowledge of X even though X is not the immediate object of conception, we would

be puzzled indeed as to how that knowledge would be non-inferential. That is, if X is not conceptually immediate then X cannot be epistemically immediate (i.e. non-inferential), for we cannot have non-inferential knowledge of something which is not an object of immediate awareness.<sup>47</sup> Often Reid claims, more strongly, that if X is not an object of immediate awareness, we can have no knowledge of it at all—whether said knowledge is non-inferential or inferential. For example, in the *Inquiry*'s dedication Reid explains that the “sceptical system” (the Theory of Ideas) he plans to attack “leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis. . . [t]hat nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it.” In other words, the mind is aware only of mental representations. Referring to ideas, he adds, “I cannot, from their existence, infer the existence of anything else: my impressions and ideas are the only existences of which I can have any knowledge or conception; . . .” (I 96a/B 4) Knowledge is restricted to the immediate objects of mind.

The relations between these three theses generate a conflict between Reid's distinction between primary and secondary qualities and his claims to both direct perception and immediate perceptual knowledge. For when I conceive of secondary qualities I must conceive of an intermediary, namely the sensation or sensory experience. This is one of the central features that sets secondary qualities apart from

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<sup>47</sup> Some may reject this “epistemic immediacy requires conceptual immediacy” thesis on the basis of the following sort of observation: we might fail to perceive an object immediately, but nonetheless be able to form a non-inferential belief about it. This, however, will only be possible for those who advocate non-epistemic accounts

primary qualities, by Reid's lights. But this makes it impossible for us either to directly perceive secondary qualities, or to have non-inferential perceptual knowledge of secondary qualities. For example, the secondary quality of the smell of a rose is the physical feature of the rose that is causally responsible for my sensation, but I am only immediately aware of my sensation. To have immediate perceptual contact with the quality of the rose that produces this smell and to have immediate, non-inferential perceptual knowledge of this quality, I must first have conceptually immediate awareness of the quality.

This result will generalize for all secondary qualities: I cannot immediately perceive secondary qualities and I cannot non-inferentially know the secondary quality. Thus I can directly perceive and have immediate knowledge of primary qualities, but I cannot directly perceive and have immediate knowledge of secondary qualities. This result complicates Reid's theory of perception.

However, there is one important point to make in Reid's defense. Given Reid's analysis of secondary qualities, this objection presents itself as much stranger than it is. Reid is *not* claiming that we cannot directly perceive our *sensations*. (They aren't Reidian secondary qualities.) In fact, though this result does seem surprising, perhaps it is the way it should be. After all, Reid speaks of secondary qualities as "unknown" (I 119b/54) and "occult" (E 321b/216) qualities.

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of perceiving. But Reid denies that there is non-epistemic perceiving since he affirms

## 10. SUMMARY

Understanding Reid's distinction between secondary and primary qualities necessitates understanding the nature of his departure from Locke's method. Reid chooses to ground his analysis in his *concepts* of qualities since those, as opposed to the scientific natures of qualities, he knew well. Concepts of primary qualities are clear, distinct, and direct, and bear fruit when placed in the service of science. Notions of secondary qualities lack all those features, primarily because they are dependent on our mediating apprehension of the sensations they cause in us. Reid disposes of his Lockean inheritance by thus taking an epistemic turn.

If this epistemic way of drawing the distinction is correct, then Reid should be seen as making a clear and radical break from Locke. Reid's epistemic distinction can be read as a forerunner to contemporary scientific anti-realist interpretations of quantum phenomena. After all, secondary qualities are unobservables. Reid shares with advocates of these accounts an intense devotion to empiricist standards in metaphysics and an abhorrence of what he would deride as 'hypotheses.' Given Locke's failure to clarify the distinction on speculative metaphysical grounds, Reid's empiricist turn should, despite the comparison just noted, retain the commonsense pedigree we rightly associate with Reid's work.

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that all perceptions, including original perceptions, have conceptual content.

CHAPTER 8:  
LEARNING AND CONCEPTUAL CONTENT  
IN REID'S THEORY OF PERCEPTION

Thomas Reid's most significant contributions to the history of philosophy are, it is widely thought, his rejection of the Ideal Theory, and his replacement of it with his theory of perception. But anyone sorting through Reid's writings on the epistemology of perception will be met with disappointment at the lack of clarity in one crucial segment of his response to the Ideal Theory. I refer to his discussion of the role of inference in the formation of perceptual beliefs. His distinction between original and acquired perceptions seems to help matters. With it he distinguishes marginally cognitive events of seeing from events of visual perception, in which a percipient applies conceptual categories to an object, i.e. perceives the chair *as* a chair. Yet the implementation of this distinction does not resolve a problem lurking in the standard interpretations of Reid on these matters. Reid is seen as simply holding that perceptual beliefs are non-inferentially known. While Reid flatly says "There is no reasoning in perception" (I 185a/172), he also makes numerous remarks that imply the contrary, e.g. he says that perceptual errors are caused by "conclusions rashly drawn" from the senses (E 335a/244). I resolve this tension on Reid's behalf by

drawing a distinction between two types of acquired perceptions.

I hope to show that Reid's theory of perceptual knowledge is considerably more subtle, and more plausible, than current interpretations indicate. I use the first parts of the paper to describe a few prominent interpretations of Reid on perceptual knowledge in order to make way for my own. I'll argue that Reid believes that a form of inference is often required to gain perceptual knowledge. Since Reid allegedly attacks the Ideal Theory on this very point—requiring inference to gain perceptual knowledge, this interpretation may be met problem.

## 1. THE THEORY OF NON-INFERENTIAL PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND ITS MOTIVATIONS IN REID

The standard interpretation commits Reid to an epistemic thesis about perceptual knowledge that allows no justificatory role for inference. Following George Pappas (1989) we'll define 'epistemic direct realism' (hereafter EDR) as follows:

EDR = (a) perceptual beliefs are (typically) justified solely in virtue of the perceptual process(es) that produces them; and (b) these beliefs are not justified in virtue of any conscious inference performed by the percipient from any other beliefs, whether about sensory states or about other perceptions.

On EDR perceptual beliefs are normally known without inference, perhaps even

thoughtlessly, much like contemporary forms of epistemic externalism. Perceptual Direct Realism, the perceptual counterpart to EDR, is:

PDR = (a) the objects of perception (and perceptual beliefs) are mind-independent physical bodies and their qualities; and (b) these bodies and qualities are perceived directly, without the mediating perception of other objects, e.g. ideas.

By ‘immediacy’ in EDR we mean that there are no inferences between my sensory perception of an object and my knowledge of the object; ‘immediacy’ in PDR refers to the fact that there are no sense-data (or any other object which is itself perceived) intervening between my sensory perception of an object and the physical object. Pappas explains epistemological direct realism as the view that perceptual knowledge of physical objects and their qualities is “typically direct or non-inferential, not being based upon immediately known, or immediately justified beliefs about sensations” (Pappas 1989, 159). EDR is motivated by a desire to explain how the faculty of perception leads to knowledge that is non-inferentially formed and non-inferentially known. It attempts to nip skepticism about the external world in the bud.

Pappas and William Alston (1989)<sup>48</sup> have explicitly endorsed an EDR reading

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<sup>48</sup> Alston (1989) explains that perceptual knowledge for Reid possesses “epistemological directness,” which a belief has when it is “justified, warranted, [and] rationally acceptable, apart from any reasons the subject has for it. It is ‘intrinsically credible’, ‘*prima facie* justified’, just by being a perceptual belief” (37). Alston does not believe Reid’s view is lucid on this score because Reid’s account of the status, or ‘ground’, of the belief is two-fold: Reid’s use of ‘ground’ is psychologically descriptive and epistemologically evaluative (41-42). Nonetheless, after noting these reservations,



of Reid. Though they are the only two explicitly to voice this thesis, there are others who make remarks that imply or assume a similar non-inferential account of Reidian perceptual knowledge. In this group belongs Phillip Cummins<sup>49</sup>, Anthony Pitson<sup>50</sup>,

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Alston concludes that “there is no doubt but that Reid takes the perception of external objects to be immediate in [this epistemologically direct] way” (37). Despite obvious differences (e.g. that the first is a thesis about knowledge, while the second concerns justification), for the present I will not distinguish between Alston’s ‘epistemological directness’, Pappas’s EDR and my own statement of the view.

<sup>49</sup> Cummins (1974) states that

Reid’s position that perception is a first principle of contingent truth could be understood as the claim that basic perceptual beliefs provide the foundation for the total system of beliefs about material things which is common to all ordinary men. (By ‘basic perceptual belief’ I mean a belief—conception and assent—which is an element or ingredient in an act of perceiving.) It will be recalled that, according to Reid, basic perceptual beliefs have a very special status. They do not result from any process of reasoning and cannot be derived from any body of factual beliefs. (338)

If such perceptual beliefs do not result from any reasoning, then they either (1) non-inferentially, immediately acquire positive epistemic status, (2) do not have such status, or (3) have positive epistemic status in virtue of a process that cannot be resolved into a form of reason. That they would not be epistemically justified is anathema to Reid. How perceptual beliefs might be epistemically justified neither in virtue of facts about their irresistible production nor by a form of reasoning, yet in a way which coheres with the texts, is unclear at best. So, the most plausible extrapolation from what Cummins says is that he believes that since most perceptual beliefs are justified, they are justified non-inferentially in virtue of facts concerning their (reliable) production.

This argument from elimination can be reapplied to the comments of other authors on this matter. If an author asserts that perceptions (and the perceptual beliefs they contain, on Reid’s view) are formed without inference, and concurs that (2) is not a viable option, then such an author will probably assent to (1).

<sup>50</sup> Pitson (1989) remarks that “My own view is that when Reid says that perception arises from sensation, and that the operation involved is one of suggestion, he is referring to the fact that there is a causal—as opposed, for example, to an inferential—relation between the two” (82).

Aaron Ben-Zeev<sup>51</sup>, and Keith Lehrer, both on his own<sup>52</sup> and with John-Christian Smith.<sup>53</sup>

The ambiguity surrounding the use of epistemic terms in EDR makes the attribution of that thesis to Reid problematic. Reid does not use the terms Alston and Pappas proffer. When he uses ‘immediate’ it is rarely in the epistemic sense it possesses in Pappas’s hands. Instead, as we shall see, Reid uses the terms ‘inference’ and ‘reasoning’. To disambiguate Reid’s views about inference we need a taxonomy of cognitive activity. I divide the types of cognition into two classes, conscious and non-conscious mental activity.

For Reid there are two types of conscious, critical mental activity: (i) deductive

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<sup>51</sup> Ben-Zeev comments that “Reid says that a perceptual belief is not based upon internal processes such as reasoning or association from past experience ...” (98).

<sup>52</sup> Lehrer (1987) remarks that “Reid holds that we have a natural and irresistible belief in the existence of external objects. This belief is, moreover, implied by our perception of external objects which involves a sensation giving rise to the conception and irresistible conviction of the qualities of the external object immediately, without reasoning, even reasoning concerning the sensation itself” (394). He continues, saying that “Reid, in opposition to Hume, holds that the beliefs in question [i.e. perceptual beliefs] are not only natural but evident and justified as they appear irresistibly in us” (Ibid.).

<sup>53</sup> Lehrer and Smith (1985) present a nuanced account of the status of acquired perception. They hold that the operation of acquired perception “does not involve any reasoning of any sort. The general principle yields a conception of the quality as the cause of the sensation without reflection or argumentation” (27-28). Their view succumbs to an important internal tension, for they also claim that acquired perceptions are “a result of experience and inductive reasoning... Acquired perception or language is inductively learned and consists of the acquired understanding of signs” (26).

inference, in which the subject actively draws a conclusion on the basis of what is thought to be a necessary connection between some body of evidence or set of premises and the inferred proposition; and (ii) abductive or inductive inference, in which the subject actively draws a conclusion because it is thought by the subject to be more probable than not on the basis of a certain body of evidence, or draws a conclusion because she believes it best explains the phenomenon under consideration. There are several types of non-conscious mental activity to be enumerated: (iii) ‘artificial’ suggestion relations, in which an object or event is non-consciously associated with another object or event in virtue of their constant conjunction in one’s past experience; (iv) ‘innate’ suggestion relations, in which sensations or perceptions cause the mind to form a perception of an object or quality via innate mental connections; and lastly, (v) ‘original principles’, or ‘laws of nature’, with which our minds are designed to abide.<sup>54</sup> We can arrive at perceptual beliefs via mental activity described in (ii) through (v).

Keeping this classification in mind, I’ll argue, first, that textual considerations show that Reid believes EDR is false. Second, I’ll try to show that Reid preserves most of the intuitions favoring an adoption of EDR. He does this by drawing an explicit distinction between original and acquired perceptions and an implicit distinction between two types of acquired perceptions. One type of acquired

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<sup>54</sup> These distinctions follow similar distinctions in the Hume literature as found in, e.g., Winters (1979).

perception belongs in group (ii) and the other belongs, depending on its content, in either group (iii) or (iv). The key task in assessing the role of inference in Reid's theory of perception lies in determining precisely where in the above taxonomy we should place acquired perceptions.

## 2. DESIDERATA ON AN ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Before we analyze the evidence for and against EDR in Reid, I'll explain some of the plausible intuitions behind such an interpretation. Though I oppose the present incarnation of EDR, in order for my own interpretation to succeed I must attempt to account for the many and forceful considerations upon which it is based. First, that the mature Reid held a view akin to PDR is uncontroversial. The intuition that epistemic direct realism would follow from (or, if not that, would plausibly accompany) perceptual direct realism has many sources of support. One reason why this intuition is especially well positioned to find support in Reid trades on a nuance in his theory of perception. For Reid the process of perception culminates in a belief the production of which is irresistible. (See I 182a-b/168, E 258a/96 and E 312b/199.) Since perception itself contains this doxastic component it seems quick work to argue that this immediately and irresistibly produced belief is justified or known. Commitment to EDR can be seen as an organic outgrowth of Reid's theory of the immediate perception of objects. Thus the first desideratum on an account of

Reidian perceptual knowledge is the preservation of a tight conceptual tie to some form of PDR.

Reasons for EDR also arise from philosophical commitments outside Reid's theory of perception. Reid contends that "original and natural judgments," e.g. believing there is a tree before me, "are a part of that furniture which Nature hath given to the human understanding. They are the inspiration of the Almighty... They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind*" (I 209b/215). Reid affirms that a perceptual belief is God-given and a component of common sense. If a belief possesses these traits, we are *prima facie* warranted in believing that it is non-inferentially justified, according to Reid. For since they are gifts of the Almighty, the implication is that we have not justified them of our own accord. So, second, we must seek to maintain the God-given, commonsensical account of one's access to perceptual knowledge. Any account failing to explain how children readily produce perceptual beliefs with positive epistemic status, for example, would not maintain this desideratum.

The most far-reaching implication of the denial of EDR lies in Reid's relationship to perceptual skepticism. Anyone who struggles through the briar patch of objections to a direct theory of perception eagerly desires some philosophical recompense for his efforts, and the natural form this takes is a dissolution of perceptual skepticism through an affirmation of EDR. Any alternative account must properly explain this relationship. Moreover, Reid lacks some of the resources that

the proponents of the Ideal Theory possess for explaining how we might have inferential knowledge of the external world. Locke, for instance, makes an abductive case for the falsity of perceptual skepticism by appeal to the coherence and regularity of our perception of ideas and images.<sup>55</sup> If what we perceive does not include ideas and mental images, and if we don't have non-inferential knowledge that the objects of certain perceptions are bodies and their qualities, then Reid must be careful to establish the justificatory status of perceptual beliefs without begging questions.

The case for holding that, for Reid, a commitment to EDR is natural and philosophically plausible makes surprising the fact that, as I will argue, Reid does not believe perceptual knowledge is spawned so simply. Reid was aware that adopting the sweeping thesis that all or almost all perceptual beliefs are immediately known results in a Pyrrhic solution to perceptual and epistemological problems.

### 3. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FOR EDR

Among several passages used to attribute EDR to Reid, the one most heavily emphasized is this:

If the word axiom be put to signify every truth which is known immediately, without being deduced from any antecedent truth, then the existence of the

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<sup>55</sup> The appeal to coherence is implicit in Locke's definition of knowledge (1975, 538; cf. 562-573).

objects of sense may be called an axiom. For my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives me of what is commonly called an axiom. (E 329a/231, quoted in Pappas 1989 at p. 159, and Alston 1989 at p. 37)

There are several reasons why this passage does not support ascribing to Reid the view that perceptual beliefs are non-inferentially known or justified.

First, this occurs in the context of Reid's discussion of reasons given by philosophers for thinking that there is no mind-independent world, reasons Reid rejects as unpersuasive. When Reid describes the existence of the 'objects of sense' as an axiom he is *not* describing the deliverances of a specific perceptual faculty. He's actually voicing opposition to a Berkeleyian, immaterialist thesis about objects. That there are mind-independent objects of sense is what Reid prudently claims to 'know'. Reid rarely lays claim to knowing anything about a specific quality of an object; instead, he only allows himself knowledge *that* there are sensible, mind-independent objects. Keith Lehrer also seems guilty of conflating the scope of these two assertions when he claims that 'There is no problem of justifying our beliefs in the existence of the external world from premises concerning sensations or sense impressions. The evidence of such beliefs is their birthright' (Lehrer 1989, 149). In marshalling this passage for their position that *particular* perceptual beliefs are self-justified, these commentators attempt to move from examining epistemic facts surrounding the status of an ontological assertion, *that there is a mind-independent world*, to drawing

conclusions about the epistemic facts concerning particular perceptual beliefs. Evidence that Reid holds that the existence of an external world is axiomatic cannot serve as evidence that he is wedded to a certain view about the epistemology of perception.

Second, Reid rarely speaks of our having *knowledge* of the particular deliverances of our sense faculties, instead being content to say that he has a conviction of their existence (though see E 260b/101 for a rare exception). His reluctance to do so is apparent in his shift from speaking of *knowing that* objects of sense exist to having an *immediate conviction* of what a sensory faculty testifies. These passages do not show that Reid holds that perceptual beliefs are known or justified in virtue of being properly produced and believed.

Perhaps defenders of EDR would respond by alighting upon Reid's use of the term 'immediate' here in E 329 as evidence for EDR. Are such beliefs immediate in the relevant sense? I have immediate convictions of the deliverances of my sensory faculties, says Reid. However, it's imperative that we distinguish between an *epistemic* and a *causal* reading of this term. EDR indicates that perceptual beliefs are epistemically immediate because they are non-inferentially formed. But if Reid simply means that such perceptual beliefs immediately arise in us as the result of being suggested by sensations, then perceptual beliefs can be *causally* immediate though *epistemically* mediate. This passage would show that perceptual knowledge is epistemically immediate only with a complementary interpretation showing that Reid



is using ‘immediately’ in an epistemic sense.

Reid himself does not carefully explain the meaning of ‘immediate’, a term he uses ubiquitously, though he typically uses it in the causal sense. He asserts elsewhere that “Every object of thought, therefore, is an immediate object of thought, and the word ‘immediate’, joined to objects of thought, seems to be a mere expletive” (E 427b/437). In a discussion of Locke Reid seems to claim that it is analytic that to be an object of thought is to be an immediate object of thought (E 278b/134). The term describes all objects of thought, not merely beliefs constituting knowledge. This is not to say that there is no case in which ‘immediate’ is used epistemically; however, the predominant use of the term is causal.

Furthermore, when Reid does intend the adjective to modify an object of knowledge, he conjoins it with ‘knowledge’, as we might expect. Reid holds that “It is by memory that we have an *immediate knowledge* of things past” (E 339a/253; my emphasis). He uses this locution, ‘immediate knowledge’, often here in the sections on memory. In *Intellectual Powers*, II, 22, Reid discusses the ‘informations’ of the senses and the ‘immediate conviction’ they produce, but in the chapter on memory *immediately following this one* he deliberately changes terminology and uses ‘immediate knowledge’ when appraising the status of memory beliefs. Those who hold that Reid thinks we immediately know perceptual beliefs will have great difficulty explaining why Reid does not use the term ‘immediate knowledge’ in the adjacent chapters on perception.

A similar contrast, this time between psychological and epistemic states, is present in an additional passage adduced as evidence for ‘epistemological directness’ by Alston. Alston holds that Reid identifies our psychological relation to perceptions with our epistemic relation to the same, quoting Reid as saying that “...we ask no argument for the existence of the object but that we perceive it; perception commands our belief upon its own authority, and disdains to rest its authority upon any reasoning whatsoever” (E 259b/99; quoted at Alston 1989, 37). Yet here Reid argues that we are powerless to use reason to override nature. He is emphasizing the psychological force our senses wield. In the preceding paragraph Reid remarks to this effect that “philosophy was never able to conquer that natural belief which men have in their senses” (Ibid.). This surely is not evidence that Reid holds that our perceptual beliefs are *known* in virtue of being believed, even though they are irresistibly believed. This is not to say that, according to Reid, such beliefs are not known, but establishing that they are known—let alone *directly* known—is a more trying task than Alston recognizes.

The textual evidence adduced by Alston and Pappas for EDR is inadequate to the task. Furthermore, there is a pair of persuasive philosophical reasons for which we must search for a more subtle interpretation of Reid on perceptual knowledge.

#### 4. PHILOSOPHICAL REASONS AGAINST

#### NON-INFERENTIAL PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE IN REID

4.1. *Perceptual Error*. Reid's title of E, II, 22, 'Of the Fallacy of the Senses', is misleading because in most cases in which we are apt to describe our senses as failing us, Reid would not. (That said, Reid secretly is pleased that there are some errors of the senses. His predecessors, in teaching "that the office of the senses is only to give us the ideas of external objects," brazenly assert that "there can be no fallacy in the senses" (E 339b/252).<sup>56</sup>) Instead he finds the common source of such errors in our cognitive manipulation of the outputs of our senses.<sup>57</sup>

Reid packages his views on error in a four-fold division of the 'appearances' of fallacies of the senses. In the first Reid asks us to suppose that someone takes a guinea coin in payment for services rendered. Upon taking it, she senses the coin with her eyes and hands. One may say her senses deceive her because she is not perceptually informed that the coin is a counterfeit. In this situation her senses are not in error.

We are disposed to impute our errors rather to false information than to inconclusive reasoning, and to blame our senses for the wrong conclusions we draw from their testimony. Thus, when a man has taken a counterfeit guinea for a

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<sup>56</sup> To appreciate why he's pleased, see Hume's *Treatise* 189/126.

<sup>57</sup> The motivation for this maneuver is in part theological. Compare Descartes' *Meditations* (1985, 39/§56). Reid is defending his supposition that the senses 'are formed by the wise and beneficent Author of Nature' (E 334a/242).

true one, he says his senses deceived him; but he lays the blame where it ought not to be laid: for we may ask him, Did your senses give a false testimony of the colour, or of the figure, or of the impression? No. But this is all that they testified, and this they testified truly. From these premises you concluded that it was a true guinea, but this conclusion does not follow; you erred, therefore, not by relying upon the testimony of sense, but by judging rashly from its testimony. (E 335a-b/244)

The error lies in “conclusions rashly drawn from the testimony of the senses” on the part of the subject (E 335a/244). The reason his perceptual belief that the object before him is a guinea coin is not justified is due to the presence of illicit inferences taking him from seeing the guinea to seeing this object *as* a guinea, or in other words, from the original perception of the color and form of the object to the acquired perception of the object as a guinea coin.<sup>58</sup>

Consider Reid's next example. I take a piece of soft turf, I cut it into the shape of an apple; with the essence of apples, I give it the smell of an apple; and with paint, I can give it the skin and colour of an apple. Here then is a body, which, if you judge by your eye, by your touch, or by your smell, is an apple... This is a fallacy, not of the senses, but of inconclusive reasoning. (E 335b/245)

There is no sensory error present in my coming to believe that this object is an apple after sensory examination. This highly deceptive environment prompts the subject to conclude that the object is an apple. (It was this sort of example Reid had in mind when stating the necessary condition on perceptual knowledge we observed above. He says he will “take it for granted that the evidence of sense, *when the proper circumstances concur*, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief” (E 328b/229; my emphasis).

Reid explains the failure of justification for perceptual beliefs by explicit appeal to faulty inferences from what the senses convey to conclusions about what is actually the case. This contrasts with EDR because from Reid’s account of error we notice perceptual knowledge is acquired by one’s drawing a conclusion on the basis of sensory evidence. Though the type of reasoning Reid identifies as the source of error is not deductive (type (i)), the error is not to be resolved into a breakdown of the unconscious relations described in (iii), (iv) and (v). These options do not allow for the subject to draw conclusions since they specify relations which are automated and involuntary. Reid would probably not contend that such conclusions are “rash” if he had in mind anything other than inductive, type (ii) reasoning. One option here would be to argue that Reid holds that a perceptual belief is non-inferentially known, conditional on there not being any defeaters of the belief’s justification. However, not

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<sup>58</sup> Fred Dretske has adopted this Wittgensteinian, seeing/seeing as terminology to describe types of perception in a way not foreign to Reid's examples (1969, 7).

only does Reid fail to describe perceptual beliefs as known (in these two passages and elsewhere) in any routine fashion, but he doesn't indicate that he has anything like an 'undefeated true belief' analysis of knowledge in mind. (Would that he did; such an analysis would make his treatment of perceptual error more understandable.)

In any event, notice that though one environment may be deceptive and another not, they can appear qualitatively identical to me. In a pair of cases in which the objects of perception appear identical to me, my mind operates in precisely the same manner. Hence, by parity of reasoning I not only 'draw conclusions' when I err in acquired perception, but in *all* acquired perceptions—erroneous or not, or so it seems.

4.2. *Knowledge.* Reid's views on perceptual knowledge and skepticism are not as sanguine as the standard interpretation leads us to believe. EDR seems to entail that skepticism about the external world is non-inferentially known to be false, whereas Reid carves out a middle ground between skepticism and the optimism that EDR bequeaths to his views. EDR describes James Beattie's views better than it does Reid's.<sup>59</sup> Consider the following passage, reminiscent of Hume:

For anything we can discover, we might have been so framed as to have all the sensations we now have by our senses, without any impressions upon our organs,

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<sup>59</sup> See Beattie (1973, 60-68), and compare with Reid (E 443-446/472-478) on their respective descriptions of the epistemic deliverances of perception. It is Beattie, not Reid, who uses terms like 'knowledge' and 'absolute certainty' to describe the deliverances of the senses.

and without any conception of any external object. For anything we know, we might have been so made as to perceive external objects, without any impressions on bodily organs, and without any of those sensations which invariably accompany perception in our present frame.

If our conception of external objects be unaccountable, the conviction and belief of their existence, which we get by our senses, is no less so. (E 327a/227)

Given the philosophical pessimism present here it is no wonder why Reid does not claim to possess perceptual knowledge of external objects, as opposed to “informations of the sense.”<sup>60</sup> Reid is reluctant to allow knowledge even that external objects produce our conceptions of what seem to us to be external objects: “We know that such is our constitution, that in certain circumstances we have certain conceptions; but how they are produced we know no more than how we ourselves were produced” (E 326b/226).

Though this wary, suspicious Reid contrasts with the canonical, EDR interpretation, this Reid conforms well with the views presented by Louise Marcil Lacoste (1978). She argues that Reid is a mitigated skeptic about perceptual knowledge. I concur with Lacoste when she explains that though it “might be

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<sup>60</sup> Roger Gallie (1989, 47-48) notices this fine distinction, and comments that, when writing carefully about the epistemology of perception, Reid argues we have belief and full conviction, but not knowledge.

difficult to reconcile the seriousness of Reid's skeptical admissions with the tenor of many of his other statements," nonetheless, Reid's common sense approach to philosophy will not allow him wholly to escape skepticism (1978, 321).<sup>61</sup> EDR, on the contrary, suggests that perceptual knowledge comes to us unaided by any cognitive faculty but for conception, dismissing the perceptual skepticism with which Reid grappled. Though beliefs about the existence of objects that are distinctly perceived have some type of positive epistemic status, just what that amounts to Reid will not say.

## 5. CONTENT AND INFERENCE IN ORIGINAL AND ACQUIRED PERCEPTION

Reid was not the first to make a distinction between two levels of cognitive activity within perceptual events explicit, nor the first to use it in part of a defense against skepticism. (Epicurus holds that title.<sup>62</sup>) But Reid's distinction between

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<sup>61</sup> On this note, compare EDR to Reid's description of the First Principle of perception at E 445. They are *prima facie* incompatible.

<sup>62</sup> Epicurus's position on the cognitive content of perception is strikingly close to Reid's. First, like Reid, Epicurus explicitly avoids introducing mental entities as objects of perceptual awareness. According to Reid, the objects of original perceptions are mind-independent, and Epicurus, an atomist, concurs. However, the mind-independent objects that we see for Epicurus are not tables and chairs but rather are the *eidola*, the films of atoms, emanating from tables and chairs (Laertius 1950, §46-49). This may or may not mark a crucial difference between the two figures vis-à-vis their responses to the skeptic. Like Reid, Epicurus holds that we immediately, visually perceive objects external to our minds.



original and acquired perception is essential in the formation of an account of perceptual knowledge and learning satisfying the desiderata mentioned above.<sup>63</sup>

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Second, when Epicurus's infamous dictum, "All perceptions [*aistheseis*] are true," is properly developed, it results in a claim quite similar to that Reid makes about original perceptions. Says Epicurus, "[I]f a presentation is termed 'true' whenever it arises from a real object and in accord with that real object, and every presentation arises from a real presented object and in accord with that object, then every presentation is necessarily true" (Sextus 1983, §205). Reid puts the point as follows: "Did your senses give a false testimony of the colour, or of the figure, or of the impression? No. But this is all that they testified, and this they testified truly" (E 335).

Third, the perceptions which are necessarily 'true' have no conceptual content. "All perception, [Epicurus] says, is irrational and does not accommodate memory. For neither is it changed by itself, nor when changed by something else is it able to add or subtract anything. Nor does there exist anything which can refute perceptions..." (Laertius 1950, §31). A bit further on we read that "Falsehood and error always depend upon the intrusion of opinion..." (§50). Stephen Everson explicates this passage as follows: "What determines the nature of a perception? Not reason, since the sense is irrational. Not memory, since it does not 'accommodate' memory. It is not self-caused but must be produced by an external object and, since it cannot itself add or subtract anything from this process, it is entirely determined by that object" (Everson 1990, 172). Concepts stored in memory are not applied by the subject to the object of original perception. Likewise, the faculty of reason is not used to process the perceptual event. Reid does not go so far as to say that original perceptions have no content, as we'll see below, but he does concur with these two points to the extent he's able.

To pursue this connection further, see Taylor (1990). Striker (1996) disagrees with Everson about the way in which Epicurus uses his defense of the infamous maxim to refute skepticism. Conversations with Sylvia Berryman aided my understanding of the similarities between Epicurus and Reid on this front.

<sup>63</sup> An interesting alternative to the one I will develop would point to Locke's use of the globe example in the *Essay* II, IX, 8. Locke claims that we do not infer from "the idea we receive by sensation," i.e. the idea of a flat circle "variously shadowed," to our idea of the globe. He explains that our judgment "alters" our original idea (1975, 145-46). This ploy is not open to Reid if he maintains PDR because Locke's solution tacitly invokes assumptions about the role of ideas in perception that Reid rejects.

Reid's application of the original/acquired distinction, missing from other accounts, serves as my point of departure.<sup>64</sup> (In what follows I will take for granted an understanding of PDR and of Reid's theory of perception. On this see I 183b/168-69, E 258a-b/96-7 and E 318b/210.)

5.1. *What we see in visual original and acquired perception.* Describing the original/acquired distinction in the *Inquiry*, Reid explains that

When I perceive that this is the taste of cyder, that of brandy; that this is the smell of an apple, that of an orange; ...these perceptions, and others of the same kind, are not original—they are acquired. But the perception which I have by touch, of the hardness and softness of bodies, of their extension, figure and motion, is not acquired—it is original. (I 184b/171)

The scope of simple, or original, perception is limited indeed. Reid explains in this passage that, with sight, “we perceive originally the visible figure and colour of bodies only, and their visible place,” and not explicitly three-dimensional extension. (Ibid.) In the *Intellectual Powers* Reid is also clear on this point, saying that by sight “we perceive visible objects to have extension in two dimensions, to have visible figure and magnitude, and a certain angular distance from one another. These, I conceive, are the original perceptions of sight” (E 331b/236).

As I form an original perception, I do not impose universals with which to

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<sup>64</sup> Two recent works each give this distinction a few pages: Van Woudenberg (2000) and Wolterstorff (2001).

differentiate the properties of the object from other properties, nor do I invoke classificatory concepts. In the ‘Essay on Judgment’ in the *Intellectual Powers* Reid describes the non-conceptual quality of original perceptions clearly.

To begin with the objects of sense. It is acknowledged, on all hands, that the first notions we have of sensible objects are got by the external senses only, and probably before judgment is brought forth; but these first notions are...gross and indistinct, and, like the *chaos*, a *rudis indigestaque moles*.<sup>65</sup> Before we can have any distinct notion of this mass, it must be analysed; the heterogeneous parts must be separated in our conception...

In this way it is that we form distinct notions even of the objects of sense; but this process of analysis and composition, by habit, becomes so easy, and is performed so readily, that we are apt to overlook it, and to impute the distinct notion we have formed of the object to the senses alone;... (E 418a/417)

I’ll address Reid’s reference to habit, but first let’s try to understand the conceptual status of original perceptions.

From this and other comments, it isn’t easy to determine whether Reid believes original perceptions conform to his standard perceptual schema on which any perception incorporates conception and belief. He says that original perceptions

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<sup>65</sup> This is a quotation from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I, §7.

are merely the product of the senses, but he also implies that in them are ‘notions’. One might think that Reid has in mind something similar to some contemporary views about non-conceptual perceiving.<sup>66</sup> But I would opt, with Van Woudenberg (2002, 74), for the alternative: original perceptions do conform to Reid’s analysis and they do contain a conceptual component. The conceptual quantity of original perceptions, though, is minimal.

Reid claims that original perceptions are ‘indistinct’, but, if I’m right, that may be a slip. The conceptual component in original perceptions is determinate and clear. Nonetheless, that component is impoverished. An example described at some length is especially instructive here. In vision we can form original perceptual beliefs (a) in regard to the quality of circularity and (b) that this circular object is present in visible figure F, as well as (c) that this circularity is a quality of a mind-independent (at least two-dimensional) object. However, while I can perceive the clock is circular, it seems that the original perceptual belief only contains demonstratives: this object seems thus-and-so. I cannot originally perceive (d) the clock as circular, since understanding the terms ‘circular’ and ‘clock’ is a matter of learning, and original perceptions *ex hypothesi* do not incorporate prior perceptual learning. Option (d) would be the

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<sup>66</sup> Alan Millar (1991) articulates and defends such a view. Specifically, he voices a “detachability thesis” that implies that “you could have had an experience of the very same type even if, for want of the appropriate concepts, the experience did not have the content in question. But it also implies that for any conceptual contents you care to mention, however tightly constrained, phenomenal character is detachable from those contents” (1991, 496). This sounds very similar to passage (4) above. (See also Millar 1992; for a contrasting view, see Hamlyn 1994).

product of an acquired perception resulting from a confluence of original perceptions of sight and touch. If I am able to classify an object as a clock in a perceptual belief, such a belief must be acquired, since my ability to apply, and my knowledge that I am correctly applying, this category depends upon cognitive abilities that transcend original perceptions. (As a matter of fact, I, for one, cannot help *but* perceive the object before me as circular and as a clock, but someone with no experience of circularity or time-keeping devices would only perceive that object and its figure originally.) After describing the differing ways a child and adult form perceptual notions about a cube of brass, Reid says, “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” (E 419a/419).

That original perceptions do have conceptual content—they do include ‘notions’—is worth highlighting due to its epistemological consequences. Debates continue about whether beliefs can be justified in virtue of non-conceptual, sensory experiences. John McDowell (1994) holds that states capable of justifying beliefs must be conceptual in origin, and Reid, I’m happy to say, agrees, provided that we allow that states like original perceptions may be immediately justified. Reid would obviously part company with McDowell’s Kantian views in several ways, e.g. Reid holds that belief is an essential ingredient in perception and McDowell does not

(1994, 60-63). But their agreement, if only on this point, is quite important. I'll address some epistemological issues this point raises in the following section, but before that let's complete our exploration of Reid's distinction by analyzing acquired perceptions.

When I was first visually presented with an apple, I didn't originally see it *as* an apple. I saw a visible figure and a color pattern possessed by an external object that is typically associated with apples by those in the know. Reid asserts that

it requires some ripeness of understanding to distinguish the qualities of a body from the body... if any one thinks that this distinction is not made by our senses, but by some other power of the mind, I will not dispute this point. I think, indeed, that some of the determinations we form concerning matter cannot be deduced solely from the testimony of sense, but must be referred to some other source. (E 323a/219)

Had I never before seen an apple I could only form original perceptual beliefs of its qualities—observing its shape and color and relative position. Without repeated perceptions of apples and the knowledge that the qualities I have perceived belong to them, I would be unable to formulate an acquired perception of the apple itself. However, when we've originally perceived several apples and observed their variations in color, size and shape, we're in a position to formulate acquired perceptions of an apple in virtue of forming and applying a 'general concept' of

‘apple’.<sup>67</sup>

One of the causal relationships between original and acquired perceptions will be familiar. In the *Inquiry* Reid posits innate suggestions to explain the connection between two relata, sensations and the (original) perceptions of external objects.<sup>68</sup> Reid thinks there are correlations between certain sensations and certain perceptual states (see I 121b-22a/59-60) since he claims that some beliefs about physical objects are suggested by certain sensations via innate mental dispositions. As with sensations, original perceptions too are capable of activating suggestion relations, as we will shortly see.

The first distinguishing mark of acquired perceptions is that acquired perceptual beliefs contain conceptual content absent in original perceptions. Reid’s own example illustrates this distinction. When a globe is set before me, I ‘perceive’ that it has three dimensions and is a spherical figure, though I ‘see’ a colored, circular, two-dimensional form. A painter, in a rare exhibition of artistic aptitude, may deceive me into believing that what I see is a globe when it is not. In so doing, the painter deceives me because she compels me to form a belief about a globe by seeing a two-

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<sup>67</sup> For a development of Reid’s account of ‘general ideas’, see Castagnetto (1992).

<sup>68</sup> It behooves us to draw as much from the *Inquiry* as we can in this context since Reid did not distance himself from his account of perception in subsequent editions of the *Inquiry*, tacitly indicating his continued accord with that work. Furthermore, Reid himself instructs us to do so in a draft of E, II, 21, “Of the Improvement of the Senses,” MS 2131/8/II/18, p. 5. Compare this with E 332.

dimensional figure (that is not the surface of a sphere). This contradicts the observed regularity found in the content of my acquired perceptions of globes (E 337a/247-8).<sup>69</sup> Previous acquired perceptions of globe-like objects were reliably caused by globes. In this deceptive case the visible figure seen by the eye is identical to what one would see while gazing at a globe of the same color and at the same distance and angle. Since the original perception of the imitation globe and the original perception of the genuine article are each composed only of raw sensory information, it is possible the two original perceptions are identical. The difference between the two cases of perception lies in the content of the acquired perception and not in the nature of the object I visually apprehend. This distinction between original and acquired perception explains Reid's resolution of the counterfeit guinea case quote above.

I mentioned that the first difference between original and acquired perceptions regards their content. The means by which they are formed—whether merely by the use of the senses or by the use of reasoning—is the second difference, but this point is less clear in Reid than the previous point. We will examine several texts out of which falls a distinction between two types of acquired perceptions.

It seems that in the *Inquiry*, drafts of sections of the *Intellectual Powers*, and in

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<sup>69</sup> Reid does not, however, allow that a person will be repeatedly fooled in this manner. This deception is successful only when the painting is in ideal conditions with respect to the eye (E 332a/237), or when it is viewed through a key hole from afar (I 189b-190a/181-82).



the *Intellectual Powers* itself Reid provides discomfiting explanations of acquired perceptions in which two fundamentally different components are present. He affirms on several occasions both that there *is* reasoning and that there *is not* reasoning in the formation of acquired perceptions. (Since all acquired perception contains a belief component, I will allow myself to refer to the epistemic status of ‘acquired perceptions’.)

Beginning with the *Inquiry* Reid claims that reasoning is a necessary component in the formation of acquired perceptions. He says, for example, that the belief in the moon’s three-dimensionality is a conclusion “not obtained by simple perception, but by reasoning” (I 185; B 172). Yet immediately before this Reid asserts that

Perception ought not only to be distinguished from sensation, but likewise from that knowledge of the objects of sense which is got by reasoning. There is no reasoning in perception, as hath been observed. The belief which is implied in it, is the effect of instinct. But there are many things, with regard to sensible objects, which we can infer from what we perceive; and such conclusions of reason ought to be distinguished from what is merely perceived. (E 185a/172)<sup>70</sup>

One means to remove the apparent inconsistency is to claim that acquired perception

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<sup>70</sup> A similar passage occurs at E 260b/101, though Gallie correctly observes (1989, 44) that the epistemic optimism in this latter text is an aberration.

is not a form of perception as Reid is using the term in the above quotation. However, when amplifying this point, he remarks that “Perception, whether original or acquired, implies no exercise of reason; and is common to men, children, idiots, and brutes” (E 185b/173).<sup>71</sup>

The difficulty becomes slightly clearer when turning to drafts of the ‘Of the Fallacy of the Senses’ chapter of the *Intellectual Powers*. Here Reid desires to carve out a conceptual space for acquired perceptions between original perceptions and ‘conclusions drawn by reasoning’. In this manuscript he says that

The habit of judging of small distances by the eye is got so early and so much confirmed by daily experience that it resembles original perception very much,

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<sup>71</sup> The contrast between cognition in deduction and suggestion relations formed by habit is present in Reid’s discussion of our ability to see objects via inverted retinal images, and will shed some light on our present concern. Descartes resolved this problem, according to Reid, by claiming that our seeing objects erect is “a deduction of reason, drawn from certain premises: whereas it seems to be an immediate perception. And, secondly, because the premises from which all mankind are supposed to draw this conclusion, never entered into the minds of the far greater part, but are absolutely unknown to them” (I 153b/115). Deduction seems to require conscious consideration of premises in an argument.

Here Reid elucidates his position on types (i), (ii) and (iii) reasoning because other types of reasoning do not require such efforts. That visible objects appear erect cannot be a conclusion drawn from premises which never entered into the minds of the ignorant. We have indeed had occasion to observe many instances of conclusions drawn, either by means of original principles, or by habit, from premises which pass through the mind very quickly, and which are never made the objects of reflection; but surely no man will conceive it possible to draw conclusions from premises which never entered into the mind at all. (I 154a/115-16)

The term ‘draw a conclusion’ describes what one does even when the premises of an argument are ‘never’ the object of reflection and pass quickly through the mind.

it is called perception in common language and can be distinguished from original perception only by philosophers. ~~As this distinction is important~~ I have taken the liberty to call it acquired perception to distinguish it on the one hand from original perception and on the other conclusions drawn by reasoning from what we perceive.<sup>72</sup>

In this unpublished passage Reid struggles to establish that acquired perceptions are more cognitive in character than original perceptions, while holding that they do not require the subject actively to draw an inference in order to formulate each acquired perception.

Assistance in sorting out acquired perception is not found in the *Intellectual Powers*, in which Reid also vacillates on this point. He explains that “Acquired perception is not properly the testimony of those senses which God hath given us, but a conclusion drawn from what the senses testify” (E 336b/247). Reid is unsure what to make of this category. He wonders “whether this acquired perception is to be resolved into some process of reasoning” or perhaps “from some part of our constitution distinct from reason, as I rather believe...” (Ibid). He is marking the divide between type (ii) inductive inference, and mere association in (iii) and (iv).

Perhaps on the basis of textual considerations like these Lehrer and J.C. Smith hold that forming acquired perceptual beliefs is a process that uses inductive reasoning. These authors distinguish various principles, some of which generate

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<sup>72</sup> MS 2132 7/V/26, p. 2.

acquired, others original perceptions. They claim that an “inductive principle accounts for our conception of secondary qualities,” conceptions which are included within acquired perceptions. They remark, “The operation of such a principle in yielding the conception of secondary qualities does not involve reasoning of any sort” (Lehrer and Smith 1985, 27). Only a page prior, however, they describe the deliverances of acquired perception as being produced by “inductive reasoning” (26).

The major problem with Lehrer and Smith’s interpretation arises as a result of an equivocation on “reasoning” and the tacit assumptions they make about induction. They inadvertently track Reid too closely. While acquired perceptions result from inductions, it is difficult to determine whether Lehrer and Smith believe one *reasons* (and if so, *how* one reasons) in performing an induction. They equivocate on their use of the term “reasoning,” and do not discuss whether, on Reid’s use of that term, acquired perceptions can aptly be described as “products of reasoning”. In point of fact, in contrast to Reid’s parsimonious, circumspect application of the term “knowledge,” his use of the term “reasoning” is quite broad. Furthermore, finely tuned distinctions between Reid’s uses of “reasoning” would only be of value in this context if it can be shown that such distinctions apply to the very uses of ‘reasoning’ that describe acquired perceptions. Drawing a distinction between types of acquired perceptions will produce much needed precision in Reid and show us how to improve on Lehrer and Smith.

5.2. *Inferential and Habituated Acquired Perceptions.* Any reconstruction of Reid's epistemology of perception must give considerable attention to acquired perception since, as Reid observes, "the far greatest part [of the deliverances of perception] is acquired, and the fruit of experience" (E 331a/235). I propose to divide acquired perceptions into two groups, one that does require conscious reasoning and one that does not.

Reid is clear that when I first perceive a globe-like object, I do not know non-inferentially that the object I perceive is a globe. Were I to form an acquired perceptual belief of the object that it is a globe, then, if that belief is justified, it must be inferred, perhaps on the basis of a tactile experience of the object. Once I have repeated this inference several times I will habituate my original perception of the globe-like object, which enables me to form an acquired perceptual belief about the presence of a globe. Once habituated, according to Reid, I need not consciously reason in the formation of my acquired perceptual belief. Instead, the original perception will suggest the non-inferential, acquired perception of a globe.

Analyses of the two forms of acquired perception are as follows:

X is an *inferential acquired perception* only if (a) there is an object or property originally perceived (i.e. heard, seen, etc.); (b) the original perceptual event causes a conception of the object or property; (c) from this conception one performs conscious explanatory reasoning to hypothesize that the object or property originally perceived is P, is a P, is caused by P or has property P; (d)

the explanatory reasoning culminates in the belief that the object originally perceived is P, is a P, is caused by P or has property P.

A few notes are in order. First, by stating clauses (b) and (c) as I have, I avoid assuming that conceptions are necessarily propositional in character. Second, by ‘conscious explanatory reasoning’ I mean to avoid implying that only deduction operates in moving from an original conception to an acquired perceptual belief. More frequently the process of conscious reasoning proceeds by the process of elimination or by trial and error—both being forms of type (ii) reasoning. Lastly, this analysis does not serve as an account of justified or known inferential acquired perceptual beliefs.

As an example of inferential acquired perception, consider the following case, adapted from Reid (E 117a-b/50). I sit in my living room, windows open, and I hear a sound. I form the conception and belief that the sound is a mule drawing a cart because that is the best explanation for the particular clip-clop noise and the fainter grating of what seems to be wheels against a hard road surface. This is the first time I have heard such a sound. When I look out I see a horse and carriage, not a mule and cart. I was incorrect and so my perceptual belief was not known; since it was my first time hearing such a sound, I was doubtfully justified. The next time I hear a similar sound I tentatively form the conception of and belief in a horse and carriage, and this time I am correct. My inferential acquired perception is known and justified, but that justification depends crucially on a process of conscious, abductive reasoning.

Building on the preceding,

X is an *habituated acquired perception* only if (a) the subject has formed a number of inferential acquired perceptions of an object or property of an object under relevantly similar circumstances; (b) by doing so, the subject has instantiated a suggestion relation that conjoins the original perception of X with the inferential acquired perceptual belief that the object is P, is a P, is caused by P or has property P in the mind of the subject.

By ‘suggestion’, I refer to the concept Reid develops at E 110-a-111b/36-38). To continue with our previous example, if the same sound was repeated nightly a type of suggestion relation would soon be created. *Ceteris paribus*, I would be disposed to move without inference from hearing the clip-clop sound to forming the perceptual belief that there is a horse and carriage passing on the road. Rarely, however, is the suggestion relation created without any error. Suppose for a week a horse and carriage nightly pass on the road, but then a mule and cart pass, making a similar sound. The embryonic (and, for Reid, artificial) suggestion relation in this case generates a false belief. Such relations will be subject to correction and standardization in different environments prior to causing justified, habituated perceptual beliefs. Once properly established, these habituated acquired perceptions show why we need not force on Reid the unwelcome consequence that each time I formulate beliefs about roses I engage in a form of conscious inductive inference in going from sensations to beliefs.

We might best describe habituated acquired perceptions as quasi-inferential. It should be clear that we do not perform any inductive inference when forming any habituated acquired perception. They are, though, epistemically and causally *dependent on* such inferences being formed upstream in the process of perceptual learning, viz. in inferential acquired perceptions. This dependence is epistemic and causal. Here I accommodate the second desideratum mentioned above. The presence of habituated acquired perceptions commonsensically accounts for Reid's ability to preserve the justification of the perceptual beliefs of children. Children engage in just the sort of inductive reasoning I describe here when they are learning to identify the same class of objects.

What about the first desideratum according to which we must maintain the close conceptual ties between PDR and Reid's theory of perceptual knowledge? Insofar as Reid has any theory of perceptual knowledge, my framework maintains these ties because in original perception, typically, I directly perceive mind-independent objects and their qualities, not images, ideas or other intermediaries. This point is overlooked at the peril of flummoxing Reid's response to the representational theory of perception put forth by his predecessors. Thus the interpretation I've advocated captures the two key motivations for EDR.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS INTERPRETATION



6.1. *Textual consistency and historical continuity.* In addition to better explaining Reid's use of the acquired/original perception distinction and his comments on perceptual error, there is a third important advantage of my analysis of the process of perceptual belief formation. With it we can see that there is more continuity between the *Inquiry* and the *Intellectual Powers* on this matter than previously recognized. John Immerwahr believes that, due to the nature of the suggestion relation, Reid holds that perceptual knowledge is inferential in the *Inquiry*. He remarks that Reid "believes that external objects are only known indirectly by means of sensations which act as natural signs of the external world" (1978, 250). Immerwahr proceeds to develop a sharp contrast between the major works in this regard:

In the *Inquiry* Reid does not really eliminate this barrier between the mind and the external world. He merely shows us a novel way to get through the barrier; this is done by seeing sensations as an innate language which suggests knowledge of the external world... In the *Intellectual Powers* the barrier is eliminated altogether. (250-51)

Immerwahr fuses EDR with its perceptual counterpart. Because sensations are (or at least can be) objects of direct awareness in the *Inquiry*, Immerwahr concludes that the external world "is known only indirectly" (248). I believe this is a mistake. First, that sensations are causally relevant in the production of perceptual beliefs has no bearing on whether or not perceptual beliefs are known directly. Ambient light is causally relevant to the production of visual perceptual beliefs, but simply because my eyes

require light to visually perceive certain objects is itself no reason for holding that such beliefs are produced inferentially.

Second, the pair of distinctions I've drawn shows that views which expansively assert that perceptual knowledge is or is not wholly inferential, even when restricted to only one of Reid's works, are improvident. The evidence for the distinction between original and acquired perception is present in both works, and that between inferential and habitual acquired perception latent in both. With these distinctions in hand, Reid can contend that some justified perceptual beliefs are non-inferential (original), others inferential (inferential acquired) and others quasi-inferential (habituated acquired).

We glimpse the continuity between the two works on this score, and the reason Reid did not overtly draw the distinction between habituated and inferential acquired perceptions, by attention to two similar passages.

When I look at the moon, I perceive her to be sometimes circular, sometimes horned, and sometimes gibbous. This is simple perception, and is the same in the philosopher and the clown: but from these various appearances of her enlightened part, I infer that she is really of a spherical figure. This conclusion is not obtained by simple perception, but by reasoning. (I 185a-b/172)

[W]hen a globe is set before me, I perceive by my eyes that it has three dimensions and a spherical figure. To say that this is not perception, would be to reject the authority of custom in the use of words... but that it is not the testimony

of my sense of seeing, every philosopher knows. I see only a circular form, having the light and colour distributed in a certain way over it. (E 337a/247)

These passages, respectively drawn from the *Inquiry* and *Intellectual Powers*, show that Reid consistently held that original perceptions were non-inferential. What has confused us is his tendency to use ‘perception’ ubiquitously in his later work. The second is helpful on this score, for here he reveals that his uses of ‘perception’, which encompass beliefs about the three-dimensionality of an object, are not technical uses but rather uses which conform with ‘custom’. In his unpublished writings he also humbly complies with common usage. He writes that

We are liable to many errors in acquired perception which are commonly called fallacies of the senses, but improperly. Acquired perception is not properly a testimony of the senses which God hath given us, but a ~~conviction~~ ~~arising from a certain improvement which they receive~~ conclusion drawn from past experience... When such conclusions come by habit to be immediately made from what the senses really testify, they come to be confounded with the testimony of sense and get the name of perception in common language... And this conclusion which was originally grounded on experience becomes so ready and habitual that it resembles immediate perception and gets the name of perception in all languages.<sup>73</sup>

‘Conviction’ did not appear strong enough to describe the nature of some acquired

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<sup>73</sup> MS 2131/7/V/26, p. 3.

perceptions, so Reid replaced it with ‘conclusion’. Also, he insinuates here that when suggestion relations are properly instantiated, perceptual beliefs will become “habitual” (also see E 418a/417, above, and E 332a-b/237-8). In both the *Inquiry* and the *Intellectual Powers* Reid shows too much deference to customary linguistic usage in the development of his theory of perception. These considerations go some way toward explaining why he chose not to make overt the further distinction between inferential and habituated acquired perceptions.

In addition to the fact that several perplexing texts are best explained by a division between habituated and inferential acquired perceptions, Descartes, a likely influence on Reid on these matters, serves as an historical precedent for the distinction. In Descartes’s *Sixth Replies* he argues that the process of perception is best resolved into three grades: a level of sensation, a level of mentality and a judgmental level, at which we form beliefs. Though Reid would posit four levels (distinguishing between sensation and original perception), Descartes, like Reid, indicates that the reasoning present in habituated acquired perceptions has allowed us to use intentional predicates to speak of the senses ‘learning’ to perform an operation.

[S]ize, distance and shape can be perceived by reasoning alone, which works out any one feature from the other features. The only difference is that when we now make a judgement for the first time because of some new observation, then we attribute it to the intellect; but when from our earliest

years we have made judgements, or even rational inferences, about the things which affect our senses, then, even though these judgements were made in exactly the same way as those we make now, we refer them to the senses. The reason for this is that we make the calculation and judgement at great speed because of habit, or rather we remember the judgements we have long made about similar objects; and so we do not distinguish these operations from simple sense-perception. (Descartes 1985, 295)

Reid echoes this hybrid position: inferences are present in the formation of our initial perceptual beliefs about three-dimensional objects, but their formation becomes unconscious and merely dependent upon prior inferences once they are performed at ‘great speed because of habit’, or in Reid’s terms, once they become ‘ready and habitual’.

*6.2. Belief formation and knowledge.* Two notes about this account are in order. First, the need to formulate inferential acquired perceptions in order to generate justified perceptual beliefs is not restricted to situations in which I have never before formed a perceptual belief about the type of object under consideration. Reid’s examples of error illustrate this. In certain contexts it will be an open question whether or not one’s acquired perceptual beliefs (of either type) will be justified. If I live among a band of counterfeiterers it seems, from Reid’s description of error, that I must draw inferences in order to be justified in assenting to certain acquired perceptual beliefs about possessing legal tender. Reid simply does not provide us

requisite detail with which to construct an account of the justification of perceptual beliefs.

Second and related, whatever positive epistemic status my habituated perceptual belief possesses derives from the epistemic status of the inferential perceptual belief through which the suggestion relation has been developed. I may form an habituated perceptual belief about the proximity of a horse and carriage on the basis of the (original) aural perception of some sound S. Yet we may imagine that in my repeated exercises of explanatory reasoning I negligently misidentify S as being caused by a mule and cart when it was actually the product of a horse and carriage. Extrapolating from his discussion of perceptual error (see §3.1 above), it is likely that Reid would contend that the error I have committed explains why the beliefs I form about horses and carriages based merely on aural perceptions lack positive epistemic status. Determining the exact nature of the epistemic dependence of habituated beliefs on inferential beliefs is made difficult by Reid's lack of specificity about the justificatory powers of the suggestion relation.

To sum up, we form original perceptual beliefs about physical objects and their qualities non-inferentially. Upon repeatedly forming such thinly conceptual original perceptual beliefs, our minds quickly generalize from associated qualities in order to classify the objects with natural kind terms in inferential acquired perceptions. We originally perceive a green, leafy object. We later perceive it *as* a green leafy object, and *later yet* as romaine lettuce. At this second stage of perceptual belief formation,

explanatory inferences are required in order consistently to form perceptual beliefs that correctly distinguish one object (or quality) from another. Once relations between certain original perceptions and certain inferential acquired perceptions have been developed, a suggestion relation is instantiated during future perceptions of these objects. This allows the mind to move quasi-inferentially from an inferential acquired perception to an habituated acquired perception. When I have developed appropriate suggestion relations between original perceptions of romaine lettuce and inferential acquired perceptual beliefs in which I classify the object of sight as romaine lettuce, as opposed to boston or bibb, my perception of that object has become habituated.

This view differs with EDR in several important respects. First, I see original and acquired perceptions as essential components of any theory of Reidian perceptual belief formation; EDR pays no heed to this distinction. Second, EDR alleges that most perceptual beliefs are non-inferentially known or justified. I argue for the opposite claim: most perceptual beliefs, for Reid, derive their positive epistemic status from explanatory inferences, either directly (inferential acquired perceptions) or indirectly (habituated acquired perceptions). The two views diverge substantially with respect to the *scope* of non-inferential perceptual belief. Third and related, EDR mistakenly claims that perceptual beliefs are known or justified immediately, whereas Reid was much more cautious in his epistemic appraisal of the status of acquired perceptual beliefs. In this way the competing views differ with regard to the epistemic

*status* of perceptual beliefs (though I've refrained from taking a determinate stand on that issue since Reid allows us none).

Where, then, does this leave us with regard to a theory of Reidian perceptual *knowledge*? Given my comments critical of EDR, it is perhaps no surprise that I have heretofore dodged questions about the nature of epistemic justification and the acquisition of perceptual knowledge. Here I do not offer an account of perceptual knowledge, but an account of perceptual learning. Since Reid seldom uses normative epistemic terminology to describe perceptual beliefs, doing so will not easily improve our understanding of the historical Reid.

For example, Reid comments that though a man “can give no reason for believing his senses, his belief remains as firm as if it were grounded on demonstration.” He adds that “the evidence of sense [is] no less reasonable than that of demonstration” (E 328b/230). Showing that the term ‘evidence’ is epistemic in these contexts is fraught with difficulty for the same reason that Alston and Pappas had difficulty interpreting ‘immediate’ in an epistemic (rather than a causal or psychological) sense. Reid notes that “We give the name evidence to whatever is a ground of belief” (Ibid.). Hence, Reid’s views on perceptual knowledge will often appear more similar to Hume’s than to EDR. Prognostication about Reid’s theory of perceptual knowledge must wait until we have a better understanding of Reid’s conditions on knowledge in general.



## 7. INFERENCE PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND REID'S OBJECTIONS TO THE IDEAL THEORY

There is a problem my position may seem to engender (one that George Pappas has brought to my attention) which must be addressed due to its *prima facie* force. An implication of my interpretation of Reid's theory of perceptual knowledge, one might argue, is that he holds a position structurally similar to the Ideal Theory. Reid objected to the Ideal Theory on the basis that it is subject to a Lockean veil of perception according to which one's mind is insulated from direct contact with the external world because its only immediate objects are ideas. A prominent Reidian objection (according to tradition) is that this leads to skepticism because it requires a sprawling inference from my knowledge of my ideas of objects to knowledge both *that* there are mind-independent objects that correspond to my ideas, and knowledge *of* said objects and their qualities. My position seems inconsistent with this for, by my lights, Reid adopts a position that requires inference, which thereby allows skepticism a foothold.

There are two responses to this criticism, each of which is sufficient to rebut it. First, on my view the inference Reid advocates from original to acquired perceptual belief is not sufficiently similar to the epistemic structure of the Ideal Theory as would be required for the objection to retain its force. Reid is a perceptual direct realist and ascribes to PDR. Because of this, *even if* Reid did claim that the Ideal

Theory entails skepticism due to our inability to infer successfully from knowledge of ideas to knowledge of objects, this would not show that my interpretation of Reid's theory of perceptual knowledge entails skepticism. On my account Reid begins with much more conceptual material (in original perceptions of mind-independent objects) than the advocates of the Ideal Theory allow.

Reid's repeated definitions of the process of perception exemplify this point. Whenever he insists that perception is constituted by a conception and belief, he rarely, if ever, fails to note that these mental actions take as their objects mind-independent, physical bodies or their qualities. (See I 183a-b/168 and E 258a/96.) Such is not the case with the Ideal Theory for, as we have observed, the objects from which we must infer are mind-dependent ideas and impressions. Reid argues that from an awareness of these sorts of ideas, one is in a miserable position from which to show that there is an external world composed of the particular objects we think it contains. Original perceptions do not occupy the tenuous, difficult place that impressions and ideas do, and because of this, the inference that my interpretation of Reid lands him in the 'coal pit' is unfounded. This is why it was important to place original perception within Reid's standard account of perception.

Second, contrary to tradition, Reid does not believe the suspicious epistemic status of inferences from ideas to mind-independent objects forces the Ideal Theory into skepticism. The second point requires a detailed discussion of Reid's arguments against the Ideal Theory, however, so an explanation and defense of this response

must wait until the conclusion of the book.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The account of Reidian perceptual belief formation at hand is more plausible, prescient and renders Reid more consistent over time than the alternatives. This interpretation is more plausible because it allows Reid a way of accounting for ‘misperceptions’ often leveled against epistemically direct theories of perception. Reid is prescient, by my lights, because he clearly foresees the current penchants for placing the mind squarely in the world and considering the roles—beneficial and otherwise—the environment has on one’s faculties. Finally, this interpretation renders Reid’s views more consistent over time because it accounts for an enormous range of texts drawn from the *Inquiry*, the *Intellectual Powers* and unpublished material the balance of which is not fully explicable on rival interpretations.

CHAPTER 9:  
THE STRUCTURE OF REID'S THEORY OF SENSATION

1. THE PLACE OF SENSATIONS

Philosophers, psychologists and cognitive scientists widely recognize Thomas Reid as the first clearly to draw the distinction between sensation and perception.<sup>74</sup> In spite of this, confusion about just what are sensations runs deep in interpretations of Reid.

Reid indicates that sensation is a type of mental state whose members are now referred to as 'qualia'—they are phenomenal or felt states. Perceptions are significantly more cognitive than are sensations, according to Reid, because perceptions necessarily contain conceptual (in fact, for Reid, propositional) contents. The central confusion amongst Reid scholars surrounds the fundamental relationship between these sensations and perceptions. Some hold that sensations are philosophically ineffectual. J.C. Smith (1986 and 1990) thinks that Reidian sensations

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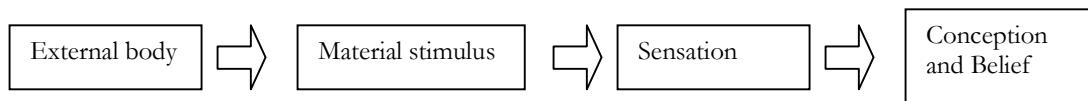
<sup>74</sup> A sampling includes: Herrnstein and Boring (1965, 172); Pastore (1971, 114); Hatfield (1990, 281-282); Humphrey (1992, 46-50); and Hamlyn (1996, 5). Hatfield says that Malbranche makes something like what would become a sensation/perception distinction but in a form too inchoate to bear philosophical analysis. Thus he can say that Reid was first to make the distinction clear. Hamlyn implies that Reid is the first since Aristotle to make this distinction clear.

can be reduced to non-qualitative functional states—and, more important for the present context, he thinks that Reid thought so as well. Nicholas Wolterstorff (2000 and 2001) proffers a related, conditional suggestion: If sensations are the phenomenal mental states that Reid often leads us to believe they are, then they are otiose in an account of perception. Wolterstorff then uses *modus tollens* to argue that sensations are not mere states of phenomenal consciousness, but rather are contentful mental states of a peculiar kind—they are “interpretations” of our sensory experiences. Smith and Wolterstorff both believe that the straightforward analysis of Reidian sensations, on which they are simple, irreducible qualitative mental states, is false. As a result they revise the straightforward analysis so as to make Reidian sensations cognitively useful (Wolterstorff) or metaphysically innocuous (Smith).

William Alston (1989) claims that Reid should have argued that a sensation state is contained within perception. In a similar way Vere Chappell (1989) contends that Reidian sensations are otiose because material impressions can do all the conceptual work to which Reid puts sensations. These two commentators also share the intuition that Reidian sensations, as they stand, are otiose, but they do not attempt to sidestep the straightforward interpretation; rather, Alston and Chappell rest content with showing that Reid’s theory—specifically as concerns the relationship of sensations to perceptions—is problematic and implausible.

Other commentators hold that Reidian sensations are not useless in an account of perception. Some argue that a sensation component is part of Reid's philosophical analysis of perception. George Pappas (1989) seems to fit this bill, for he argues that Reidian perception is best construed as a fused-concept containing a sensation component. The primary challenge for members of this group is to show that Reidian sensations are actually important, on Reid's terms, for the success of the perceptual process.

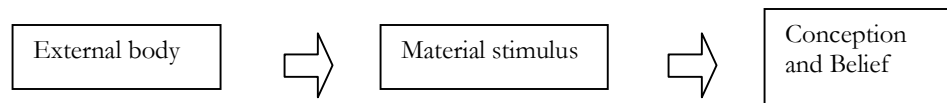
I tentatively represent the standard model, whereby the sensation component is alleged to be somehow contained in the perceptual process, in diagram 1:



The immediate problem we confront with the standard model is that it is not apparent what are the relations between the various stages of perception. It seems on this model that, *temporally* speaking, sensation is thought to occur prior to the conception and belief. It is also generally thought that sensation *suggests* (in Reid's special use of that term) the conception and belief. (For the uninitiated, suggestion, for Reid, resembles causation but is not quite identical to it since the only causation worth the name, according to Reid, is agent causation.) Most important for present

purposes is neither the causal nor temporal relation between sensation and perception, but rather their *conceptual* relation.

I happen to believe that we have all missed something crucial about the nature of Reid's distinction between sensation and perception by endorsing the standard model of the perceptual process. These commentators assume that Reid thought that perception is a process necessarily including a sensory component, though of course they differ widely over whether Reid's account of sensation makes good on this commitment.<sup>75</sup> The standard model implies, on *a priori* grounds, that the structure of perception represented in diagram 2 fails to render a full account of the perceptual process:



The key assumption implicit in the standard model is what I will call the ‘necessity of sensation thesis’: qualitative states are conceptually necessary components of perceptual states. Thus any account of perception on which sensation plays merely a contingent role is erroneous. I’ll show below that interpreters of Reid typically

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<sup>75</sup> Another standard assumption is that the process of perception as represented above is uniformly structured in all the senses. I have shown above, in chapter 6 that this assumption too is mistaken and that there is important intermodal differentiation. Specifically, in the process of visual perception there is no parallel sensation state, though in Reid's intricate theory of visual perception even this must be qualified.

assume the necessity of sensation thesis is true, and typically take Reid to assume it is true.

The central purpose of this paper is to articulate and defend an interpretation of Reid on sensation upon which he *denies* the necessity of sensation thesis, which marks a more plausible interpretation of Reid. Reid allows that sensations occur in tandem with perceptions, but he intends his philosophical account of perception not to include any qualitative component. Rather than render Reidian sensations otiose as a result—which appears to be the primary motivation upon which Reid’s commentators endorse the necessity of sensation thesis—I will argue that this makes sensations useful, though in a way very different than is often thought.

We can put my thesis in terms borrowed from cognitive scientist Nicholas Humphrey. He has identified the type of theory that I believe Reid endorses with the claim “that the two categories of experience—sensation and perception, autocentric and allocentric representations, subjective feelings and physical phenomena—are alternative and essentially non-overlapping ways of interpreting the meaning of an environmental stimulus arriving at the body.” Humphrey mentions in passing that Reid is an early advocate of just this position, though he calls Reid’s view “interestingly ambiguous” (1992, 47, 49). In what follows I will mount an argument that this in fact is the proper way to interpret Reid on sensation.

Before I begin my argument, I have a procedural point to make on Reid’s behalf. Reid employs a first-person method of analysis. Reid does not use, or at least



does not see the need to use, anti-physicalist arguments to justify his belief that sensations exist and are not identical to or reducible to physical states, what he calls “material impressions.” It is no surprise that those who argue that Reidian sensations are easily reducible to material or functional states do not show much appreciation for Reid’s method.<sup>76</sup> For Reid holds that first-person experience of qualia is sufficient evidence on which to build a strong case for the independence of qualia from physical states. Reid suggests to his readers that we carefully attend to what we experience through our senses. He says, “The most simple operations of the mind, admit not of a logical definition: all we can do is to describe them, so as to lead those who are conscious of them in themselves, to attend to them, and reflect upon them; and it is often very difficult to describe them so as to answer this intention” (I 182b/B 166). To participate with Reid in this exploration of our conscious mental life we must be willing to accept that this method is virtuous—at least provisionally—for otherwise his analysis is mistaken from the start.<sup>77</sup> Since this is a point of method

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<sup>76</sup> For example, Chappell thinks it is important to note, in his interpretation of Reid, that “the empirical case for such sensations is not decisive” (1989, 56). Reid, especially as a dualist, is well aware that from a third-person scientific perspective the case isn’t obvious. But he warns, “Those who do not attend to the complex nature of such operations, are apt to resolve them in to some one of the simple acts of which they are compounded, overlooking the others” (E 229b/B 37).

<sup>77</sup> What I will say about sensations is intended to apply generally to Reid’s theory of sensation and the relation between sensation and perception. I will not, however, discuss one objection that one might raise—indeed, that has been aptly raised—against Reid’s theory. This objection alleges that Reid’s analysis of sensation and the relation between sensation and secondary qualities requires a highly implausible semantics for secondary-quality terms, such that our terms ‘red’ and ‘heat’

closely echoed in contemporary work on consciousness, I do not expect it to be a stumbling block.<sup>78</sup>

## 2. REID'S DISTINCTION

Given my primary goal, I seek to establish a very different interpretation of the *relation between* sensation and perception for Reid. I will not offer a new interpretation of Reid on the *nature of* sensations. Nonetheless, given the confusion created by sharply divergent spins put upon the nature of Reidian sensations, I will first set out the straightforward interpretation of Reidian sensations on which they are non-reducible, non-conceptual, purely qualitative mental states. For in addition to being the correct analysis of Reidian sensations, this marks the conceptual starting point from which other interpretations are proposed.

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refer to qualities in bodies and not to qualitative, sensory experiences. (Falkenstein (2000) and Pitson (2002) both raise this problem. Falkenstein argues that it is a debilitating problem for Reid's account of sensation and secondary qualities, while Pitson is more hopeful.) This is a troubling problem for Reid in particular, given the role that he allows ordinary language to play in guiding his philosophical intuitions. However, since I have discussed this objection from ordinary language in the context of Reid's analysis of primary and secondary qualities, I will not repeat my analysis here.

<sup>78</sup> For example, Siewert (1998) pleads with his readership in the second person. He says he "will describe types of conscious experience, as well as cases in which certain kinds of conscious experience are or would be lacking. ...I ask you to turn your attention to the first-person case. That is, I would like you to consider instances in your own life of the types of conscious experience I will describe..." (4-5).

Reid's analysis of sensations flows from the failure, as Reid saw it, of the Ideal Theory—roughly, the views about the nature of the mind that Reid variously associates with Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Three primary features of the Ideal Theory call for analysis here. (i) Ideas, latter-day sense-data, are the *immediate objects of perceptual events*. (ii) Ideas (for the Ideal Theory's representative realist subscribers, i.e. except for Berkeley) *represent mind-independent objects and their qualities*. In Locke's terms, "It is evident the mind knows not things immediately, but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them. Our knowledge, therefore, is real only so far as there is a conformity between our ideas and the reality of things" (Locke 1975, 563; see also 169-70). Locke is asserting that we only ever immediately perceive ideas; they "intervene" between our minds and things. But he's also saying, (iii), that *our non-inferential knowledge is restricted to ideas*—a thesis more explicit in his well-known definition of knowledge at the outset of *Essay*, book IV. I will avoid interpretive issues surrounding how accurately Reid's attributions to the Ideal Theory represent the views of his predecessors in favor of pursuing Reid's position.

Reidian sensations do not play any of these roles ideas play. Sensations are not the typical objects of perception.<sup>79</sup> Sensations are not intentional or representational;

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<sup>79</sup> While no one defends the view that sensations are typically the objects of perception for Reid, whether sensations in principle can be objects of perception is a subject of debate. For a brief defense of the notion that sensations can be and on occasion are objects of perception in Reid see the end of Pappas (1989). For two objections to this contention, see Cummins (1990). Pappas' response (Pappas 1990) follows Cummins' piece.

they have no conceptual or cognitive content. And, because we do not typically perceive sensations, our non-inferential knowledge is not restricted to knowledge about them, but rather extends to knowledge of mind-independent qualities of the world, according to Reid.

Reid argues that ideas as perceived intermediaries fail to account for the sensory qualities of perceptual events. He believes that the Ideal Theory conflates sensation and perception. Even though “the purposes of common life do not make it necessary to distinguish them, and the received opinions of philosophers tend rather to confound them,” nonetheless, distinguishing between sensations and perceptions is essential for “any just conception of the operations of our senses” (I 182b/B 167). And finding such a “conception,” after all, is the *Inquiry*’s central goal.<sup>80</sup> There Reid describes the sensation of smelling a rose as a feeling occasioned by “effluvia of vast subtilty” projected from the flower and imbibed in the membranes of our nostrils (I 104b/B 25). Reid claims, however, that this feeling is a simple affection of the mind “altogether inexplicable and unaccountable” (I 105a/B 27). Reid means that, though

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<sup>80</sup> Some may initially object that the Ideal Theory does distinguish between sensation and perception. Sensations are those mental states caused immediately by the external world while perceptions are those mental states caused by sensations and the operation of certain cognitive processes, like induction. (This is more defensible as an interpretation of Locke than of some of the other Ideal Theorists, like Hume.) But even if this accurately expresses some Ideal Theorist’s views, it fails to capture the philosophical importance of the distinction. Simply dividing up the process of perception and dubbing the first stage or state in that process ‘sensation’ does not account for the qualitative difference between the two, a difference Reid goes to some length to establish and clarify.

caused or occasioned by physical properties of bodies, sensations cannot be reduced to properties of objects or brains.

Sensations resist reduction in part because they are not intentional states. On this point Berkeley's influence permeates Reid's views on sensations in two ways. Unlike ideas, sensations in no way represent any property of mind-independent objects (I 105a/B 26). Berkeley claims in the *Principles* 1 viii that ideas cannot take agents or material objects as intentional objects. They cannot be "pictures or representations" of "those supposed originals or external objects" (WGB 44). Reid reapplies Berkeley's '*esse* is *percipi*' thesis to argue that sensations do not and cannot have any representative capacity. A sensation, he says, "has no similitude to anything else, so as to admit of a comparison" (I 105a/B 26). This is to say what sensations are not, but Reid also describes sensations positively. He explicitly expresses his satisfaction with Berkeley's principle when he says that Berkeley's ideas of sense, reinterpreted as proxy for sensations, "appears to me to be perfectly agreeable..." adding that the "very essence of [a sensation] consists in its being felt" (E 289b/B 156). In his correspondence with Hume, published in the Brookes edition, Reid is yet more explicit: "I can attend to what I feel, and the sensation is nothing else, nor has any other qualities than what I feel it to have. Its *esse* is *sentiri*, and nothing can be in it that is not felt" (258). According to Reid, the phenomenal, qualitative experience is all that is involved in a sensation state, whereas perceptions are representational states.

This feature of sensations is nicely captured in Reid's description of the nature of pain, which he uses as paradigmatic of all sensations:

The form of expression, *I feel pain*, might seem to imply that the feeling is something distinct from the pain felt; yet, in reality, there is no distinction. As *thinking a thought* is an expression which could signify no more than *thinking*, so *feeling a pain* signifies no more than *being pained*. What we have said of pain is applicable to every other mere sensation... [T]he sensation by itself... appears to be something which can have no existence but in a sentient mind, no distinction from the act of the mind by which it is felt. (I 183a/B168)

This insight has been given renewed voice by contemporary advocates of the 'adverbial' theory of sensation, who are interested in avoiding a host of varied problems (perceptual, metaphysical and ontological) associated with the reification of sensation states.

We might ask to what degree Reid's analysis of sensations is similar to those given by Chisholm, Ducasse and others. Chisholm himself says that the inspiration for his own development of an adverbial theory of sensation lies in Reid's work (1957, ch. 8). Most later statements of this view closely resemble Reid's in content and presentation. Thomas Nagel, for example, focuses on pain to say roughly what Reid does: "although it is undeniable that pains exist and people have them, it is also clear that this describes a condition of one entity, the person, rather than a relation between two entities, the person and a pain. For pains to exist *is* for people to have

them...” (1965, 342). But while the similarity between Reid’s theory and contemporary adverbial theories is not cosmetic, they differ in important ways. The adverbial theorists could respond to contemporary versions of the Ideal Theory’s theory of perception by denying corollaries of (A), (B), and (C) above. An adverbial theory of sensation enables one to explain phenomenological aspects of perceptual experience while avoiding the reification of intermediating objects of perception. Thus adverbial theorists deny (A) above, that there are ideas which are the immediate objects of perceptual events. Likewise, adverbial sensations do not possess any representative or intentional properties. Thus the adverbial theory can be taken to imply that sensations do not represent mind-independent objects, which captures Reid’s parallel position on (B).

What adverbial theorists have to say about the foundations of knowledge is sufficiently complicated that I will not attempt to draw any comparison there. Reid’s theory serves epistemic purposes, which marks an important difference—a difference in philosophical strategy—from contemporary uses of the adverbial theory. Adverbial theories like Reid’s have been resurrected primarily to construct a more parsimonious account of the mind than is otherwise available. Reid himself, though, is not motivated by intuitions about parsimony and reduction, or even by an interest in blocking a representative realist theory of perception *per se*. E. H. Madden is exactly right to say, about this similarity (what he calls an “identity”) between Chisholm’s theory and Reid’s, that

One is tempted to make much of this identity and yet is constrained from doing so since Reid failed to deploy his active concept of sensing when he considered [sic.] the different sense modalities separately and in detail. It seems as if Reid used his analysis of sensation to undermine the passive and substantive epistemic base of the British empiricists but never parleyed this view into a systematic alternative. (1986, 272)

Reid wants to insure that at least some perceptual knowledge is non-inferential. If sensations are perceived representational states that stand between us and the world, then we will be hard-pressed to prove that we have non-inferential knowledge of the external world (thus his motivation for considering them purely phenomenal, non-representational states). Reid also wants his account of sensation to correspond with the phenomenological facts he thinks result from his first-person, introspective method. Hence he does not employ his theory of sensation for the sorts of problem-solving purposes his contemporary followers do.

Of course, that Reid puts his theory of sensation to different philosophical uses does not mean that his theory thereby evades criticisms of adverbial theories (as presented aptly by Jackson (1977, ch. 3)); Reid's theory cannot evade such criticisms any better than its contemporary cousins. Rather than pursue questions concerning whether Reid's theory, as interpreted here, is true and can be defended against such attacks, the more interesting question for my purposes is: What is the relation between Reidian sensations, as I have just described them, and perception?



Numerous attempts to answer this question have been presented. In the next section I will explain that the failure to arrive at any consensus on this matter stems from (i) a failure to appreciate the very difference in philosophical strategy between Reid's and contemporary versions of the adverbial theory of sensation just discussed, and (ii) the mistaken assumption that Reid claims that perception necessarily incorporates a sensory component.

### 3. REIDIAN SENSATIONS ARE NOT COGNITIVE

I want to clarify the function of sensations by taking a different approach than is common. Rather than beginning with Reid's definitions of perception and ruling *a priori* about the role of sensation, I want to examine Reid's teleological explanation of sensations first. I will begin my case by stating a recent interpretation of the structure of Reid's theory of sensations given by Nicholas Wolterstorff, with which my interpretation contrasts.

*3.1. A cognitive account of sensations.* I mentioned that J.C. Smith argues that sensations are not, for Reid, irreducible qualitative states, but rather are functional states.<sup>81</sup> Wolterstorff moves in the opposite direction to claim that sensations are

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<sup>81</sup> There is one other major type of analysis of Reidian sensations, offered by J.C. Smith, who claims that perception is mediated by sensation. He puts it more strongly than this: "If one [cognitive faculty] is mediated, as perception clearly is by sensation, then they all must be mediated." Smith describes sensations as a "functional" intermediary (Smith 1990: 150, 142), but just what sort of mediating role this is remains unclear. We can understand Smith's position on sensations by distinguishing amongst two types of mediation:

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*Epistemic mediation:* agent S's movement from mental state A to mental state C is epistemically mediated by mental state B iff S uses B, along with A, in an inference to conclude that C.

Smith claims that sensations are *not* epistemic intermediaries of perception for "Perception counts as immediate knowledge even though it is mediated by sensation." (Smith 1990: 148) One might think they are causal intermediaries:

*Causal mediation:* the movement from mental state A to mental state C is causally mediated by mental event B iff A causes B and B causes C.

But Smith's "functional" intermediaries seems to sit between causal and epistemic mediation. A functional intermediary is a state that does not have "objective representational properties". In other words, sensations "do not present objects to the mind by being conceptions of perceived objects," and "sensory operations are not... representational." (Smith 1990: 145, 177, and 182)

Smith describes sensations by telling us what they are not. At his most explicit he says that "sensations are functional states while conceptions are computational states." Smith indicates that a functional state is simply any state that can be "decomposed" into more rudimentary operations. Putting the point in terms of explanation, he says, "functional explanation is the result of pursuing a strategy of decomposing complex operations or capacities of *any* sort into an organized exercise of simpler subcapacities." (Smith 1986: 183, 180) Given the genre—1970's functionalist literature—through which Smith interprets Reid, sensations are alleged to be functional states in the way that the latter day functionalist thinks mental states are functional states. The qualitative experiences Reid calls 'sensations' are reducible to the non-qualitative, non-conscious functional roles they play in the nexus of connections composing our mental life.

Smith is quite right to think that sensations are not "conceptions of perceived objects," not "representational." But his more substantial claim that Reid endorses a theory of sensations logically equivalent to a traditional functionalist analysis of mental states is ill-supported. Smith seems to think that one of Reid's desiderata in endorsing the theory of sensations that he does is a concern for parsimony. This seems unlikely, and Smith produces no textual evidence for concluding that this is Reid's motivation; in fact, Reid is comfortable with an ontologically robust philosophical system so long as the objects in it do the work they are intended to do.

Smith himself seems to recognize the limits of his position—as offered as an interpretation of Reid—when remarking, about his description of types of computational explanation, that "All of this is consistent with Reid's views." (Smith 1986: 182) This leads me to think that Smith's reading would apply to anyone who (i) is a mind-body interactionist, and who (ii) denies Ideal Theory presuppositions about the nature of perception. But one can hold those two theses and roundly deny any type of functionalist reduction of qualia; indeed, it seems that most of the texts that Smith cites are orthogonal to the real question about whether Reid endorses

conceptually contentful intermediating mental states. He calls them “interpretations” of nature. In order to experience the sensation as “suggesting” something to us in the world, we must engage in cognitive activity. By Wolterstorff’s lights perception and sensation are both cognitive, thus he does not as sharply distinguish sensation from perception as the interpretation I sketched above.

Wolterstorff claims that Reid thinks “that sensations are ... a sort of *medium* between the external object and our perception thereof” (Wolterstorff 2000, 11; all emphases his). He thereby invokes a serial processing account of Reidian perception. This is alleged to be an insight ripe with philosophical implications. According to Wolterstorff’s Reid, in order for me to conceive of the quality of hardness, I must first conceive of my sensation of hardness. To this end Wolterstorff emphasizes the

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functionalism. The texts he typically cites (quoted and unquoted) are open-ended and their presentation edited. Smith says, for example,

Under this account [i.e., an account of the “functional transduction” of a “descriptively specified” “sensory system”] the sensory operations occur in an arbitrarily systematic activity available as an underlying *uninterpreted* “machine language” to any of the faculties, including the perceptual faculty (Reid 1983, 14, 39). This situation resembles the modern computational use of “production systems,” which function independently whenever arbitrary formal relations of activity in the “workspace” happen to meet pre-established conditions *internal* to those systems. (Smith 1986: 188-89)

When one examines the citations used to support attributing this to Reid, one finds no support for believing that Reid posits some type of language of thought or mentalese in his account of cognition, let alone any of the other, more exotic aspects of the computational account of cognition to which Smith refers. In addition to the fact that Smith’s positive textual support for this functional analysis of sensations in Reid is weak, I argued in chapters 2 and 3 that Reid endorses a radically anti-reductionist, anti-functionalist explanation of cognition.

interpretive work we must do to understand the ‘signs,’ Reid’s technical term for the role of sensations in perception, that cue our awareness of external objects.

Wolterstorff says, “Perception involves reading the signs, interpreting the symbols” and “Reid regularly speaks of...conception and immediate belief...as *interpretations* of signs.” He also uses the term “hermeneutic of signs” to describe this process (Wolterstorff 2001, 119, 148 and 154).

Sensations, according to Wolterstorff, are representations, though he himself is wary in putting the point in this way since it does grate against the standard interpretation on the matter. He says, “it would not be wrong to describe our sensations as “representing” external entities.” Reid didn’t describe them this forthrightly because “Reid has his eye throughout on one particular mode of mediation...: mediation by *imagistic* representations” (Wolterstorff 2001, 134).

Sensations are the immediate objects of cognition, but, what Wolterstorff insists is the important point, they are not pictorial representations.

But this seems to contrast with the way Reid often describes his opposition to the Ideal Theory. For example, Reid explains that the Ideal Theory “leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis. . .[t]hat nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it” (I 96a/B 4). Reid’s target in this passage is a representational account of perception *simpliciter* and it makes no mention of whether the perceived representational intermediaries are pictorial.

In what sense are sensations non-pictorial representations? Wolterstorff says that one's conception and belief—the final stage in Reid's perceptual process—is an “interpretation” of the sensation. Specifically, “The conceptions and beliefs interpret the sensations so as to extract the information about external qualities which the sensations carry by virtue of being signs of those qualities” (Wolterstorff 2001, 148). It thus seems that the immediate intentional object of the conceptual state—the thing that the conceptual state is directly about—is the sensation, not a mind-independent object. The way in which sensations are informational states and the way in which our conceptions and beliefs interpret those sensations remains elusive, but the upshot of his interpretation of Reidian sensations is that “perception on the standard schema does not yield acquaintance with the world” (Wolterstorff 2001, 147).

Wolterstorff's support for this attribution consists largely in adducing this passage, in which Reid uses the term “interpretation”:

The signs in original perception are sensations, of which Nature hath given us a great variety, suited to the variety of the things signified by them. Nature hath established a real connection between the signs and the things signified; and Nature hath also taught us the interpretation of the signs—so that, previous to experience, the sign suggests the thing signified, and create the belief of it. (I 195a/B 190; in Wolterstorff 2001, 79)

There are difficulties in using this passage as support for Wolterstorff's interpretation of sensations as highly cognitive—difficulties that stand apart from *only* or *primarily*

using this passage as support. First, were the cognitive, interpretive activity on our part an important aspect of our experience of sensations, it is reasonable to think that Reid would have described it (in some detail) in his most pointed treatment of the matter. He does not. Within the *Inquiry* Wolterstorff has been forced to travel quite far from Reid's formal treatment of sensations in order to find this passage.

Second, there is no indication in this passage that "interpretation" is a technical term with the cognitive connotations Wolterstorff attributes to it. To the contrary, Reid is insistent in this passage (and in the core material on sensation, at I 119-122; B 54-61) that there is no higher-order cognitive activity needed in order for properly functioning human beings to associate a certain sensation with a certain quality of bodies. Even Reid's use of the term seems inappropriate for Wolterstorff's ends since Reid indicates that these are "interpretations" performed "previous to experience." Any cognitive process of interpretation would seem conceptually to require something from which something else is interpreted. If the source material for an interpretation is not experience, then what might it be?

For Reid our ability to understand what quality it is that a sensation indicates is innate (and however unsatisfactory his answer to this question is, we shouldn't make it something it is not). Reid seems to think that there is no cognitive work on our part required, no interpretation needed, in order to associate a certain sensation with a certain quality. In Reid's description of this type of "natural sign," the concept of "interpretation" or any of its cognates does not appear. He says, writing of the

connection between pressure sensations and the quality of hardness, 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... .” He says that sensations are “invariably connected” with conceptions and beliefs, but “this connection is the effect of our constitution, and ought to be considered as an original principle of human nature... .” (I 122b/B 61). Wolterstorff’s explanation of this connection in cognitive terms does not correspond with these and other texts. What makes the relation between sensation and the conception and belief stage in perception so unyielding and resistant to analysis is precisely that, by Reid’s lights, sensation is *not* an informational or representational state. He does not describe this connection as the result of “a natural kind of magic” for nothing. (I 122a/B 60).<sup>82</sup>

3.2. *The implicit objection to Reid’s account.* Given this textual case against Wolterstorff’s position, Wolterstorff is forced to shore up his interpretation by non-textual means. Seemingly aware of this, Wolterstorff argues that if sensations were not objects of interpretation, there would be “an odd superfluity of information.” He says that the sensation, for Reid, “transmits information about the object to the

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<sup>82</sup> What’s worse, construing sensations as the conceptual states Wolterstorff thinks they are threatens to take back their very epistemic gains Reid thought he could get only by endorsing his adverbial account of sensations. This is because, even if sensations are not perceived intermediaries by Wolterstorff’s lights, they are clearly conceptual intermediaries, as he himself indicates. Where as Reid thought that at least some perceptual knowledge could be attained non-inferentially, this would not be possible if Wolterstorff’s account of sensations as “interpretations” is correct.

perceiver” (Wolterstorff 2000, 12). But if we were directly perceptually acquainted with objects (as most commentary on Reid asserts), then this information from our sensations would be overkill. “Given acquaintance with external entities, the sensory experience functioning as sign of the external entity is otiose; given the sensory experience functioning as sign of the external entity, acquaintance with the external entity is otiose” (2000, 13; cf. 2001, 148). Our direct perceptual acquaintance with external objects and our sensation experiences both yield the same thing. Wolterstorff says that “Double information is theoretically incoherent” (2001, 150). So sensations seem useless if their job in the process of perception can be just as easily performed by perceptual acquaintance.

The best way to reconstruct Wolterstorff’s reasoning here seems to be as follows. First, assume for reductio:

- (1) Sensations are merely non-conceptual, non-intentional qualitative states.

Wolterstorff’s rejection of a purely qualitative interpretation of sensations on the basis of their being “otiose” points to an affirmation of (2):



(2) If Reidian sensations are merely non-conceptual, non-intentional, qualitative states, then sensations are not necessary for perception, i.e. they are otiose.

If sensations are merely qualitative states, then, he says, “Something seems definitely wrong here. Given acquaintance with primary qualities, the sensory experience seems otiose” (Wolterstorff 2001, 148). The consequent of (2) is tantamount to a denial of the necessity of sensation thesis, which is clearly unacceptable to Wolterstorff. This prompts him to apply *modus tollens* as follows:

(3) Sensations are not otiose.

(4) So, sensations are not merely non-conceptual, non-intentional states of phenomenal consciousness, i.e. (1) is false.

(5) Hence, the best interpretation of Reid on sensation is that it is a perceptual *sine qua non*, being a type of representational state that bears informational content about external objects.

Leaving aside other problems with this argument, particularly the jump from (4) to (5), the most important premise is (2). Wolterstorff is not the only Reid scholar to employ something like this premise.

Alston and Chappell both seem to endorse (2). They believe that if sensations are purely qualitative, then they are explanatorily idle in an account of perception. But neither Alston nor Chappell use *modus tollens* to derive (4). Chappell claims that Reid's position is a failure and stops there, while Alston is content to note the conceptual confusion in Reid's account and call for more work on the problem.

Chappell draws upon Reid's examination of the idiosyncrasies in visual perception in his statement of this objection. Reid holds that there are some visual perceptual experiences that do not proceed via sensations by claiming that we have no sensations of properties of visual space and figure (though we do of color). Chappell then asks: "[I]f such [material] impressions are capable of suggesting qualities directly, without the intervention of sensations, in some cases, why not in all?" (Chappell 58). In other words, since Reid thinks that we can perceive without sensations in some cases, he must hold that sensations are explanatorily useless in an account of perception, which is tantamount to a denial of the necessity of sensation thesis. But clearly this thesis is true, so Reid's theory is false.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Strictly speaking, Chappell merely attempts to show that sensations are "not all that different" from ideas (1989, 49). He says, "Reid attributes three special propositions to the idea theorist: (1) that all mental operations have ideas for their objects; (2) that ideas are the only things that are immediately thought and perceived; and (3) that ideas resemble their *representata*." (50) Chappell argues that we can replace

Alston argues that since Reidian perception is the conceiving of and believing in a mind-independent object, it follows that Reid has left sensation out of his account altogether. He says that “perception is distinguished from thinking and believing precisely by incorporating an intuitive, sensory element. Perception essentially involves sensory awareness, awareness of sensory qualities... . So Reid has escaped a representational, ideational theory of perception only by talking about

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“sensations” with “ideas” in (1)-(3) and Reid would accept them. If correct, Reid’s account of sensations would be confused. (Indeed, if I am correct, Reid nearly explicitly denies each of (1)-(3) when recast about sensations.)

Strangely, Chappell does not explicitly argue for the aforementioned replacement in each of (1)-(3). Indeed, he seems to argue for something else altogether, namely

(4) “that sensations have representational properties” (Chappell 52).

I suppose his rationale is that, for one, (4) is much more central to Reid’s views on sensations than is (1) or (2), and, for two, (3) is dependent on (4). (4) would imply that Reid’s sensations are not significantly different from his predecessors’ ideas. Chappell says,

ideas are representative beings; they stand for or represent things distinct from themselves. The same again is the case with sensations. It is true that Reid rarely uses the language of representation in connection with sensations. What he says rather is that sensations suggest things to the mind in which they occur... But representation too is a species of signification, as Reid acknowledges... (52)

This charge, however, does not adequately appreciate the differences in types of representation discussed in chapter 1. There I argued that, on one definition of “representational,” even Aquinas’s appeal to formal causes is representational since the actual object does not enter the mind. But I think the deeper problem with Chappell’s interpretation is that he does not define “representation” and he does not contrast that term with “direct”. Questions about directness address the relationship between sensation and perception, which we are presently (and which it seems Chappell was) more interested in.

something else altogether” (1989, 38).<sup>84</sup> Alston’s claim that “Perception essentially involves sensory awareness” makes explicit his presumption of the necessity of sensation thesis and his application of this thesis to the interpretation and evaluation of Reid. Incorporating a sensation component in an account of perception is an *a priori* condition on an account of perception for Alston. He concludes just as Chappell does: since Reid’s theory of perception denies the necessity of sensation thesis, his theory is erroneous.

These authors are not merely interested in determining whether Reid can meet their *a priori* constraints. Alston adduces further evidence from Reid’s formal definition of perception as textual support for the claim that Reid denies the necessity of sensation thesis:

If...we attend to that act of our mind which we call the perception of an external object of sense, we shall find in it these three things. First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived. Secondly, A strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence. And, thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (E 258a/B 96)

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<sup>84</sup> Norman Daniels also senses this tension when remarking that Reid is “on the verge of plunging sensations into an insignificant role in our theories of mind and knowledge” (1974, 73).

Mention of sensation is made neither here in Reid's definition of 'perception' nor in other statements of it (see, e.g., I 183; B 168). Alston and others take this as further evidence that Reid's theory is misguided.

Commentators evaluate Reid negatively on the basis of his failure to endorse the necessity of sensation thesis. But this dispute is by no means a purely historical matter. This thesis is affirmed and used now by those who are constructing philosophical accounts of perception, which gives this dispute about Reid's theory some of its contemporary importance. Brian O'Shaughnessy (2000), for example, employs this thesis. An account of perception "must," he says, "be classed as an *a priori* concept" (302). This presupposition is required in order to impose necessary constraints on an account. He worries that those who do not include a qualitative experience, what he simply calls an "experience," in their analysis of perception are "throwing the baby out with the bath water" (413). O'Shaughnessy has in mind information-processing theories about visual perception for such theories claim, in his words, "that *seeing is not necessarily an experience*" (419) and that "seeing has neither nominal nor real essence..." (427).

Reid denies that perception "necessarily" incorporates a qualitative, sensory experience, but he denies neither that there are such experiences nor that such experiences are related to perception. Thus, his view stands in sharp contrast to the reductive analysis of sensations that concerns O'Shaughnessy. But O'Shaughnessy objects not merely to the information processing accounts, but to the notion that

sensation may not be a conceptually necessary component of perception. Speaking of an account resembling Reid's, O'Shaughnessy says that it

hardly seems to be a theory at all. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the recipe for seeing which it offers is equal to the task of designating *anything!* ... To my mind the danger facing such a theoretical position is, that in dispensing altogether with essences and demoting visual experience from its usual pre-eminence, they will have succeeded in dissolving seeing out of existence! They run the risk of denying it a nature of any kind! (427-8)

O'Shaughnessy says that perceptual experience, particularly seeing, "is endowed with an intrinsic essence..." (435).

But there is more bark than bite in this argument, particularly from Reid's perspective. Reid does not believe that there is any "intrinsic essence" or conceptual "necessity" properly imposed upon accounts of perception. In fact, this is just the methodological feature of the Ideal Theory that Reid attacks. For the Ideal Theorist begins, mistakenly, from *a priori* theorizing about the necessity of sense-data in perceptual experience, and from there is lead into the 'coal pit.' Second, Reid preserves a robust metaphysical role for qualitative experience. Reid, as substance dualist, is arguably able to take the introspective aspects of qualitative experience more seriously and give them a more robust role in his philosophy of mind than is O'Shaughnessy. Third, Reid invokes notions of teleology and proper function in his account of perception. In this respect Reid's theory seems more contemporaneous

than those offered by O'Shaughnessy and Alston, both of whom speak of "essences." I see little merit in the objection that a teleological explanation of sensations (like Reid's, say) will not be capable of "designating *anything!*" or that such an explanation will be "denying [seeing] a nature of any kind!" It is now time to explain how it is that Reid's theory is teleological.

#### 4. REID'S TELEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF SENSATION

*4.1. A priori accounts of perception.* I argue that the balance of texts favors viewing sensations as only a contingent part of the perceptual process. In order to show this is so, I first want to describe Reid's general opposition to imposing *a priori* constraints on an account of perception. Reid sets out a rule of thumb in this passage:

Most operations of the mind, that have names, ... are complex in their nature, and made up of various ingredients, or more simple acts; which, though conjoined in our constitution, must be disjoined by abstraction, in order to our having a distinct and scientific notion of the complex operation. In such operations, sensation for the most part makes an ingredient. (E 229b/B 37)

He applies this rule later to the issue at hand when he writes,

If we thus analyse the various operations of our minds, we shall find that many of them... are compounded of more simple ingredients; and that sensation ... makes one ingredient, not only in the perception of external objects, but in most operations of the mind. (E 311b/B 197)

Sensation “for the most part” is a component to operations of the mind, but determining whether it is or is not a component part of perception is not a matter for armchair philosophy.

Reid holds that we are in some way conscious of sensations when we experience them (I 105b/B 27 and I 114b/B 44). Reid extends this hypothesis to perception and it is no wonder why, given that perception requires belief. I may form a belief that I am walking on cobblestones without explicitly bringing to self-conscious attention that I am experiencing the sensation of walking on such a walking surface. My belief is a perceptual belief and it is occasioned by my sensations of touch (and other sensations and visual images) even though I am not attentive to the sensory elements of my experience. Reid has got it right that sensation is often somehow involved in events of perceiving, which conforms to our common sense intuitions. The question has never been whether sensation is related to perception, but how it is related to perception.

What we must bear in mind is that Reid puts sensations into the service of a completely different explanatory task. In Reid’s “*experimentum crucis*” he argues that sensations do not account for our repertoire of concepts, hence are unnecessary for the occurrence of the ultimate stage of perception—the formation of a conception and belief. But this does not imply sensations are unnecessary *tout court*. We mustn’t overlook Reid’s point that sensations are intended by God for and are physically necessary *for our survival* (I 112a-114b/B 40-43). By assuming that the only purpose for

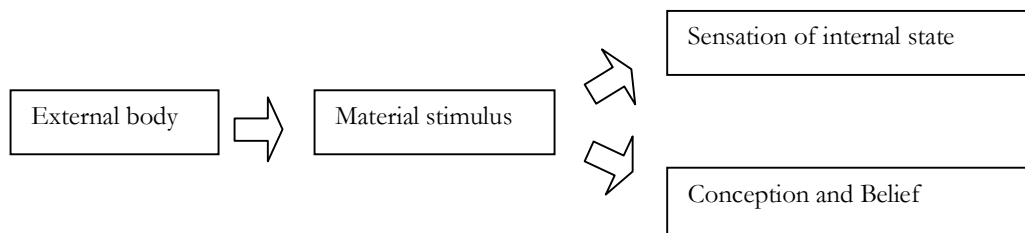


sensations must be found within his theory of perception these authors don't cast their nets wide enough.

4.2. *An evolutionary explanation of sensations.* According to Reid, sensation and perception perform entirely distinct functions in the life of the mind. He says,

The external senses have a double province—to make us feel, and to make us perceive. They furnish us with a variety of sensations, some pleasant, others painful, and others indifferent; at the same time they give us a conception of and an invincible belief in the existence of external objects. This conception of external objects is the work of nature; so likewise is the sensation that accompanies it. This conception and belief which nature produces by means of the senses, we call *perception*. The feeling which goes along with perception, we call *sensation*. The perception and its corresponding sensation are produced at the same time. In our experience we never find them disjoined. Hence, we are led to consider them as one thing, to give them one name, and to confound their different attributes. (E 318b/B 210)

Here Reid explains what he takes the purposes of sensory and perceptual activity to be. This is his statement of what I will call, following Humphrey, the 'parallel processing' analysis of perception. We can represent this model as follows (diagram 3):



This model makes clear that sensation stands apart from the train of events that make up perception, whereas the serial model typically blurs this point by representing sensation as playing a causal role in the production of a conception and belief of the external object. More important than endorsing a parallel processing model of perception, though, is Reid's denial of the necessity of sensation thesis, which this diagram also seeks to make clear.

Reid gives us an explanation for why those two activities have been conflated in previous thinking about perception. We do not sense the world through sensations. Rather we sense *our reactions* to the world through our sensations. Sensations are directed internally. Perception contrasts sharply from sensation for in perception we represent aspects of the mind-independent world—its objects and their properties.

I suspect that this is the reason that so much work on the relation of mind to world prior to Reid focuses upon perception. If our primary interest in studying perception is to respond to global skepticism, then we will neglect to study certain properties of our qualitative experience. This aversion to sensations has continued in contemporary work on these matters. Nowadays one reads reductive explanations of

sensations proffered so as to cause minimal offense to naturalistic models of the mind. (See note 81 on Smith's interpretation of Reid.) Those in the minority, who defend a substantive account of sensory experience, have used the apt term "consciousness neglect" to describe just this trend (Siewert 1998, *passim*). On the basis of these considerations, those who are not persuaded by Reid's introspective argument for the conceptual independence of sensations from representational states will thus demand to know why we have them at all, why they are not otiose in the end.

In response, Reid adopts a teleological—even evolutionary—explanation of sensations. Reid says, speaking of our capacity for sensation among other things, that "The faculties which we have in common with brute-animals, are of earlier growth than reason" (A 548b). When discussing sensation in *Intellectual Powers*, II, 16, Reid remarks on the wide variability amongst sensations. Some require effort to notice, while the mere presence of others causes us immediately to attend to them. Some are internal to our body, while others are caused by events external to our bodies. Most sensations assist us in prolonging our bodily existence (presumably they all did at one time). The state of being in need of nourishment, for example, produces sensations of hunger that in turn signal to one's conscious mind one's need of food (E 311a/B 196).

Reid claims that "the Author of Nature, in the distribution of agreeable and painful feelings, hath wisely and benevolently consulted the good of the human

species, and hath even shewn us, by the same means, what tenor of conduct we ought to hold” (E 312a/B 198). God has somehow brought it about that the sensations we experience condition us to develop patterns of response. Engaging in those patterns of behavior benefits us as organisms. Not only do sensations thus assist us in our attempt to survive, but they also are capable of rewarding us for behaviors beneficial to our bodies. But notice that the function of our possession of sensations is not to benefit us as epistemic agents; indeed, the presence of sensations often befuddles us in our attempt to gain knowledge of the mind-independent world.

For example, when the body’s nervous systems lose their ability to function and to sense dangers to health, chaos erupts. Consider leprosy, a bacterial infection in which one’s peripheral and cutaneous nervous systems are debilitated. The lack of sensory cues renders victims of leprosy and other similar pathologies unaware that they are doing grave harm to their bodies, and simultaneously diminishes their ability to provide for their daily needs. Reid says, “The painful sensations of the animal kind are admonitions to avoid what would hurt us; and the agreeable sensations of this kind invite us to those actions that are necessary to the preservation of the individual or of the kind” (E 312a/B 198). Reid extrapolates from this general principle by adding that one will have certain sensations of pleasure when exposed to beauty and sensations of disgust when exposed to “every species of deformity.” Furthermore, inactivity creates an idleness in our muscles which causes unpleasant sensations (E 312a-b/B 197-99). The purpose of sensations, their positive connection with our

survival, is quite clear. Each capacity for sensation is tailored by God in order to give us a sensory experience of the proper quality and intensity for each circumstance.<sup>85</sup>

Reid grants that God could have created us in such a way that we experience no sensations at all, or that our sensations would be matched with different physical causes than those with which they happen to be matched in the actual world. Others criticize Reid for rendering the relation between sensation and conceptions and beliefs in the perceptual process arbitrary, and for severing any connection between sensation and perceptual knowledge. Nonetheless, Reid says that how sensation serves as a sign of conceptions and beliefs is “magic” to us—not a matter of positing representational or informational content to sensation states. He says,

We know that, when certain impressions are made upon our organs, nerves, and brain, certain corresponding sensations are felt, and certain objects are both conceived and believed to exist. ... We can neither discover the cause of any one of them, nor any necessary connection of one with another; and, whether they are connected by any necessary tie, or only conjoined in our

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<sup>85</sup> We can see how this teleological analysis leads Reid to say,

Sensation, taken by itself, implies neither the conception nor belief of any external object. It supposes a sentient being, and a certain manner in which that being is affected; but it supposes no more. Perception implies an immediate conviction and belief of something external—something different both from the mind that perceives, and the act of perception. Things so different in their nature ought to be distinguished. (E 312b/B 199)

He does not say that perception implies sensation.

constitution by the will of heaven, we known not. ...Nor can we perceive any necessary connection between sensation and the conception and belief of an external object. For anything we can discover, we might have been so framed as to have all the sensations we now have by our senses, without any impressions upon our organs, and without any conception of any external object. For anything we know, we might have been so made as to perceive external objects, without any impressions on bodily organs, and without any of those sensations which invariably accompany perception in our present frame. (E 327a/B 227)

Reid is claiming in this passage that two relations are contingent: that between a material impression and a sensation, and that between a sensation and a perception. Most important for our purposes is the second, which marks a denial of the necessity of sensation thesis. In this passage from the *Intellectual Powers* Reid is actually making the modal epistemic claim that we cannot know that sensation is necessary for forming the conception and belief in a perceptual event. This is logically distinct from the claim that sensation is not a necessary component in perceptual events. But notice that this modal epistemic claim is still inconsistent with the necessity of sensation thesis (and with the consequent of (2) in the argument above). This is because, implicit in the affirmation of that thesis, is the claim to be able to know (and the claim to know) that it is so.

Besides this, Reid affirms the contingency of the sensation/perception relation explicitly elsewhere, this time in the *Inquiry*. He says,

We might perhaps have been made of such a constitution, as to have our present perceptions connected with other sensations. We might perhaps have had the perception of external objects, without either impressions upon the organs of sense, or sensations. Or lastly, the perceptions we have, might have been immediately connected with the impressions upon our organs, without any intervention of sensations.

This is not merely a claim about what is possible, but what is actual. Reid continues, “This last seems really to be the case in one instance—to wit, in our perception of the visible figure of bodies...” (I 187b/B 176). Reid’s claim that there is not “any intervention of sensations” in visual perception marks a denial of the necessity of sensation thesis. Not only is that thesis false, but sensation is not even a physically necessary component in all perception in *our* world. By both endorsing the necessity of sensation thesis and (as opposed to Alston) by presuming that Reid does too, Wolterstorff misconstrues Reid’s goals in giving a theory of perception. Reid simply was not after necessary and sufficient conditions on perception.

*4.3. Evidence for the truth of Reid’s analysis.* To take stock, up to this point we have clarified Reid’s theory of perception by showing that his interpreters have erred in imposing upon him the necessity of sensation thesis. We can better understand Reid’s theory of perception and his opposition to the philosophical methodology of his

predecessors by appreciating Reid's denial of this thesis. Achieving this goal marks a worthwhile philosophical exercise, but I want to show briefly that Reid's prescient denial of the necessity of sensation thesis increases the plausibility of his theory of perception.

An abundance of evidence points to the conclusion that the interpretation of Reid advanced here succeeds in accounting for the physiological and evolutionary facts. This notion that the purpose of sensations is to aid us in our survival, and is not necessary for gaining perceptual knowledge of the world, has been nicely borne out by research in evolutionary and cognitive psychology. Without embarking on even a summary of the evolution of sensation, we can say definitively that it came prior to the evolution of our perceptual capacities. The first living uni- and multicellular animals were able to react to their environments by receiving crude light and pressure stimuli. This ability to *react to* the environment was sensory, and it gave these organisms an enormous evolutionary advantage. The capacity to *represent* the external environment only later evolved when organisms found a survival advantage in possessing the ability to delay their responses to stimuli.

The insightful nature of Reid's denial of the necessity of sensation thesis and concomitant affirmation of a parallel processing model of perception have not been noticed by contemporary philosophers of psychology, with the notable exception of Nicholas Humphrey. Humphrey notes that Reid correctly asserts that "body surface stimuli," what Reid would call "material impressions," cause both the qualitative state,



and the cognitive, perceptual state. The sensation itself is thus not the *cause* of the perceptual event.

This parallel model has been examined by the study of cases of visual agnosia and blindsight. Blindsight cases describe the severing of any relationship between visual sensation and visual perception. Blindsight victims do not acknowledge the presence of any visual sensations in certain portions (sometimes, in the entirety) of their visual field. This sensory deprivation is caused by damage to the visual cortex, but, from the first-person point of view, these subjects might as well lack receptors on their retinas.

Despite the fact that blindsight subjects claim that they have no sensations of light and dark, of hue and brightness, or of visible figures, they are nonetheless capable of perceiving objects. They can recognize and discriminate amongst the objects in their visual field. Since patients deny they can ‘see’ any such objects, experiments generally proceed by requesting that subjects take a guess about the nature of the objects in their visual fields—‘guesses’ which are remarkably accurate. Humphrey says, “Thus maybe blindsight is after all a case of pure perceptual knowledge, despite the subject’s protestations that he—“I”—is not seeing in any way at all. For what seems to be strikingly lacking in the blindsight case (or subliminal perception, or for that matter ESP) is precisely this ego involvement that sensation usually provides” (Humphrey, 91). Victims of blindsight do not have visual

sensations but they do reliably perceive objects, which implies that Reid is right not to endorse the necessity of sensations thesis.

Though Reid is not aware of blindsight phenomenon, he is aware of phantom pain cases in which one's sensations are not accompanied by the perceptual apparatus that usually accompanies them when one functions properly. In the case of phantom limb pain, if the subject "did not know that his leg was cut off, it would give him the same immediate conviction [viz. same perception] of some hurt or disorder in the toe" (E 320b/B 214).<sup>86</sup> We can have sensations without any accompanying perceptions, which supports his "double province," parallel processing hypothesis. Like Reid's analysis of visual perception and visible figure, blindsight cases support this hypothesis by being examples of the opposite phenomenon: cases in which perceptions are not accompanied by corresponding sensations.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> This marks an aberration of the general rule that certain sensations are constantly conjoined to certain secondary qualities. In this case there is a sensation (of pain) and there is a secondary quality causing the sensation, but that cause it not the typical cause of the sensation of pain. "This perception, which Nature had conjoined with the sensation, was, in this instance, fallacious" (E 320b/B 214).

<sup>87</sup> I mentioned at the outset that some accounts of Reid's theory of perception, though in the minority, posit a close relation between sensation and perception. Pappas describes his "single-tier" account as one in which "perception is rather an organic whole consisting of fused elements one of which is a sensation" (Pappas 1989, 163). On the "double-tier" theory he describes, "which takes perception proper to be nothing more than belief-acquisition or judgement," he claims that "perception itself has no sensuous content." Pappas does not qualify the scope of the single- and double-tier theories he discusses; specifically, he does not rule on whether, on the double-tier theory, sensation is necessarily (either logically or physically) a constituent component of perception. He then remarks that, "all else

## 5. HIS PREDECESSORS' MISTAKE

Reid's predecessors typically did not make any place for non-intentional, purely qualitative states in constructing their philosophies of mind. Locke started and Hume continued the debate by claiming, under the aegis of the Ideal Theory, that sensations and perceptions are both species of the genus *idea*. Humean ideas and impressions are said to lie on the same ontological plane, differing only in the force with which they strike us. Hume says in the *Treatise*, "Now since all ideas are deriv'd from impressions, and are nothing but copies and representations of them, whatever is true of the one must be acknowledg'd concerning the other. Impressions and ideas differ only in their strength and vivacity" (T 19/18). There is no principled difference between the two drawn in terms of their intrinsic properties.

It was Locke, though, who makes the implications of such a thesis upon an analysis of sensations most clear. Tacit assumptions in his commitment to the Ideal

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being equal, it would seem preferable to side with a theory which *allows for there to be* sensuous content in perception..." (Pappas 1989, 164; my emphasis).

Pappas endorses his "single-tier" theory as being Reid's theory. This position marks a substantial improvement over those of Wolterstorff, et. al., since Pappas does not claim that there is any conceptually necessary relation between sensation and perception. However, his description of the "single-tier" theory remains ambiguous about whether sensation bears any physically necessary relationship to perception.

Though Pappas and Alston were not addressing one another, their disagreement about the relationship between sensation and perception in Reid resembles that between Peacocke and O'Shaughnessy in a different context altogether. Peacocke writes, "O'Shaughnessy says that experiences with content are the causal consequences of sensations. I have set up the issues in such a way that

Theory lead Locke to propose his famous thought experiment about the visible spectrum. Locke says,

If by the different structure of our organs, it were so ordered, that the same object should produce in several men's minds different ideas at the same time; e.g. if the idea, that a violet produces in one man's mind by his eyes, were the same that a marigold produced in another man's, and vice versa... he would be able as regularly to distinguish things for his use by those appearances, and understand, and signify those distinctions, marked by the names blue and yellow, as if the appearances, or ideas in his mind, received from those two flowers, were exactly the same, with the ideas in other men's minds. (Locke 1975, 389)

Locke draws an epistemic conclusion: "this could never be known: because one man's mind could not pass into another man's body, to perceive, what appearances were produced by those organs." Locke not only thinks that the relation between sensations and perceptions is contingent. He also holds that, if sensations are simply qualitative states, then they are superfluous. Thus we can swap sensations as we wish and it wouldn't make a difference perceptually. What fuels this intuition for Locke is the fact that he sees sensations as randomly, or better, artificially, related to the representational contents of our perceptions. This is precisely what the crew of Reid scholars assumes in premises (1) and (2).

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sensational properties, if they exist, are properties of the very same thing, the

Though Locke presented this example with modest goals, cases of inverted spectra and inverted ‘worlds’ have been put to uses Locke could have scarcely imagined. I only bring up this example to show the way in which Reid would respond to Locke’s own primary use of the case. Reid would deny Locke’s conclusion that sensations are somehow useless by refuting his intermediate conclusion that we couldn’t ever know that such a switch has taken place. He would deny this on the basis of the parallel evolution and parallel operation of sensation and perception. Sensations began in the history of organic life as responses to stimuli, and not as some way to represent mind-independent reality. Thus there is no reason to think that, were our spectra inverted, a third party could not know that was the case.

Physiological data can be brought to bear on inverted spectrum cases and other sensation-switching thought experiments in order to block Locke’s epistemic conclusion. Studies on color preference and color avoidance have shown that obvious and sometimes startling behaviors are associated with certain color sensations and not others. For example, when primates are placed in red environments their heart rates and body temperatures increase substantially in comparison with their rates and temperatures when in other chromatic environments. (For supporting data see Humphrey (1977 and 1975).) While these studies are unimportant for an interpretation of Reid, they go some way toward vindicating his “double province,” parallel processing account of perception. Such studies show that the Lockean

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experience, which has representational properties” (1983, 5).

objection that a switching event “could never be known” is false. Contrary to Locke, the qualitative features of sensations are not to be passed over or ignored in favor of attending to their would-be representative properties.

Reid thus stands apart from the Ideal Theory, which typically takes the qualitative features of sensations to be unimportant and otiose. Reid rightly insists that sensations matter—but for reasons of survival. But Reid also stands apart from those who endorse the necessity of sensation thesis. In the actual world sensations typically accompany perceptual events in most sense modalities, but they are physically and logically contingent components of such events.

CHAPTER 10:  
REID ON THE IDEAL THEORY,  
AND THE METHOD AND GOALS OF PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of this book has been to clarify and properly interpret Reid's theory of perception. In this final chapter I want to draw together some epistemological themes, bring more unity to Reid's method and to his philosophical priorities. My thesis here is that Reid is best understood as an epistemologist through and through: philosophy is in the service of knowledge. This alone does not help reveal Reid's philosophical character; this is already well-known. But the contribution I hope to make to our study of Reid, is that his emphasis upon gaining knowledge is manifest in uniquely prescient ways.

Up to this point we have shown how Reid responds to specific facets of the Ideal Theory as he develops his own theory of perception. While I will highlight several of these responses, I will also draw out two central types of objection he makes against the Ideal Theory. The first has to do with the Ideal Theory's logical relationship to skepticism. This is often thought to be little more than a *reductio* to skepticism, but I will show that Reid articulates several different epistemological

arguments against the Ideal Theory—and that he doesn't place emphasis upon the simpleminded reduction he is typically thought to have relied upon.

The second type of criticism is methodological; Reid argues that a process of scientific inquiry cannot be founded upon the Ideal Theory. If I'm right, it was Reid, and not Hume, who properly lays claim to Newton's methodological mantle.

The Ideal Theory hinders our pursuit of knowledge by supporting skepticism and impeding science. The particular way that epistemology is the lynchpin of philosophical inquiry shows that Reid's intuitions bear keen resemblance to latter-day empiricism. Reid places priority on the attainment and preservation of knowledge, which supercedes any concern with metaphysics. This is similar, for example, to the views of instrumentalists in the philosophy of science. I will assess Reid's relation to empiricism by drawing out a set of theses that other empiricists have used to characterize their views; Reid's methods fit happily amongst this set of theses.

## 1. SKEPTICISM AND THE IDEAL THEORY

### *The interpretation of Reid's criticisms*

Reid wasn't interested in the subtleties about ideas that have consumed the attention of Hume's students today. Reid has a more important question in mind: Why believe there are things which play the various roles ideas and impressions are



alleged to play? Because he single-mindedly focuses on this question, Reid is widely thought to have misunderstood, and then maligned, the theories of his predecessors.

Hume sets the tone that would be carried through Reid's historical detractors, including Thomas Brown, Kant and others, when he expresses his wish that "Parsons wou'd [...] confine themselves to their old Occupation of worrying one another; & leave Philosophers to argue with Temper, Moderation & good Manners."<sup>88</sup> This trend is resurrected of late by Galen Strawson (1990) and Alistair Sinclair (1995). In some ways it is furthered by Reid's supporters, who have interpreted his views in ways that have brought his work undeserved criticism. This trend begins famously with James Beattie (responsible for the transmission of Reid to Kant), but also continues today.

The danger of inadvertently doing Reid a disservice is especially present in analyses of Reid's relationship to the Ideal Theory. John Greco (1995) and Robert Sleigh (1987), in their reconstructions of the Ideal Theory, argue that the Ideal Theory is actually compatible with Reid's anti-skeptical arguments, a result which runs contrary to Reid's own analysis of the dialectic. Greco in particular argues that (i) Reid says that the Ideal Theory implies skepticism about perceptual knowledge, but that (ii) the Ideal Theory does *not* imply skepticism about perceptual knowledge. This portrays Reid in a bad light for the Ideal Theory was of Reid's own creation. Reid simply selects theses from his predecessors, theses involving ideas, and refers to their

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<sup>88</sup> From Hume's letter to Hugh Blair, 4 July 1762, in Brookes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 257.

conjunction as ‘the Ideal Theory.’ Reid errs philosophically, and, what’s worse, makes an egregious *faux pas*. On Greco’s reading, it follows that Reid fails even to construct a coherent straw man!

There are two central reasons why Greco’s interpretation is in need of improvement.<sup>89</sup> First, Greco operates by finding those theses which the majority of Reid’s predecessors share and dubs these the “core” theses of the Ideal Theory.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This might mark a third. While Reid identified a recognizable commitment to the existence and use of ideas in several of his predecessors, Reid did not think that this commitment was ever codified clearly—by him or his predecessors. Greco seems to make the opposite assumption. Reid claims that, though philosophers affirm the existence of things or dispositions they call “ideas,” nonetheless they “hardly agree in any one thing else concerning them” (E 305a/184). Reid does not uniformly describe the Ideal Theory throughout his work, and in fact describes it in ways that seem contradictory (on which see Sleight, 77-79). (Indeed, Reid seems to take this lack of any uniformity as the source of an additional criticism of the Ideal Theory.)

<sup>90</sup> The core theses of Ideal Theory, quoting Greco, are:

- a. All thinking in general involves ideas which are in the mind or brain, and which have no existence outside the mind that thinks.
- b. Such ideas are distinct from any operation of thought, but are rather the immediate objects of thought in such operations as conception, memory, imagination, perception, etc.
- c. All thinking about external objects involves ideas which are images or resemblances of those objects in the mind or brain.
- d. Such images or resemblances are the immediate objects of thought about external objects.
- e. These images or phantasms or species or forms represent external objects, which are themselves thought only mediately, if at all. (Greco, 283)

Greco is committed to this approach because, he says, “Reid often claims that the ideal system was universally held, or nearly universally held, by his philosophical predecessors” (1995, 281). Greco adopts this method in order to avoid the result “that Reid is a *terrible* historian, guilty of the most outrageous mistakes” (1995, 282; his emphasis). He weighs this result against the coherence of Reid’s philosophical objections to the Ideal Theory, and chooses to preserve Reid’s credibility as an historian of philosophy over his ability as a philosopher. This leads Greco to claim that Reid fails to understand his own central philosophical commitments: the Ideal Theory does not imply skepticism. Greco says that “Reid’s assessment of his own work is incorrect” (1995, 279).

A second reason to seek a better understanding of Reid’s Ideal Theory is that Greco believes (along with Sleight) that the Ideal Theory doesn’t contain epistemic principles. As they see it, Reid’s primary difference with proponents of the Ideal Theory is epistemic in nature, and does not lie in metaphysical or perceptual theses. Greco says, about Reid’s response to the skepticism of Hume and Berkeley, “the linchpin of that reply is Reid’s theory of evidence, not his rejection of the theory of

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This set of overlapping theses represents a hodgepodge of doctrines. I believe we can simplify these commitments as follows:

1. All human thoughts take as their objects ideas, and
2. Ideas are mental representations, and are often claimed to bear a special type of representative relation to external objects, viz. resemblance.

ideas” (1995, 279). Sleight says that “the fundamental difference” between the Ideal Theory and Reid’s alternative “concerns epistemic principles” (1987, 78). Sleight also remarks that “Reid’s major difficulty with the Ideal Theory as applied to our knowledge of the external world... has nothing to do with the fact that the theory postulates certain mental particulars which are not operations of the mind or modifications thereof” (83). But if the Ideal Theory doesn’t contain any epistemic principles, then Reid is at a loss to show that it reduces to skepticism, so they argue. Yet there is evidence that epistemic principles play a foundational role in the work of his predecessors. Reid says that this

may be considered as the spirit of modern philosophy, to allow of no first principles of contingent truths but this one, that the thoughts and operations of our own minds, of which we are conscious, are self-evidently real and true; but that everything else that is contingent is to be proved by argument. (E 464a/516)

Reid does not claim that this is an incidental claim affirmed by his predecessors, but rather that this is their only first principle and can be “considered *as the spirit* of modern philosophy.” This strongly worded and wide-ranging claim does not make it onto Greco’s short list. (That said, other students of Reid do include a principle of evidence within the Ideal Theory (e.g., Wolterstorff 1987).)

Proposing an improved set of theses as constitutive of the Ideal Theory is a fruitless task of dubious philosophical value; I'm not interested in doing this. I'm more concerned to identify the arguments Reid voices against specific assertions of his predecessors. For by misconstruing the Ideal Theory, we have misunderstood Reid's rejection of it. Only by considering a few of Reid's arguments against the Ideal Theory will we correct our impression of Reid and his philosophical methods and goals.

*Reid's criticisms and their scope*

In Greco's terms, Reid argues that the Ideal Theory implies skepticism by showing "the impossibility of our providing adequate evidence for our beliefs about the external world" on the basis of ideas (1995, 279). I want to determine whether this sort of skeptical argument is one Reid endorses in order to better understand Reid's epistemology.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> I have a second motivation for investigating this point. Recall the discussion from chapter 8. There I argued that Reid's understanding of the role of learning in perception implied that, contrary to popular opinion, he gives inference an important place in his theory of perceptual knowledge. This put me in danger of the criticism that my interpretation of his theory of perception does not sufficiently distinguish it from that offered by the Ideal Theory. I want to show now that a pervasive misunderstanding of Reid's reductio to skepticism of the Ideal Theory makes such a criticism more palatable to Reid scholars than it should be.

Reid wants to refute the claim, which Greco lists amongst the Ideal Theory's core theses, that

(I) An agent A's thought T about external objects involves ideas which are images or resemblances of those objects in the mind or brain, and such images or resemblances are the immediate intentional objects of T. (see Greco 1995, 287)

That is, Reid's goal is to ground a theory of perception on which we experience qualities and bodies of the mind-independent world directly. Commentators reinforce an all-too-familiar interpretation of Reid's response to this tenet of the Ideal Theory, his alleged *modus tollens* refutation of it. This can be construed as follows:

(1) If (I), then skepticism.<sup>92</sup>

(2) Not skepticism.

(3) So, not (I).

This refutation of the Ideal Theory does not stem merely from Greco, but is prevalent in others' interpretations. For example, Yves Michaud has attributed this

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<sup>92</sup> Notice a potential confusion surrounding Reid's various arguments for 1. To successfully argue that the objection under discussion renders my view relevantly parallel to the Ideal Theory, it is not sufficient to argue that Reid believes that the available inferences from original perceptions are insufficient to grant us knowledge of acquired perceptual beliefs. What must be shown is not merely that inferences are used both by my account of Reid and by the Ideal Theory. Rather, my interlocutor must show that the specific reasons on the basis of which Reid thinks the inferences required by the Ideal Theory fail are reasons which also apply to inferences from original to acquired perceptions.

argument to Reid (see Michaud 1989, pp. 14-15).

Some of Reid's comments about First Principles support the simple *modus tollens* construal of Reid's response to the Ideal Theory. Reid gives an armchair explanation for the attraction of the Ideal Theory to his interlocutors, saying that the reason it held such allure was "because they cannot help it" (I 130a/71). He then says roughly the same about his own First Principles! He says,

All reasoning must be from first principles; and for first principles no other reason can be given but this, that, by the constitution of our nature, we are under a necessity of assenting to them. Such principles are parts of our constitution, no less than the power of thinking: reason can neither make nor destroy them. (I 130a/71)

This allows Reid to deny skepticism in (2), which enables him to conclude that the Ideal Theory is false in (3).

Not surprisingly, this argument is thought to mark a double-standard, which vitiates its plausibility. This is unsatisfactory, not least because Ideal Theorists, like Hume, can avail themselves of something like a reliability theory of justification for perceptual knowledge based on cause/effect reasoning (see Costa 1981). Reid is thought to be offering nothing more than a tit-for-tat appeal to undefended philosophical principles in this context. The fact that this is (thought to be) Reid's major philosophical innovation fuels the fires of some of his critics (like Strawson and Sinclair, mentioned above). David Tebaldi correctly concedes that, "if this simple

*reductio* argument were all, or even the best, that Reid had to offer against the views of his famous predecessors, then he would perhaps deserve the reputation he has suffered as a relatively naive and unimaginative 18th-Century philosopher” (Tebaldi 1976, 25).

Thankfully, this form of the *modus tollens* rejection of the Ideal Theory is largely a matter of myth. First, Reid’s inference that the Ideal Theory implies skepticism is more subtle than is typically thought; he has several reductions of the Ideal Theory to skepticism that do not rest upon the claim that there aren’t good inferences from ideas to external objects. Second, he has reductions of the Ideal Theory that make no appeal whatsoever to his own epistemic First Principle. I want to describe this typically unknown side of Reid’s response to his predecessors by briefly stating several distinct ways the Ideal Theory leads to several varieties of skepticism. (Given my goals in this chapter, I will not be evaluating these arguments, only stating them.) Reid’s standard procedure in arguing against the Ideal Theory is to turn it against itself, and not, as is popularly believed, to hold it up to his own epistemic commitments for independent testing.

(1) Unfortunately, it is in the *Inquiry*’s dedication that Reid comes closest to giving voice to what we can refer to as the ‘no good inference’ argument—claiming that the Ideal Theory reduces to skepticism because there are no good inferences from ideas to objects. This is unfortunate because, in this location, readers of his work quickly seized the contours of Reid’s attack on his predecessors, despite the fact



that Reid's aim in the dedication is to state his view in the simplest possible terms. (I note that this passage is emphasized by Greco (1995, 281) and Wolterstorff (1987, 399).) Reid explains that the "skeptical system" he plans to attack "leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis...[t]hat nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it" (I 96a/4). Continuing, he says that "I cannot, from their existence, infer the existence of anything else: my impressions and ideas are the only existences of which I can have any knowledge or conception" (Ibid). Knowledge is restricted to mental objects, a boundary which inference 'cannot' surmount.

These are strong terms: the inference is not merely slightly lacking in justification; Reid claims it 'cannot' be made. The inference cannot be made because impressions, from which we infer the existence of external bodies, "...are such fleeting and transitory beings, that they can have no existence at all, any longer than I am conscious of them" (Ibid). Reid concludes that the Ideal Theory is incapable of showing that "bodies and spirits, sun, moon, stars, and earth" have any "permanent existence." The inference from ideas to the external world fails due to particular facts about the objects—purely mental objects—*from* which the Ideal Theory is forced to infer. But the immediate objects of Reid's original perceptions are not "fleeting and transitory." As I have insisted, Reid is a *perceptual* direct realist. The objects of original (and acquired) perception are *mind-independent* objects or qualities of objects. (And, as we have seen in chapter 6, this is no less true for visible figures than it is for middle-sized dry goods.) In this case the views of Reid's predecessors reduce to skepticism,

not on the basis of the ‘no good inference’ argument, but rather on the basis of the principled problem regarding the Ideal Theory’s impressions and ideas.

(2) Reid was not especially interested in the task of showing that an inference from ideas to external objects was epistemically illegitimate since the authors he took to be most representative of the Ideal Theory themselves thought that mind-independent objects were fictitious (or so Reid believed). In this way he briefly notes the Berkeleyian transition from a denial of secondary qualities to a denial of primary qualities, and on to a parallel argument against matter itself (I 109a/34). Reid claims that philosophy, under the Ideal System, “pretends to demonstrate, *a priori*, that there can be no such thing as a material world” (I 127a/67). Reid opposes this *metaphysical* thesis with criticisms of arguments given for the non-existence of matter. On the Ideal Theory, we have no knowledge of the material world simply because, among other reasons, there is thought to be no material world.

(3) Reid argues that the Ideal Theory as advocated by Hume results in skepticism about reason itself.

The author of the ‘Treatise of Human Nature’ appears to me to be but a half-skeptic. He hath not followed his principles so far as they lead him; but, after having, with unparalleled intrepidity and success, combated vulgar prejudices, when he had but one blow to strike, his courage fails him, he fairly lays down his arms, and yields himself a captive to the most common of all vulgar

prejudices—I mean the belief of the existence of his own impressions and ideas. (I 129a/71)

Reid's position that the Ideal Theory implies skepticism stems not from the Ideal Theory's theses about the metaphysics of perception, but from the Ideal Theory's restrictive epistemological principles. (See above Reid's remark about the "spirit of modern philosophy.") The faculties we possess which produce beliefs are, epistemically speaking, equivalent, says Reid. This argument is emphasized by Wolterstorff, who dubs the Ideal Theory's epistemology "Classical Foundationalism." This is the view according to which

We are not warranted in accepting the deliverances of any belief-forming faculty, except for those of reflection, self-evidence, and reasoning, until such time as their reliability has been established by reference to the deliverances of the faculties of reflection, self-evidence, and reasoning. (Wolterstorff 1987, 408)

All our belief dispositions are on a par, says Reid. Just as we cannot derive certain knowledge from perception, so we cannot from reasoning, because the status of the faculties themselves is less than certain. Here too Reid turns the Ideal Theory on itself to argue that it is internally inconsistent.

(4) Closely related to the previous objection, Reid argues that the Ideal Theory denies important first principles. "It is a bold philosophy that rejects, without ceremony, principles which irresistibly govern the belief and the conduct of all

mankind in the common concerns of life.” (I 102b/21) Later, prefacing his own discussion of First Principles, Reid argues that “DesCartes thought one principle, expressed in one word, *cogito*, a sufficient foundation for his whole system, and asked for no more. Mr. Locke seems to think first principles of very small use.” (E 435a/454) The Ideal Theory not only fails to employ some measure of epistemic parity to the First Principles it endorses, but, furthermore, it endorses too few. Any form of foundationalism devoid of a suitable epistemic principle will, if not lead to skepticism, result in the inability to justify most of the beliefs we take to be justified.<sup>93</sup>

(5) Hume’s commitment to (I) enables Reid to employ yet another reductio to conclude that Hume is a skeptic, in this case, about the self. Reid argues that from “a fundamental principle of the ideal system, that every object of thought must be an impression or an idea,” it follows as a “just and natural consequence” that “thought and ideas may be without any thinking being...” (I 108-9/33-35). The missing premise seems to be one to the effect that, given (I), none of my words can refer to anything other than ideas and impressions. If I cannot refer to my mind, then I cannot have knowledge that I have (or am) a mind. This is because “if impressions and ideas are

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<sup>93</sup> A variation of this argument appears in the *Intellectual Powers*, where Reid decries Descartes’ rejection of the first principle of perception, viz. that what I perceive exists independently of my mind. This was due to Descartes’ appreciation for ancient arguments that “our senses often deceive us, and therefore ought never to be trusted on their own authority” (E 269a/115). This suspicion of the veridicality of the senses, caused in part by an affirmation of principles about the immediate objects of perception associated with the Ideal Theory, lead Descartes to a variety of skepticisms. Descartes “took it for granted, as the old philosophers had done, that

the only objects of thought, then heaven and earth, and body and spirit, and everything you please, must signify only impressions and ideas, or they must be words without any meaning” (I 109a/33). Hume shows that ideas are incapable of representing things other than ideas. Reid puts this point differently in the *Intellectual Powers*, when remarking that Hume has shown that “the idea or the impression, which is only a more lively idea, is mind, perception, and object, all in one” (E 294a/164).<sup>94</sup> He adds that “Hume’s system does not even leave him a self to claim the property of his impressions and ideas” (E 293b/163; see also I 110b/37). In light of this, Reid claims as a First Principle “That the thoughts of which I am conscious are the thoughts of a being which I call myself, my mind, my person” (E 443b/472). Given Hume’s descriptions of ‘idea’ and ‘impression’, it seems that perceivers need not be conscious. Reid argues that Hume’s view fails to provide a metaphysics of the self.<sup>95</sup>

(6) Elsewhere Reid claims that the Ideal Theory lands in the coal pit on the basis of the doctrine of the resemblance between sensations and their objects. The Ideal Theory takes it for granted “that this same material world, if any such there be,

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what we immediately perceive must be either in the mind itself, or in the brain, to which the mind is immediately present” (E 272a/121).

<sup>94</sup> Reid interprets Hume as arguing that “there is nothing in nature but ideas only; for what we call a mind is nothing but a train of ideas connected by certain relations between themselves” (E 299a/173).

<sup>95</sup> Not only does Hume claim that perceiving can occur without a subject, but it can also occur without an object, a point Reid also disputes. See, e.g., E 224a/26 for Reid’s comments about Hume on the term ‘perception’.

must be the express image of our sensations; that we can have no conception of any material thing which is not like some sensation in our minds.” Reid adds, “Every argument brought against the existence of a material world, either by the Bishop of Cloyne, or by the author of the “Treatise of Human Nature,” supposeth this” (I 127b/69). Reid is assuming that resemblance is unpacked in terms of a likeness principle of some kind, here following Berkeley. This doctrine of resemblance implies that we cannot conceive of material, physical objects. Reid thought this result is absurd, and inferred that the doctrine of resemblance on which it hangs is highly implausible.

(7) Reid also argues that the Ideal Theory (again, as present in Hume’s system) cannot intelligibly account for the phenomenon of belief. Hume asserts in the *Treatise* that “belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures” (I 183/123). Emotivist interpretations of Hume on this score offer some confirmation that this was Hume’s considered view. Reid certainly thinks it is (E 356-360/286-294). Reid argues that this precludes one from being able to differentiate between believing B and believing the denial of B on the grounds that there is no act of judgment present in believing. Reid argues that

the belief of a future state and the belief of no future state must be one and the same. The same arguments that are used to prove that belief implies only a stronger idea of the object than simple apprehension, might as well be used to prove that love implies only a stronger idea of the object than indifference... If

it should be said, that in love there is something more than an idea--to wit, an affection of the mind--may it not be said with equal reason, that in belief there is something more than an idea--to wit, an assent or persuasion of the mind?  
(I 107a/30 )

This is not to say that the subject cannot differentiate between the affirmation and denial of B, but rather that, on the Humean model, we cannot even affirm or deny B. The act of affirmation is a cognitive event occurring at the behest of the mind, but according to Hume beliefs are merely affective states which we experience passively.

The eighth argument, which I regard as the most important, is the argument presented in chapter 2 according to which the Ideal Theory cannot adequately account for the intentional contents of thoughts. It will not be repeated here.

These arguments have an important feature in common. Time and time again Reid argues against the Ideal Theory with what might well be described as transcendental arguments. Principles of the Ideal Theory can be used to infer, for example, that it is impossible to entertain beliefs about mind-independent objects, and that the concept of a substantial self is incoherent. (Of course, some Ideal Theorists do this work on Reid's behalf.) Thus, from principles of the Ideal Theory, Reid deduces that we cannot have any knowledge of mind-independent objects, or of substantial selves. Emphasis upon standard *modus tollens* reductio of the Ideal Theory to skepticism overlooks a number of much more subtle, broadly epistemological arguments against it. I rest content here with having shown (i) that Reid has several

*prima facie* persuasive arguments against the Ideal Theory that, collectively, constitute a diverse and sophisticated arsenal, and (ii) that in only one of these arguments does Reid employ anything like the simpleminded ‘no good inference’ argument.

This discussion shows that one central feature in Reid’s metaphilosophical platform is a keen interest in preserving the epistemic commitments of ‘common sense’, a term I have refrained from using until now. Failing to capture this feature in one’s philosophical system is sufficient, Reid shows us, for the dismissal of one’s system. In fact, several of the arguments above—about the self, the external world, and thought—explicitly discuss the failure of the Ideal Theory to ground knowledge of theses that Reid identifies as first principles of common sense in *Intellectual Powers* VI, 5.

## 2. NATURAL SCIENCE AND THE IDEAL THEORY<sup>96</sup>

I said that there are two distinct types of criticism Reid voices against the Ideal Theory. The first type involves philosophical—largely epistemological—arguments against it. I now turn to the second: that the Ideal Theory is an impediment to the progress of science. By explaining this point, I hope to shed further light on Reid’s philosophical methods and priorities.

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<sup>96</sup> This section is indebted to Larry Laudan’s landmark paper (Laudan 1970) “Thomas Reid and the Newtonian Turn of British Methodological Thought.”



*The Ideal Theory and the hypothetical method*

Despite the fact that it is Hume that claims, in his preface to the *Treatise*, to do for moral philosophy what Newton had done for natural philosophy, Larry Laudan argues that Newton's empiricism and his methodology of science were largely lost on Hume and the (so-called) British Empiricists. Laudan says,

Although histories of philosophy often bracket Newton with the classical British empiricists, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, such a conjunction is more misleading than illuminating, at least so far as the history of the philosophy of science is concerned. Indeed, those three empiricists are surprisingly un-Newtonian when it comes to questions of scientific method. Locke, for instance, died before most of Newton's *pronunciamentos* on methodology were published, so we look in vain for signs of Newtonian influence there. Berkeley, on the other hand, though undoubtedly aware of Newton's inductive empiricism, developed a theory of scientific method and concept formation which is almost as alien to Newton's views as any could be. Indeed, *De Motu* can be read as a poorly disguised critique of Newtonian empiricism and inductivism. The situation is not vastly different with Hume, who seems to have taken little or no cognizance of Newton's numerous methodological *obiter dicta*. In fact, when Hume did come to grips with methodological issues (e.g., induction and causality), his conclusions were diametrically opposed to the then usual interpretation of Newton's doctrines... [O]n the crucial

questions of scientific method and the philosophy of science—the very areas where Newton ventured most openly and frequently into the philosophers’ domain—there seems to be very little evidence indeed that the early British empiricists were either very impressed by, or paid much heed to, Newton’s much publicized views. [M]ost of the available evidence seems to indicate that Reid was the first major British philosopher to take Newton’s opinions on induction, causality, and hypotheses seriously. (105-6)

Laudan describes an important, though mostly overlooked, insight into Reid’s relationship to the Ideal Theory. Reid’s doughty pragmatism means more to him than crude appeals to commonsense, with which he can dismiss his predecessors. Reid’s emphasis on securing practical knowledge is manifest in his advocacy of a different methodology for science—one that works.

Two aspects of Reid’s self-avowed Newtonianism are worth developing here. First, Reid argues against positing hypotheses that are not based on observation. Then he explains the role of observation and induction in gaining scientific knowledge. In effect, these are two sides of the same coin.

Reid often issues broad statements about the failure of hypotheses, like this one:

Let us lay down this as a fundamental principle in our inquiries into the structure of the mind and its operations—that no regard is due to the

conjectures or hypotheses of philosophers, however ancient, however generally received. (E 236a/51)

Reid offers several distinct reasons for his insistence on this point. First, there are deleterious psychological effects that follow the creation of hypotheses. If, he says, no observations on behalf of the hypothesis

can be produced, we must conclude...that every system which pretends to account for the phaenomena of Nature by hypotheses or conjecture, is spurious and illegitimate, and serves only to flatter the pride of man with a vain conceit of knowledge which he has not attained. (E 251a/82)

The creator of a system is subject to greater feelings of pride than is an observer of the world. This is why the hypothetical method creates bias: “When a man has laid out all his ingenuity in fabricating a system, he views it with the eye of a parent; he strains phenomena to make them tally with it, and makes it look like the work of nature” (E 472b/535). Next, and related, he argues that hypotheses color our observations: “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 than when seen by a pure light” (E 474b/540). These first two points can be used to explain the great sway of the Ideal Theory in the face of (what Reid thought were) the small number of arguments on its behalf.

Third, the hypothetical method takes too much comfort in *a priori* reasoning. “These facts are phenomena of human nature, from which we may justly argue

against any hypothesis, however generally received. But to argue from a hypothesis against facts, is contrary to the rules of true philosophy” (I 132b/76). Philosophers have to the present day overstepped their bounds by attempting to structure science with *a priori* constraints; Reid makes an early, if unsuccessful, effort to stop this trend. (See also his letter to Lord Kames, *Works* 57.)

Reid argues that using hypotheses in place of observation unduly emphasizes simplicity over genuine explanation. He says,

Men are often led into error by the love of simplicity, which disposes us to reduce things to few principles, and to conceive a greater simplicity in nature than there really is. ... We may learn something of the way in which nature operates from fact and observation; but if we conclude that it operates in such a manner, only because to our understanding that appears to be the best and simplest manner, we shall always go wrong. (E 470b-71a/530-31)

While simplicity marks a useful criterion in the evaluation of theories (Reid doesn’t dispute this), it can often be given undeserved importance, especially by philosophers reasoning *a priori*. We’ve seen some evidence of this methodological tenet in Reid’s treatment of fictional objects. He rules in favor of allowing non-existent objects because he thinks that allegiance to his epistemological goals trumps any concern with simplicity.

Fifth, when an hypothesis is provable at all, it is thought provable by arguments from elimination. “This, indeed, is the common refuge of all hypotheses,

that we know no other way in which the phaenomena may be produced, and therefore, they must be produced in this way” (E 250a-b/81). But Reid follows Newton, who said, “I cannot think it effectual for determining the truth to examine the several ways by which the phenomena may be explained, unless there can be a perfect enumeration of all those ways” (Turnbull, I, n 15, 209). Failing a complete evaluation of all possible explanations of a phenomenon, an argument from elimination will not succeed.

*Reid's method: Induction and Observation*

Reid mounts an argument against the hypothetical method based on the history of science. In it he sharply contrasts the scientific method he favors with the one advocated by Berkeley and Hume in particular. He says,

[Scientific] discoveries have always been made by patient observation, by accurate experiments, or by conclusions drawn by strict reasoning from observations and experiments, and such discoveries have always tended to refute, but not to confirm, the theories and hypotheses which ingenious men have invented.

As this is a fact confirmed by the history of philosophy in all past ages, it ought to have taught man, long ago, to treat with contempt hypotheses in every branch of philosophy, and to despair of ever advancing real knowledge

in that way. (E 235a-b/49-50; cf. E 271a-b/120-21, E 397a/371/, I 97a-98b/12; I 157a-b/57)

Throughout Reid's entire corpus, he upbraids the Ideal Theory's methods, and attempts to replace them with a rudimentary commitment to observation and induction. Here are a few passages in which he expresses the importance of his empirical methods:

[I]f ever our philosophy concerning the human mind is carried so far as to deserve the name of science, which ought never to be despaired of, it must be by observing facts, reducing them to general rules, and drawing just conclusions from them. (I 122a/59)

When men pretend to account for any of the operations of Nature, the causes assigned by them ought, as Sir Isaac Newton has taught us, to have two conditions, otherwise they are good for nothing. First, they ought to be true, to have a real existence, and not to be barely conjectured to exist, without proof. Secondly, they ought to be sufficient to produce the effect. (E 250a/80; cf. E 236a-b/51)

Laudan's interpretation of Reid on Newton's first rule has it that to justify the presence of a causal law like 'If A, then B,' A and B must both be observable in

particular cases. Where A is unobservable, such an explanation fails to meet the demands of the first rule. Laudan says, “This is tantamount to the demand that every explanation must contain what we should now call descriptive statements of initial conditions. Unless we know the initial conditions (which, for Reid, are generally the causes of the event to be explained), then it is impossible to give an explanation” (Laudan, 113). In order to claim that a law is capable of explaining a phenomenon, we must observe both cause and effect in particular cases. “Reid,” adds Laudan, “seems to have been the first philosopher of science to make the point explicitly, and it certainly deserved making in the context of eighteenth-century science” (113). The way Reid uses Newton’s first rule seems to imply that all scientific causes are capable of discovery, and of resolution into law-like generalizations through induction.

Reid regards this as the key purpose of scientific inquiry. In his most explicit statement about the goals and limits of science, he says,

By the cause of a phenomenon, nothing is meant but the law of nature, of which that phenomenon is an instance, or a necessary consequence... such laws cannot be the efficient cause of anything. They are only the rule according to which the efficient cause operates. ... Efficient causes, properly so called, are not within the sphere of natural philosophy. Its business is, from particular facts in the material world, to collect, by just induction, the laws that are general, and from these the more general, as far as we can go. And when

this is done, natural philosophy has no more to do. (*Works*, Letter to Kames, 57-58)

For Reid, the role of observation, and induction from observation, is so central to the methods of science, that this role constrains scientific explanation to inferring general laws that are necessary and sufficient to save the phenomena. Reid explicitly says that science does not trade in efficient causes.

Perhaps Reid has in mind the following sort of argument about the limits of science. The freely willed actions of human agents are caused by the wills of the agents, and such actions are the only efficient causes (see O'Connor 1994). It follows that we cannot observe the causes of effects produced by agents, viz. the machinations of agents' wills. Since we cannot observe both cause and effect, agent causes cannot be incorporated under a general law; that is, agent causes are not explicable by scientific reasoning. So, efficient causes are not in the purview of "natural philosophy" because, for Reid, agent causes are the only genuine efficient causes.

If this is what lies in the background of Reid's thought, then the scope of properly scientific explanations will increase or decrease as our powers of observation increase or decrease. This point is pertinent for understanding Reid's fascinating relationship to dualism. There is little reason to doubt that Reid is a substance dualist. More interesting in the present context is Reid's protean views about the *epistemic status* of his belief in dualism, and the relationship between dualism and science.



### 3. DUALISM, EMPIRICISM AND THE ENDPOINTS OF SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Reid was troubled by the fact that he saw the need to explain how material impressions can cause qualitative, sensory events, but he could not explain that connection satisfactorily without lapsing into a naturalistic theory. If it is shown that a naturalistic explanation of qualitative experience is in principle impossible, then his account of sensation will be, at bottom, mysterious. But if Reid allows that it is in principle possible that science can show that purely physical events cause all our qualitative experience, then his view becomes unexpectedly appealing. This might suggest that Reid's justification for his belief in dualism is not based on alleged *a priori* truths, but is instead subject to refutation by science. Does Reid give us enough information about his dualism and his interactionism to clearly determine the epistemic status of these beliefs?

What Reid does say about the physical nature of the causes of sensations is interesting, though incomplete. His comments occur in the *Inquiry* at VI, 21 and in the *Intellectual Powers* at II, 2-4. If we are to perceive objects in the world, there must be some medium through which the object is put into contact with our sensory organs. The external object generates a material impression on the organ, an impression that is then conducted through the nervous system. Reid is cautious and remarks that, "probably, by means of the nerves, some impression must be made upon the brain." He adds, "The impression made upon the organ, nerves, and brain,

is followed by a sensation” (I 186b/174). Reid seems to grant *that* neural activity produces a sensation, even though he avoids using the term ‘cause’ to describe the relationship. He says, more strongly, “In like manner, in every other sensation, there is, without doubt, some impression made upon the organ of sense” (I 187a/175). While the nature of the relationship between each part of the process is not made lucid, Reid is clear that further scientific investigation should aid us in understanding many of these connections. Though similar, the description of the physical causes of sensation (and perception) expands in the *Intellectual Powers*. Nerves, says Reid, “serve as a medium to make an impression upon the brain. Here the material part ends; at least we can trace it no farther; the rest is all intellectual” (E 248a/75).

In the discussions of Newton, Hartley and Locke that follow these passages Reid describes some accounts of the connections between mind and brain, and then describes the explanatory demands facing such accounts. His primary foil is a theory, put forward by the physiologist Hartley, according to which the nerves transmit the material impression from its reception in the organs to the brain by vibrations. Reid entertains the possibility that these vibrations explain sensations in such a way that no reference to any indelibly mental qualities is necessary. That is, this view suggests that we can philosophically explain features of qualitative mental life by appealing to nothing over and above states of the nervous system and brain. Reid seems to take Hartley’s thesis to be something like what we would today describe as a mind-brain

identity thesis. Reid expects that Hartley, who explicitly disavows such a hypothesis, nonetheless implicitly believes it may do the trick.

Reid responds with a philosophical argument against this reduction as it is advanced for memory beliefs. When we ask for an account of thought, a reductive materialist may assert that the mental qualities of the belief can be identified with brain states. Counters Reid, “To say that this impression [on the brain] is memory, is absurd, if understood literally” (E 354a/281). Presumably Reid is employing the ‘is’ of identity here, and concluding that such a view is not worthy of serious consideration. Memories are not identical to brain states.

He continues, though, by describing a slightly weaker hypothesis. He says, “If it is only meant that it [the brain impression] is the cause of memory, it ought to be shewn how it produces this effect, otherwise memory remains as unaccountable as before” (E 354a/281). The thesis Reid addresses here is that brain states are *causes of* memory states. This is an instance of a global claim, viz. that all mental states are caused by physical states. The diffident tone of his response to this weaker physical/mental thesis shows more restraint than his reply to the identity thesis. He does not say or imply that it is impossible that brain states be the causes of memories. In fact, he does not say that brain states are not the *actual* causes of memories. His concern isn’t directed at the truth or falsity of this thesis. (In fact, shortly I will show Reid endorses a causal dependency thesis.) Reid’s concern is sternly with the evidence

on behalf of this thesis, and with whether appeal to purely physical causes is sufficient to account for mental states. He says,

If a philosopher should undertake to account for the force of gunpowder in the discharge of a musket, and then tell us gravely that the cause of this phenomenon is the drawing of the trigger, we should not be much wiser by this account. As little are we instructed in the cause of memory by being told that it is caused by a certain impression on the brain. For, supposing that impression on the brain were as necessary to memory as the drawing of the trigger is to the discharge of the musket, we are still as ignorant as we were how memory is produced; so that, if the cause of memory, assigned by this theory, did really exist, it does not in any degree account for memory. (E 354a/281)

Reid's point is not especially clear. He seems to imply that one cannot, or at least not fully, "account" for memory by appealing to a physical cause of memory, *even if* the physical state appealed to is actually the cause of memory. There is a premise missing in his argument. It seems to be something to the effect that physical causes cannot account for mental events. But if this is the missing premise, then Reid seems to violate the sorts of judicious, empirical maxims that Laudan and I have earlier attributed to him. Recall that Laudan says, "Unless we know the initial conditions (which, for Reid, are generally the causes of the event to be explained), then it is impossible to give an explanation." Here is a case in which, for the sake of argument,

we do know the causes of the event to be explained. But Reid nonetheless claims that if those physical states exist, they do “not in any degree account for memory.”

Part of the problem can be overcome by emphasizing that knowledge of the causes of the phenomenon to be explained is a necessary, but not sufficient, part of a philosophical explanation. The other maxim we have seen Reid endorse above is that, for an observed state of affairs to “account” for an event, it also “ought to be sufficient to produce the effect” (E 250a/80). Thus in the inset passage above, Reid is implying that an account of memory experiences that appeals only to their purely physical causes is insufficient. In other words, such an account omits something of crucial importance—namely the qualitative aspect of memory experiences. This interpretation of Reid’s missing premise finds further evidence when Reid says, following the passage in question, that even “if we knew as distinctly that state of the brain which causes memory, we should still be as ignorant as before how that state contributes to memory” (E 354b/283). Knowledge even of which token physical causes are responsible for causing which memories would still not constitute a philosophical account of memory. Reid implicitly distinguishes between identifying an efficient cause and constructing a philosophical explanation. The former does not imply the latter. That seems to be his lesson here.

At the time of Reid’s writing, there was no scientific case to be made for correlation between types of brain states and types of mental states; whether or not there in fact is such a correlation, he doesn’t say. But he does grant that, “although

impressions upon the brain give no aid in accounting for memory, yet it is very probable that, in the human frame, memory is dependent on some proper state or temperament of the brain” (E 354b/282). Reid stands ready to grant that brain states are the causes of our mental states (though ‘cause’ here must be used carefully, in light of Reid’s proviso about agent causes being the only efficient causes). “Nature,” he adds, “may have subjected us to this law, that a certain constitution or state of the brain is necessary to memory. That this is really the case, many well-known facts lead us to conclude.” (Ibid.)

This is not ‘pineal gland interactionism’. Reid appreciates the role of the brain and nervous system more than most of his dualist predecessors. What remains unclear, however, is whether Reid relies upon his theory of scientific explanation—or instead on brute faith, say—to shoot down his opponents’. In his only other interesting discussion of this issue, Reid clears up this point.

Reid is amenable to the modest materialist claims that Hartley actually makes. Hartley observes what he takes to be an explanatorily useful causal dependence of mental operations like sensations upon brain activity. In Reid’s words, Hartley holds that “there is a certain connection between vibrations in the medullary substance of the nerves and brain, and the thoughts of the mind; so that the last depend entirely upon the first, and every kind of thought in the mind arises in consequence of a corresponding vibration...” (E 251b-52a/84). This universally generalized dependence claim resembles contemporary forms of supervenience. Reid seems to

attribute to Hartley the view that we have all the mental states we do in virtue of our brain states.

The manner in which Reid rejects this dependence thesis illustrates his easy way with influences from materialism. Hartley's research cannot, according to Reid, be used to show that thought "depends entirely" on physical states. But, and this is the point I wish to emphasize, Reid's reasons for rejecting Hartley's dependence claim stem from his scientific method. His reasons are not borne out of faith, out of any crude appeals to common sense, or out of *a priori* intuitions.

Knowing something about the physical constitution of nerves—their location and length, their sheaths and functional purpose, Reid believes that Hartley has not made significant advances over earlier (speculative and false) hypotheses about the pneumatic nature of the nervous system. Reid's first criticism of this view is that, "as to the existence of the vibrations in the medullary substance of the nerves and brain, no proof has yet been brought" (E 252a/84). Hartley hasn't made the requisite observations of the causes in question. Given the weak character of Hartley's physical data on behalf of his explanation of sensation, Reid's criticism follows straightforwardly from the methodological axioms he espouses.

Furthermore, to justify his causal dependency thesis, Hartley must also observe the correspondence between the variation in our mental experience with the variations amongst vibrations in the nerves. Variations in the vibrations passing through a "uniform elastic medium" like the nerve occur along two axes only, thinks

Reid: vibrations may be quick or slow, and strong or weak. But “each [type of sensation] has an endless variety of degrees,” and these cannot be captured by Hartley’s particular physical explanation (E 252b/85). Reid’s present point differs from the above criticism. Here he claims that *even if* Hartley had successfully observed vibrations in the nerves, the sorts of vibrations of which nerves are physically capable are not “sufficient to produce the effect.” That is, because of particular facts about the physical constitution of nerves, appeal to their vibration alone cannot explain the range of sensations that we experience.

Because Reid’s criticism is not based on faith, common sense or miscellaneous *a priori* intuitions, he can admit that mental states are caused by and depend upon brain states. Minimally, he is an interactionist in this way. But he is not merely that. He is optimistic about the promise further scientific investigation into the brain may bring to a philosophical account of perception and sensation. He says, even if tentatively, that “If the divisions and subdivisions of thought be found to run parallel with the divisions and subdivisions of vibrations, this would give [a] kind of plausibility to the hypothesis of their connection” (E 252a/85). We can illustrate Reid’s intent by looking at what he says about auditory experience.

With respect to the source of sensations of sound and their causal dependence on vibrations in the air, Reid was sanguine about the deliverances of science. He says, “we know that such vibrations do really exist; and, secondly, that they tally exactly with the most remarkable phenomena of sound” (E 253a/86). While we cannot



“shew” precisely *how* variations in waves through the air “should produce the sensation of sound,” we can nonetheless know *that* they do.

We can point out that relation of synchronous vibrations which produces harmony or discord, and that relation of successive vibrations which produces melody; and all this is not conjectured, but proved by a sufficient induction.

This account of sounds, therefore, is philosophical; although, perhaps, there may be many things relating to sound that we cannot account for, and of which the causes remain latent. (E 253a/86)

Reid believes that the appeal to brain states, and the material impressions that cause them, can positively contribute to a “philosophical” account of mental states. (Note the cautiousness in Reid’s tone. Reid’s observations of and disdain for the past failure of hypotheses, and his own commitment to dualism, seem to inhibit him from expressing his positive views more forcefully, or clearly, in this discussion.

One means by which to appreciate Reid’s position with respect to the epistemology of dualism and its relation to science, is to highlight a thesis about mind/body interactionism. We can call this thesis ‘closed dualist interactionism’. In addition to affirming a substance dualism and a thesis about interaction, this view also contains the following necessary condition:

CDI: No appeal to relationships between physical and mental states can be explanatorily efficacious.

Endorsing CDI precludes one from using contributions from science in the philosophical analysis of mental states. The standard-bearer of CDI is Descartes, at least as he is normally interpreted. Descartes adds some such principle of philosophical explanation to his dualist metaphysics to conclude that appeal to brain states in offering philosophical accounts of mental states is, on *a priori* grounds, prohibited. The argument of this section, though, shows that Reid is a substance dualist who *denies* CDI. He remains open to the fact that proper scientific enquiry might usurp his epistemic justification in dualism.

Let us step back from the nuances of the arguments to see this issue about the epistemic status of beliefs about the dependency of mental states on brain states in historical context. First, Reid's denial of CDI marks an intriguing mutation in the thought of Early Modern dualists. Reid's dualism does not seem to be purely a principle of faith, or a tenet of an *a priori* method of hypothesis. After all, he engaged materialist proposals by evaluating in some detail their claims to be scientific. Second, consider for a moment the following playful sort of question. Suppose for the sake of argument that there is some discrete point in the history of the development of 'cognitive' science at which the epistemic justification that philosophers and scientists had for dualism was defeated. Suppose also that there is another point in time (perhaps identical to the first, perhaps not) at which one becomes justified in believing that substance dualism is false. (There may be a third period in which one is justified neither in believing nor in disbelieving substance dualism.) How would we

describe these points? More to present purposes, where does Reid stand with respect to them?

I ask this hypothetical question because I do not want to lose sight of the fact that the more important issue here is not whether Reid's dualist *metaphysics* is true or false. I am more interested in determining whether the method Reid uses to assess the epistemic status of commitments to materialism and dualism is a plausible one. My hunch is that Reid was working at a time in which the science of the mind was sufficiently inchoate that someone like Reid could be justified in believing either in substance dualism or in its denial (or be justified in believing neither). If so, then we have further reason to appreciate his prudent, even wary, thinking about mind/body interaction. When the evidence is mixed, his cautious reasoning is especially *apropos*.

#### 4. REIDIAN EMPIRICISM

A clearer picture of the nature and scope of Reid's philosophical method is coming into focus. Reid's guarded views about the epistemic status of his belief in substance dualism, and the watchful way he canvasses debate on this point by scientists like Hartley, marks a test-case for the application of Reid's inductive and observational method. We have identified two key components of his metaphilosophical platform: (i) the preservation of knowledge of common sense truths, and (ii) a method of scientific inquiry characterized by induction, observation, and the avoidance of hypothesis.

We have witnessed a number of examples of these beliefs in action in earlier chapters. In Chapters 1-3, I argued that Reid takes uncommon steps in order to preserve knowledge of what he takes to be common sense truths, like the fact that I know what I am thinking about merely in virtue of thinking. The Ideal Theory's account of cognition did not preserve such knowledge, so he argues. So Reid runs roughshod over differences in the contents of beliefs about fictional objects and beliefs about physical objects in his attempt to ground first-person privileged access. Here Reid's allegiance to the preservation of our knowledge of common sense truths trumps any concern he has with metaphysics. This nicely exemplifies the first key commitment.

In Chapter 9, about sensation experience, I argued that Reid's commitment to observation of our perceptual faculties led him to fault the Ideal Theory's treatment of the relation between sensation and perception. Specifically, Reid infers that his predecessors were not justified to conclude that sensations were necessary in our perceptual experience. He grants that, in proper circumstances, there is constant conjunction between sensation and perception, but this is not sufficient for a philosophical explanation. In this case, illustrating the second commitment, Reid is actually correct if contemporary work in cognitive science is to be believed.

Both the key commitments I have identified are broadly speaking epistemic in character. These do not fully capture the depth of Reid's focus on epistemology, though. In Chapter 7, about qualities, I argued that Reid's distinction between

primary and secondary qualities is drawn on epistemic grounds—in virtue of the immediacy of our concepts of the respective types of qualities. Yes, epistemic concerns guide Reid in deciding what issues are philosophically important, and inform what he takes to be philosophically adequate answers to problems. But we can identify a third key commitment in Reid’s philosophical system: (iii) Reid views philosophical problems through an epistemic lens. For, in the case of qualities, what is by most thought to be a metaphysical problem, Reid transmogrifies into an epistemic problem, with correspondent solution.

Because of commitments like these, Reid effectively represents what’s right about empiricism. Unfortunately, the history of the term ‘empiricism’ and its cognates is fraught with polemics, making any analysis of whether Reid best exemplifies empiricism a futile pursuit. Reid’s empiricism is not, for example, what Kant famously identifies with the antitheses of his four antinomies. According to Kant, the empiricist believes (i) that the world has no beginning in time and no limits in space; (ii) that there is nothing in the world that is simple; (iii) that there is no freedom, or in other words, that everything in the world is the product of laws of nature; and (iv) that there is no necessarily existent being (*Critique*, A426-461/B494-504). Clearly Reid isn’t in this camp.

Francis Bacon, the first to use cognates of the term in the Early Modern period, described empiricists as those who “merely collect and use” which made them “like the ants” (Bacon 1994, Lib. I, Aph. 95, 64). For Bacon, empiricists are those

who make observations, and extrapolate their results only as far as judgments about specific future events; that is, empiricists do not formulate observations into general laws. Reid doesn't quite fit this account either, since he believes that observing the world and making inductions on the basis of those observations is precisely in the service of proper scientific inquiry.

Leibniz follows Bacon on this use of the term in some ways, but he makes the distinction between empiricists and rationalists more clearly epistemological than Bacon does. Leibniz indicates that rationalists claim to have some *a priori* knowledge of substantive truths, while empiricists deny we have such knowledge (*New Essays*, 50). But Reid claims that some truths can be known *a priori*. Reid has a rather lengthy list of "first principles of necessary truth" that includes theses in ethics, e.g. "that no man ought to be blamed for what it was not in his power to hinder" (E 453b/494), and in metaphysics, e.g. "that whatever begins to exist, must have a cause which produced it" (E 455a/497). Reid, then, is not an empiricist on Leibniz' definition of the term, nor does it seem that Reid is an empiricist in the sense in which Locke, Berkeley and Hume are called the 'British Empiricists' (if, in fact, there is any sense in this use of the term).

According to these and other historical definitions of empiricism, Reid is thus not an empiricist. But the metaphilosophical foundations to Reid's system cohere very well with some prominent contemporary characterizations of empiricism. Bas van Fraassen, for example (a self-described empiricist), claims that the rejection of

metaphysical theorizing is central to modern-day empiricism—a view Reid advocates forcefully in his own time. Drawing from his most recent book, Van Fraassen makes a number of comments about contemporary analytic metaphysics that resonate with Reid’s critique of his predecessors. Consider these passages:

I see metaphysical concoctions not as underpinnings but as the canopies of baroque four-poster beds... Metaphysical theories purport to interpret what we already understand to be the case. But to interpret is *to interpret into* something, something granted as already understood. Paradoxically, metaphysicians interpret what we initially understand into something hardly anyone understands, then insist that we cannot do without that. (Van Fraassen, 3; his emphasis)

What exactly are the targets of the empiricist critique? As I see it, the targets of traditional empiricism are forms of metaphysics which (a) give absolute primacy to demands for explanation, and (b) are satisfied with explanations-by-postulate, that is, explanations that postulate the reality of certain entities or aspects of the world not already evident in experience. (Van Fraassen, 37)

Van Fraassen argues that the empiricist is one who is, first, comfortable with rejecting “demands for explanation at certain crucial points,” as surely Reid was—to the

frustration of his students, then and now. Second, the empiricist has “a strong dissatisfaction with explanations (even if called for) that proceed by postulation” (ibid.).

Some of Van Fraassen’s comments could be interchanged with remarks from Reid without much notice. To proponents of what he dubs the “metaphysical enterprise,” Van Fraassen pleads, “But most of all, please admit that this putative pursuit of truth runs on a fuel of probabilities and values extraneous to its enterprise. For what is there inside this project besides the delight in puzzle-solving?” (Van Fraassen, 17). Reid remarks, of Ideal Theorists, that “When a man has laid out all his ingenuity in fabricating a system, he views it with the eye of a parent; he strains phenomena to make them tally with it, and makes it look like the work of nature” (E 472/535). Both Reid and Van Fraassen after him attempt to effect a renewal of philosophy by refocusing attention to worthwhile epistemological questions. In so doing, they both acclaim natural science, *sans* hypotheses, as the paradigm of rational inquiry.

Reid’s metaphors for the Ideal Theory differ with Van Fraassen’s for the “metaphysical enterprise”, which he thinks is like “the canopies of baroque four-poster bed.” Van Fraassen says he sees “a dead man walking.” Reid describes the insidiousness of the Ideal Theory’s tendency to exorcise sound philosophy as being like “the Trojan horse” which “carries in its belly death and destruction to all science and common sense” (I 132b/75). The Ideal Theory, he says, “is a rope of sand” and



proceeds upon false hypotheses (I 128b/70). Most evocative of Reid's metaphors and similes, though, and most instructive about Reid's response to the Ideal Theory, is a different one.

The Ideal Theory, he says, is "like Nebuchadnezzar's image, whose feet were partly of iron and partly of clay" (E 436b/457). Reid refers to the dream recorded by the author of the Book of Daniel:

You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. (Daniel 2: 31-35)

The Ideal Theory was a beautiful conceptual artifice, but it was built atop foundations that could not bear its weight. Reid supplanted the Ideal Theory with the theory of the mind and its relation to the world that I have presented. By building his account of perception upon sound metaphilosophical foundations, Reid has done his part to place knowledge of self and world on firmer footing.

APPENDIX:  
THE MEDIEVAL ORIGINS OF REID'S DISCUSSION OF CONTENT

John Haldane believes that when Reid appeals to “*immanent* acts of the mind” he is best interpreted as making reference to a view like Aquinas’ identification of knower and known (Haldane 1989, 297-300; see also Haldane 2000). On this basis Haldane explicitly attempts to forge a conceptual link between the theories of cognition offered by the two. This may not appear surprising; BonJour himself appeals to Aquinas when affirming that the property or object serving as the object of thought itself imbues the thought with content (e.g. the form of froghood gives content to my thought of a frog). In Aquinas’s terms, froghood takes two forms: *esse intentionale* and *esse naturale* (De Potentia q2, a1).

It is questionable whether the historical Aquinas’ theory is as straightforwardly direct an account as is made out to be by Haldane. Aquinas agrees with Aristotle in *De Interpretatione* (16a 3-4) that spoken words “signify intellectual concepts immediately and signify external things *through the mediation of these concepts*” (*Expositio libri Peryermenias* I.2.109-112; Pasnau 1997b, 561; my italics).<sup>97</sup> That this is a view

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<sup>97</sup> All translations from Aquinas and Ockham are from Pasnau 1997a, unless otherwise noted, as in the present case.

Aquinas adopts and not merely an interpretation of Aristotle is attested to by similar comments elsewhere (*De rationibus fidei* ch. 3; *Summa Theologica* 1a 85.2 ad 3; *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* 4.1c, 4.2c; *Summa contra gentiles* IV.11.3466). But suppose for the time being that they are.

The claim that Reid's views are similar to Aquinas' on these matters, however, does not take into account several passages in which Reid repudiates these views as presented by Aristotle. After setting out what he took to be Aristotle's theory concerning the cognitive and perceptual abilities of the soul and the intellect, Reid argues that the theory implies cognition and perception are indirect processes. Aristotle, says Reid, "thought, That there can be no sensation, no imagination, nor intellection, without forms, phantasms, or species in the mind; and that things sensible are perceived by sensible species and things intelligible by intelligible species" (I 204b/207). He voices the same point in *Intellectual Powers* where he says that on this Aristotelian and Peripatetic doctrine, "every immediate object, whether or sense, of memory, or imagination, or of reasoning, must be some phantasm or species in the mind itself" (E 225b-26a/30). Elsewhere Reid remarks that sensible species, intelligible species and phantasms are scarcely coherent:

The whole doctrine of the Peripatetics and schoolmen concerning forms, substantial and accidental, and concerning the transmission of sensible species from objects of sense to the mind, if it be at all intelligible, is so far above my

comprehension that I should perhaps do it injustice, by entering into it more minutely. (E 268a/106; see also E 405b/389-90)

Soon after this passage Reid identifies a commitment to forms or species as the second of two central theses in the Ideal Theory, which he rejects in full.<sup>98</sup> While corroborating our attribution of a non-reductive theory of cognition to Reid, these passages also distance Reid from Aquinas's philosophy of mind.

The reason Aquinas posits cognitive intermediaries in his theory of cognition and phantasms in his theory of perception—is due to his assumption that there can be no action at a distance. This doctrine made its way full force into the 17<sup>th</sup> century and Reid was especially exercised in rejecting it. He targets the thesis that there can be no action at a distance as a central tenet of the Ideal Theory (E 368b/312). While Aquinas embraces the assumption, Ockham rejects it flatly, saying “something can act at a great distance with nothing acting in between” (*Reportatio* III.2 at *Opera Theologica* VI, 59, Pasnau 1997a, 162). The upshot of this point for a theory of cognition is that positing an intermediary to carry the object to the mind is unnecessary.

After arguing that Aristotle did not break sufficiently with Plato on ideas, Reid adds that “the Peripatetic system of species and phantasms, as well as the Platonic system of ideas, is grounded upon this principle, that in every kind of thought there

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<sup>98</sup> “The ancient theory,” he says, “may be divided into two parts: The *first*, that images, species, or forms of external objects come from the object, and enter by the avenues of the senses to the mind; the *second* part is, That the external object itself is not perceived, but only the species or image of it in the mind” (E 274a).

must be some object that really exists; in every operation of the mind, something to work on” (E 372b/320). A theory of cognition employing forms affirms the principle that we can only think of that which exists. This too is a thesis Reid explicitly identifies with the Ideal Theory and explicitly rejects (at E 274b/128 and E 368b/312).

Despite the equivocal references to the schoolmen, the textual evidence is overwhelming: Reid disavows a commitment to forms, species or *anything of which we are allegedly aware* that stands between thoughts and things. This marks a big stumbling block in Haldane’s case that Reid endorses a view like Aquinas’. Once we move beyond the distinction to which Bonjour and Haldane appeal, Aquinas’ account of cognition is not straightforward. In the first place, there are not merely two forms or species, but a third, *species in medio*. Aquinas believes that *species in medio* are often the intentional objects of our thoughts.<sup>99</sup> Ockham objected to Aquinas’s position on grounds that parsimony warrants discharging *species in medio* from an account of cognition. (see Pasnau 1997a, 166) There is no compelling explanatory reason for keeping them around: “We shouldn’t claim that anything is necessarily required for some effect unless we are led to it by a conclusive argument proceeding from things apprehended *per se* or by conclusive experience. But neither of these leads to positing species” (*Reportatio* II.12-13 at *Opera Theologica* V, 268, Pasnau 1997a, 166. See also

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<sup>99</sup> See the argument of Sorabji (1991).

II.12-13 at V, 268; and *Summa Logicae* I.12 at *Opera Philosophica* I, 43, Pasnau 1997a, 284)).

While Reid and Aquinas thus differ on several important points, Reid and Ockham have much in common. Reid uses the same combination of parsimony and empirical evidence against the Ideal Theory's commitment to ideas that Ockham uses against uses of species in explanations of mental processes. Reid contends that he has no evidence for the mental representations posited by Hume and others—representations which form the foundation of their theories of cognition. Speaking of ideas, he says, “[N]o indication or trace of them appears to me as I carry out this investigation in a serious manner” (Reid 1989, 62; see also I 127/68ff). This is not the major weapon in Reid's arsenal against the Ideal Theory's analysis of thought, but he insists that the burden of proof lies on the Ideal Theorist to show that there are the representations—impressions and ideas—it posits.

They also share a methodological commitment to recognize limits to philosophical analysis, and a corresponding willingness to take intentional content as primitive. According to Ockham, “One cannot give any general reason why something is cognitive. Rather, it stems from the thing's nature that it is either cognitive or noncognitive” (*Ordinatio* 35.1 at *Opera Theologica* IV, 427, Pasnau 1997a, 60). Reid closely echoes this thought when he says that that conception cannot be “logically defined” (E 360b/295). He adds in this context that, “It is a fine thing and one worthy of a philosopher, to confess that he does not know what he does not

know rather than to contaminate philosophy with fictitious hypotheses” (Reid 1989, 73).

Reid and Ockham both believe that concepts are natural signs. We’ve briefly developed Reid’s appeal to natural signs. While the similarity with Berkeley’s theory of signs cannot be overlooked, it seems to me that the use to which Reid puts the theory of signs owes a bigger debt to Ockham. Reid and Ockham both stress the origins of artificial signs like words in natural signs like gestures and sounds. Ockham says, “Nor does it seem more absurd to be able to call up some qualities in the intellect that are naturally signs of things, than that brute animals and human beings naturally emit some sounds that are naturally suited to signify other things” (*Ordinatio* 2.8 at *Opera Theologica* II, 270, Pasnau 1997a, 104). The theory of natural signs allows Ockham to make the content of certain thoughts intrinsic to them. Reid’s approach is identical: he begins with an analysis of what he calls “natural signs” (I 121/60ff) to analyze, as best he can, artificial signs (see Ellos 1983). Robert Pasnau captures this trait of Ockham’s theory:

It is important to see that he [Ockham] is not appealing to relational facts to explain mental representation. Representation, on his account, is entirely a product of the internal properties of the cognizer. It is not the causal fact itself that determines the intentional content of a cognition but the fact that the cognition’s own nature is such that it could have been caused only by a certain particular. (Pasnau 1997a, 118)

The same holds of Reid's position.



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